The title of this chapter represents the principle that change is inevitable. Like the ever-evolving patterns of the kaleidoscope, change is inherent in all life’s patterns. Anything can be changed and everything does change, from the cells in our bodies to global politics. There is no permanent pattern, no one way of experiencing or doing anything that lasts forever. This fact of life can be scary, but it can also be energizing. The mystery of life, like the wonder of the kaleidoscope, rests in not knowing precisely what will come next.

The readings in this chapter address the changing terrain of gender. If one takes only a snapshot of life, it may appear as though current gender arrangements are relatively fixed. However, an expanded view of gender, over time and across cultures, reveals the well-researched fact that gender meanings and practices are as dynamic as any other aspect of life. Patterns of gender continuously undergo change, and they do so at every level of experience, from the individual to the global. Michael Schwalbe (2001) observes that there is both chance and pattern in the lives of individuals and in the bigger arena of social institutions. He makes the point that no matter how many rules there might be and no matter how much we know about a particular person or situation, “social life remains a swirl of contingencies out of which can emerge events that no one expects” (p. 127). As a result, life, including its gendered dimensions, is full of possibilities.

Social constructionist theory is especially helpful in understanding the inevitability of change in the gender order. Recall that social constructionist research reveals the processes by which people create and maintain the institution of gender. It underscores the fact that gender is a human invention, not a biological absolute. Particular gender patterns keep going only as long as people share the same ideas about gender and keep doing masculinity and femininity in a routine, predictable fashion (Carrera, DePalma, & Lameiras, 2012; Johnson, 1997; Schwalbe, 2001). Given that humans create gender, gender patterns can be altered by people who, individually and collectively, choose to invent and negotiate new ways of thinking about and doing gender.

At the micro level of daily interaction, individuals participate in destabilizing the binary, oppositional sex/gender/sexuality order. They do so by choosing to bend conventional gender rules or changing the rules altogether by undoing or redoing gender (Bobel & Kwan, 2011; Deutsch, 2007;
Lorber, 1994; West & Zimmerman, 2009). For example, women and men are creating new forms of partnership based on shared care work and housework roles. Other individuals purposefully transgress the boundaries of sexual and gender identities by mixing appearance cues via makeup, clothing, hairstyle, and other modes of self-presentation (Bobel & Kwan, 2011; Lorber, 1994). Chris Bobel and Samantha Kwan’s (2011) research illustrates a variety of ways people employ their bodies in acts of gender resistance and related forms of resistance such as counternormativity and counter-homonormativity. For example, within the U.S. gay community, big men or “bears” are masculine-presenting, fat, hairy, gay and bisexual men who, with their admirers (“chasers”), have formed alternative spaces where they can interact in comfort. In addition, they display their bodies with pride and challenge the appearance norms of dominant gay society and the heterosexual world (Pyle & Klein, 2011). Research on embodied resistance, such as bear culture, points to the powerful social fact that “humans can be at once rule-bound and wonderfully inventive agents of social change. We can enact the mandates—trudging along, submitting and rationalizing—but we can also assert ourselves and break away” (Bobel & Kwan, 2011, p. 2). When we do the latter, we engage our potential to alter toxic social patterns such as gender inequality.

**TRENDS**

At the macro level of the gender order, change comes about through large-scale forces and processes, both planned and unplanned. Trends are unplanned changes in patterns that are sustained over time. For example, Peter Kivisto (2011) states that the Industrial Revolution is a trend, marking the transition from agricultural to industrial economies. This so-called revolution involves complex economic, technological, and related changes, such as urbanization, that have profoundly altered the fabric of social life over time. Consider the impact of industrialization on gender in work and family life in the United States. Prior to industrialization, women’s labor was essential to agricultural life. Women, men, and children worked side by side to grow crops, make clothing, raise animals, and otherwise contribute to the family economy (Lorber, 2001). That is, work and family were closely intertwined and the distinction between home and workplace did not exist (Wharton, 2005).

As the Industrial Revolution got under way, productive or waged work moved from the home into factories and other specialist work sites, and work came to be defined as valuable only if it resulted in a paycheck. Although essential work was still done at home, it typically did not produce income. The negative outcome was that household labor was transformed into an invisible and devalued activity. Work and family came to be defined as distinct, firmly gendered domains of life, especially in the White middle class. Women and children were relegated to the home and “good” women were expected to be full-time housewives and mothers, while men were ordained to follow wage work in the capitalist market, embrace the breadwinner role, and participate in the political arena (Godwin & Risman, 2001; Wharton, 2005).

The profound changes in gender relations and the organization of work and family wrought by the Industrial Revolution continue to be a source of conflict for many women and men in the United States today. For example, although most heterosexual married women with children work outside the home, the doctrine of natural separate spheres—unpaid household work for women and paid work for men—continues to operate as an ideal against which “working women” who have children are often negatively evaluated.

Industrialization continues as a force for social change, one that is amplified by processes of globalization. The term **globalization** refers to the increasing interconnectedness of social, political, and economic activities worldwide (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999). Transnational forces such as geopolitical conflicts, global markets, transnational corporations, transnational media, and the migration of labor now strongly influence what happens in specific countries and locales (Connell, 2000).
For example, the international trading system—dominated by nations such as the United States—encompasses almost every country in the world, while films and television programs, especially those produced in the West, circulate the globe (Barber, 2002).

Offering a valuable perspective on the impact of globalization in her reading in this chapter, R. W. Connell (2000) argues that it has created a worldwide gender order. This world gender order has several interacting dimensions: (1) a gender division of labor in a “global factory” in which poor women and children provide cheap labor for transnational corporations owned by businessmen from the major economic powers, (2) the marginalization of women in international politics, and (3) the dominance of Western gender symbolism in transnational media.

However, despite the order Connell posits, globalization is not monolithic. There are countervailing forces challenging the homogenizing and hegemonic aspects of globalization. For example, indigenous cultures interact with global cultures to produce new cultural forms of art and music. In addition, globalization has spawned transnational social movements such as the reproductive justice movement, environmental justice movement, and domestic workers movement, which address worldwide problems of Western hegemony, global inequality, and human rights. Connell’s reading in this chapter includes analysis of the links between local and global social action involving men in gender change. Her discussion of what she calls “the broad cultural shift toward a historical consciousness about gender” provides insight into the complexities of globalization.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Large-scale change may also come about in a planned fashion. Social movements are prime examples of change that people deliberately and purposefully create. They are conscious, organized, collective efforts to work toward cultural and institutional change and share distinctive features, including organization, consciousness, noninstitutionalized strategies (such as boycotts and protest marches), and prolonged duration (Kuumba, 2001). The United States has a long history of people joining together in organizations and movements to bring about justice and equality. The labor union movement; socialist movement; civil rights movement; and gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex movement have been among the important vehicles for change that might not otherwise have happened.

One of the most durable and flexible social movements is feminism (Ferree & Mueller, 2004). Consider the fact that the feminist movement has already lasted for more than two centuries. At the opening of the 19th century, feminism emerged in the United States and Europe. By the early 20th century, feminist organizations appeared in urban centers around the world. By the turn of the 21st century, feminism had grown into a transnational movement in which groups work at local and global levels to address militarism, global capitalism, racism, poverty, violence against women, economic autonomy for women, and other issues of justice, human rights, and peace (Shaw & Lee, 2001).

Research on transnational feminism has proliferated and drawn attention to the complex nature of a “highly diversified, globalized social movement” (Hewitt, 2011, p. 65). As discussed earlier, Connell’s reading in this chapter offers insight into the issue of men and masculinities in relation to gender equality worldwide and does so by discussing the diversity of men’s movements, setting out grounds for optimism as well as pessimism in the struggle to end men’s privileges and institute gender equality.

Other readings in this chapter address challenges facing feminist movements today. For example, developing ways to work together across differences and inequalities among women rooted in cultural, national, religious, and other intersectionalities is no easy task (Hewitt, 2011; Ryan, 2001). Simply put, “gender is but one strand of oppression among many,” and alliances need to be forged across intramovement differences (Hewitt, 2011; Motta, Flesher Fominaya, Eschie, & Cox, 2011). This problem takes many shapes. Not only is it a
matter, for instance, of class-privileged women and poor women or White women and women of color forming working alliances, but it is also a matter of women and men being attuned to pitfalls in thinking and organizing across individual and collective differences and inequalities (Motta et al., 2011).

One response to this problem is suggested by Elora Halim Chowdhury (2009), who calls for the intertwining of U.S. “anti-racist/third world feminisms and third world/transnational feminisms” to build connections across multiple borders, both “intra-national and international” (p. 53). Andrea Smith’s reading in this chapter is a good example of feminist analysis that crosses borders. Her indigenous feminist perspective and activist work link Native feminism to women of color feminism more broadly in the United States and to the struggles of colonized peoples globally. She opens up new “social imaginaries” (Carrera et al., 2012, p. 1009) by challenging the nation-state as a viable form of governance and by urging us to think deeply about how to create a new world based on interconnectedness and responsibility. Smith is one of the contributors to the roundtable reading on reproductive justice (Briggs et al. in this chapter), a layered and rich examination of the global and American terrain of reproductive politics. This article highlights the limitations of what is largely a Western, White, middle-class feminism focused on individual choice (choice feminism), and it does so through the lens of the transnational reproductive justice movement. The closing words of Rosalind Petchesky, reproductive justice scholar and activist, underscore the significance of cross-border, cross-boundary feminisms. She calls for feminists to think deeply about systemic change and to build broad coalitions with other social justice and antiracist movements. Two other readings in this chapter examine effective strategies for building bridges across intersectionalities and between feminist organizations. Courtney Martin and Vanessa Valenti assess the critical role of online feminism in the 21st century. They demonstrate how feminist blogs have become a vehicle for consciousness raising and activism that makes a difference. Online feminists and traditional feminist organizations have become allies across boundaries and borders and, together, have successfully altered the genderscape. Martin and Valenti offer clear accounts of the radicalizing force of online feminism. In the reading by the members of the Santa Cruz Feminist of Color Collective, the authors present a model of the creative collective as a supportive and egalitarian space for sharing and honing feminist insight and activism. This collective is linked to a long history of feminist-of-color collectives and to collectives currently at work in the online feminist world and in more traditional settings. Together, these two readings provide tools for creating and sustaining feminist movements in this new century.

THE COMPLEXITY OF CHANGE

Not only is social change pervasive at micro and macro levels of life and a function of both planned and unplanned processes, it is also uneven and complex (Ridgeway, 2009). Change doesn’t unfold in a linear, predictable fashion, and it may be dramatically visible or may take us by surprise. Consider the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920, which guaranteed women the right to vote. This one historic moment uplifted the public status of women and did so in a visible fashion. But more often, change consists of alterations in the fabric of gender relations that are not immediately visible to us, both in their determinants and their consequences.

For instance, we now know that a complex set of factors facilitated the entry of large numbers of single and married women into the paid workforce and higher education in the second half of the 20th century. Those factors included very broad economic, political, and technological developments that transformed the United States into an urban, industrial capitalist nation (Stone & McKee, 1998). Yet no one predicted the extent of change in gender attitudes and relations that would follow the entry of women into the workforce. It is only “after the fact” that the implications have been identified and assessed.
For example, heterosexual marital relationships in the United States have moved toward greater equity in response to the reality that most married, heterosexual women are not dependent on their husbands’ earnings. As married women have increasingly embraced paid work, their spouses have increasingly reconceptualized and rearranged their priorities so they can devote more attention to parenthood (Goldscheider & Rogers, 2001).

**PRISMS OF GENDER AND CHANGE**

Returning briefly to the metaphor of the kaleidoscope, let us recall that the prism of gender interacts with a complex array of social prisms of difference and inequality, such as race and sexual orientation. The prisms produce ever-changing patterns at micro and macro levels of life. Our metaphor points to yet another important principle of dynamic gender arrangements. We can link gender change to alterations in other structural dimensions of society, such as race, class, and age. For example, as Americans have moved toward greater consciousness and enactment of gender equality, they have also come to greater consciousness about the roles that heterosexism (i.e., the institutionalization of heterosexuality as the only legitimate form of sexual expression) and homophobia (i.e., the fear and hatred of homosexuality) play in reinforcing rigid gender stereotypes and relationships (see Chapter 6). It has become clear to many seeking gender justice that the justice sought after cannot be achieved without eliminating homophobia and the heterosexist framework of social institutions such as family and work.

Additionally, gender transformation in the United States is inextricably tied to movements for racial equality. This is true both historically and today. The first wave of feminism was an outgrowth of the antislavery movement, and the politics of racial justice led to the second wave of feminism (Freedman, 2002). Racism, as well as ageism, classism, and other forms of oppression, had to be addressed by feminists, because the struggle to achieve equal worth for women had to include all women and men. Anything less would mean failure.

**THE INEVITABILITY OF CHANGE**

Collectively, the articles in this chapter invite the reader to ask, “Why should I care about or get involved in promoting change in the gender status quo?” That is a good question. After all, why should one go to the trouble of departing from the standard package of gender practices and relationships? Change requires effort and entails risk. On the other hand, the cost of “going with the flow” can be high. There are no safe places to hide from change. Even if we choose “not to rock the boat” by closing ourselves off to inner and outer awareness, change will find us. There are two reasons for this fact of life. First, we cannot live in society without affecting others and in turn being affected by them. Each individual life intertwines with the lives of many other people, and our words and actions have consequences, both helpful and harmful. Every step we take and every choice we make affect the quality of life for a multitude of people. If we choose to wear blinders to our connections with others, we run the risk of inadvertently diminishing their chances, and our own, of living fulfilling lives (Schwalbe, 2001). For example, when a person tells a demeaning joke about women, he or she may intend no harm; however, the (unintended) consequences are harmful. The joke reinforces negative stereotypes, and telling the joke gives other people permission to be disrespectful to women (Schwalbe, 2001).

Second, we can’t escape broad, societal changes in gender relations. By definition, institutional- and societal-level change wraps its arms around us all. Think about the widespread impact of laws such as the Equal Pay Act and Title VII, outlawing discrimination against women and people of color, or consider how sexual harassment legislation has redefined and altered relationships in a wide array of organizational settings. Reflect on the enormous impact of the large numbers of women who have
entered the workforce since the latter half of the 20th century. The cumulative effect of the sheer numbers of women in the workforce has been revolutionary in its impact on gender relations in family, work, education, law, and other institutions and societal structures.

Given the inevitability of change in gender practices and relationships, it makes good sense to cultivate awareness of who we are and what our responsibilities to one another are. Without awareness, we cannot exercise control over our actions and their impact on others. Social forces shape us, but those forces change. Every transformation in societal patterns reverberates through our lives. Developing the “social literacy” to make sense of the changing links between our personal experience and the dynamics of social patterns can aid us in making informed, responsible choices (O’Brien, 1999; Schwalbe, 2001).

REFERENCES


Reproductive justice for all women has been a centerpiece of the feminist movement in the United States since the 1980s. The reproductive justice framework was created by women of color to address the multiple facets of reproductive oppression and to move beyond the limitations of a reproductive choice framework. It is a positive approach that links sexuality, health, and human rights to social justice issues and movements such as immigrants’ rights, environmental justice, and population control. Reproductive justice theory asserts that every woman has the human right to decide if and when she will have a baby and the conditions under which she will give birth; decide if she will not have a baby and her options for preventing or ending a pregnancy; parent children in safe, healthy environments. The conversation in this reading is among scholars and activists who have made major contributions to feminist research on reproductive politics and justice. They discuss reproductive justice in light of the legacies of Roe v. Wade and related issues and challenges.

1. What is Roe v. Wade and, according to the discussants in this reading, what are its negative and positive outcomes?
2. Why have women of color been at the forefront of the reproductive justice movement?
3. What role has racism played in the anti-abortion movement in the United States?
4. How has the United States had significant impact on women’s reproductive health issues in other parts of the world?

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**ROUNDTABLE**

**REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES AND REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE**

Laura Briggs, Faye Ginsburg, Elena R. Gutiérrez, Rosalind Petchesky, Rayna Rapp, Andrea Smith, and Chikako Takeshita

To commemorate the fortieth anniversary of Roe v. Wade, and to invite conversation about the broader global and American landscapes of reproductive politics, the Frontiers’ editors convened a roundtable of scholars and activists who have made major contributions to feminist research in the field. Beginning with a question about the legacies of the Roe decision, we also asked our contributors to reflect on other landmarks in the history of struggles for reproductive justice and to share their perspectives on ongoing challenges. . . . The conversation that appears here is based on the contributors’ written comments and was put together in this format by Mytheli Sreenivas.

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The year 2013 is the fortieth anniversary of Roe v. Wade. What do you think are the most important legacies of this Supreme Court decision for contemporary women’s reproductive issues, both in the United States and globally?

SMITH: The legacy of the Roe v. Wade decision was to narrow the agenda of reproductive justice to abortion rights. While abortion rights are important, they are only one aspect of a larger reproductive justice agenda. Roe v. Wade framed the right to abortion through the right to privacy rather than through the lens of gender equality. This framework easily lent itself to a more libertarian framework around freedom from government intervention. However, this framework was limited in terms of the responsibility of the government to ensure all have equal access to abortion services. Hence, the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits Medicaid funding for abortion except in cases of rape, incest, or if the life of the mother is endangered, was not deemed inconsistent with Roe v. Wade. Thus, even today mainstream reproductive rights groups do not address issues like dangerous contraceptives in communities of color, repealing the Hyde Amendment, environmental racism as it impacts the reproductive systems of indigenous women and women of color, poverty as it affects women’s ability to access reproductive health services, and so on. Reproductive justice has become equated with the right of some women who can afford it to have abortion.

GUTIÉRREZ: As when Roe v. Wade became law in 1973, the politics of abortion today remain a cornerstone in the health and social disparities that exist for women living in the United States. Forty years after the Supreme Court decided that women have a legal right to have an abortion, most continue to face limited access to pregnancy termination procedures (medical and nonmedical) as well as many other reproductive health care services, including prenatal care, fertility technologies, and pap smears. Although the existence of Roe v. Wade has certainly increased the availability of legal abortion services and was responsible for irrevocably bringing reproductive politics into public conversation over the past forty years, the impact of the law has been significantly limited almost since its inception. Most important, the subsequent passage and persistence of the Hyde Amendment in 1977 was essential to establishing a government-regulated reproductive divide for women in the United States that has since only widened. This legislation, in addition to the declining access to services in many states and increasingly restrictive circumstances nationwide, makes it very difficult and often impossible for low-income women to pay for a legal abortion or experience any semblance of actual reproductive choice as it is popularly conceived. In response local abortion funds, which are almost all grassroots, community-based efforts dependent upon private donations, have grown over the United States to assist women who may
need financial assistance to pay for pregnancy termination procedures that they cannot afford.

The Guttmacher Institute recently reported that during 2011 and 2012 more abortion restrictions were enacted in U.S. states than in any other previous years. The year 2011 marked a record high, with ninety-two pieces of legislation being passed throughout the country. These types of measures disproportionately impact women who live in poverty, as they are more likely to have to terminate a pregnancy because of an inability to parent another child due to financial constraints. Forty-two percent of women having abortions are poor, and women of color are more likely to live below income than white women. Thus, low-income women of color are those most impacted by dwindling access to abortion services.

Increased attention to these disparate circumstances has developed from and contributed to steadily growing advocacy movements within women-of-color communities that insist that true reproductive “choice” necessitates an intersectional approach to understanding the many factors that impact women’s reproductive options and a more comprehensive rubric of reproductive justice. This means that access to all types of reproductive health care, not only abortion services, is a matter not only of gender equity but of racial, class, sexual, and embodied justice.

PETCHESKY: On first glance the most remarkable thing about approaching the fortieth anniversary of Roe v. Wade is a landscape of apparent stagnation. Instead of celebrating how far we’ve come from a moment when the struggle for abortion rights for women and girls seemed blessedly to have been won in the courts, we encounter a never-ending battle over four decades to counter right-wing strategies that make abortion the stand-in for feminism. And feminism here is clearly coded as antifamily, antichildren, pro-sex—especially for young unmarried women. In writing about abortion politics in 1990—in terms that remain depressingly relevant today—I argued “that abortion is the fulcrum of a much broader ideological struggle in which the very meanings of the family, the state, motherhood, and young women’s sexuality are contested.” And I linked that confluence of meanings directly to an insidious racism that underlies the anti-abortion movement, in which “birth control and abortion services, widely available without age or marital restrictions, have helped to make the young, white woman’s sexuality visible, thereby undermining historical race and class stereotypes of ‘nice girls’ and ‘bad girls.’” In a racist society this makes contraception and abortion doubly dangerous.

So today we have national and state funding attacks on Planned Parenthood centers and Title X, plus systematic efforts to keep abortion and contraception out of health care reform plans. (If fire-bombings of clinics have subsided, picketing and harassment of providers and patients have not; and the last murder of an abortion doctor, George Tiller, occurred as recently as 2009.) The assault on contraception has ratcheted up the anti-abortion movement from saving fetuses to sanctifying embryos. In 2012 electoral politics we have the first lady and the aspiring first lady, and a bevy of other politicians, appealing to (white) women voters by proclaiming their allegiance to familialism, momism, and stand-by-your-manism. We have a Republican Party platform that seeks to take us back to a time when abortion was criminal in absolutely every circumstance. And we have a new and more sophisticated twist on the racist themes of the so-called pro-life campaigns through billboards that attempt to convince African Americans that abortion rights are a form of “genocide”—when, in fact, four times as many women of color as white women suffer from unwanted pregnancies due to lack of access to safe, affordable reproductive health care, including contraceptive services and supplies. In turn this lack of access comes largely from the structural racism and class divisions that permeate our society, resulting in exclusions from jobs that provide health insurance with contraceptive coverage; restrictions on Medicaid funding in many states (Texas in
the lead) for not only abortion but also contraception, breast exams, and other routine gynecological services; and lives more burdened with sexual violence, single motherhood, and poverty.3

Given this bleak landscape, what then can we count as the legacies of Roe v. Wade after forty years? On the positive side I still believe the idea of a right to personal ownership over one’s body, its sexuality and reproductive capacity, contained in Roe’s “privacy” doctrine is powerful and potentially transformative. There’s no question that this idea has exploded in thousands of directions and locales, both in the United States (e.g., informing the Supreme Court’s 2003 ruling against sodomy statutes in Lawrence v. Texas) and among social movements across the globe for freedom of sexual and gender expression. At the same time Roe’s very strength was also its weakness: Restricting abortion decisions to the “personal,” the “private,” also meant severing their deep connection to issues of economic and social justice. Taking “a woman and her doctor” out of the context of all the social and structural reasons why abortion access is one link in a huge chain of conditions necessary for personal well-being made it easier to demonize women seeking abortions as “evil” at worst or hapless victims at best and providers as purveyors of genocide. But the U.S. legal system, with its emphasis on individualism and property rights, doesn’t lend itself well to fights for social justice. So here, I think, we might find a lesson from Roe v. Wade, a lesson we have to learn again and again: Litigation is only one tool available to movements for social change. It may shift standards in the courts, but it takes a mobilized social movement to change values, images, and power relations.

TAKESHITA: The political right’s relentless attempt to undermine the 1973 Supreme Court decision, regrettably, is one of the most significant legacies of Roe v. Wade. Forty years after legalization, American women seeking abortion still face harassment from anti-abortion protesters and encounter obstacles set up by state laws. As of October 2013 seventeen states mandate that women be given counseling that includes anxiety-provoking information that is scientifically unsupported, such as the purported link between abortion and breast cancer, the ability of a fetus to feel pain, and long-term mental health consequences for women. Twenty-six states require a woman seeking an abortion to wait twenty-four hours or more between when she receives counseling and the procedure is performed. Thirty-nine states require parental consent or notification in order for a minor to receive abortion.4 The right wing has been relentlessly attacking Planned Parenthood, engineering constitutional amendments to overturn Roe v. Wade, and is now attempting to challenge President Obama’s Affordable Care Act, which requires new health plans to fully cover birth control for women.

While the recent presidential election drew considerable attention to the rights of American women to receive reproductive health care, there is little awareness of the negative impact that the backlash against Roe v. Wade has also had on women abroad. After unsuccessfully attempting to challenge Roe v. Wade during the 1970s, anti-abortion leaders turned their effort overseas, gradually cutting aid to family planning programs in developing countries from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The Reagan administration instituted the Mexico City Policy in 1984, which denied funding from USAID to foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that provide abortion counseling, referral, and/or services using non-U.S. funds. Known also as the Global Gag Rule because it prevents health care providers from not only performing but also making references to abortion, this executive order has resulted in diminishing much-needed reproductive health care for women in the global South by forcing clinics to close and curtailing contraceptive supplies from USAID in certain areas. The Global Gag Rule also made it difficult for governments fearful of jeopardizing their relationships with USAID to openly discuss abortion-law reforms in their countries. While it had no effect on reducing global abortion rates, the Global Gag Rule most likely drove numerous women to
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back-alley abortions performed by untrained people. Sadly, unsafe abortions still account for thousands of maternal deaths and injuries worldwide. Although the Global Gag Rule has been rescinded and funding has been restored every time a Democratic president has taken office, overseas programs critical to women’s health have perpetually been “held hostage to the ping-pong game of U.S. partisan politics.”

The United States has had significant influence on women’s reproductive health issues in the global South for decades. Initially American leaders aggressively urged foreign governments to control population growth and prioritized funding family planning programs over providing aid for other development projects. Global population control was a signature imperialist project of the U.S. during the 1960s and 1970s. Over time, however, American aid arguably also helped meet contraceptive needs of women in countries where resources are scarce. Conservative lawmakers’ attempts to curb foreign aid for reproductive health care amounts to another form of American tyranny over the reproductive lives of women in the global South. Given this history, we might say that the adversarial legacy of Roe v. Wade, namely American antiwomen’s rights activists’ attempt to restrain abortion, contraception, and women’s sexuality in general, has an impact on women beyond the United States.

BRIGGS: As Chikako Takeshita suggests, the transnationalization of the U.S. culture wars is an important legacy of the post-Roe decades. Here I will speak only of the United States and Latin America, as that is the context I know best, although the geographic expansion of Evangelical Christian “values” concerns has been crucial to the (significantly condom-free, homophobic) expansion of HIV education in many nations in Africa. As journalist Michelle Goldberg has argued, the “population control” regime of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s was replaced with a fight about abortion and women’s rights, decisively after the Cairo Conference of 1994, but beginning in the 1980s, with the election of Ronald Reagan and the growing political power of Evangelical Christian actors in the United States and Latin America. This often occurred in relationship to anticommunism. As Lynn Morgan and Liz Roberts have argued, the same people who so hated the regime of human rights during the anticommunist civil wars in Latin America turned decisively to a regime of reproductive governance that, in their phrase, emphasized the “rights of the unborn” and proliferated a weak notion of rights and responsibilities. Since 1998 abortion has been banned altogether, with no exception even to save the life of the mother, in El Salvador, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, and some Mexican states. Costa Rica has banned in vitro fertilization in deference to the Catholic Church.

What additional historical landmarks do you think are important for understanding issues related to reproductive rights, technologies, and justice? For example, how significant has been the policy shift from population control to women’s reproductive health, as developed at the UN Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994? What has been the impact of changing reproductive technologies on feminist understandings of reproduction? In other words, if we decenter Roe v. Wade, how might our conception of reproductive rights, technologies, and justice change?

PETCHESKY: Thinking historically, let’s remember that the campaigns for safe, legal abortion in both the United States and Europe in the early 1970s sparked a profusion of women’s health movements—in Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, and the Pacific, as well as the “West”—whose aims were far broader than the legalistic and individualistic prism of Roe v. Wade. By the mid-1980s the International Women and Health Meetings, which originated in Italy in 1975 and reconvened every three years for over two decades thereafter, were bringing together activists from all these regions and were forging strategies to secure not only safe, legal abortion but also access to safe childbirth; an end to maternal mortality and morbidity; an end to sexual abuse and violence; and effective challenges to racist population policies, poverty, and global economic injustices. Most important,
women from the global South not only were building their own context-specific strategies and organizations but also were in the leadership of many of these transnational efforts.9

We need to situate the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994 and its historic, if still limited, Program of Action in this long trajectory. Cairo was not a beginning but rather a kind of culmination, a (nonbinding) codification at the level of intergovernmental policy making of the visions, aspirations, and energetic campaigns of women’s health activists for the previous twenty years. The Program of Action itself was disappointing in terms of its weak resource allocations and its reaffirmation of neoliberal, market-based approaches to “development,” to say nothing of its deference to national laws on the matter of abortion and its heteronormative assumptions about sexuality and gender. But it remains to this day a powerful statement of a vision of reproductive health rights that embraces a multitude of intersecting needs. These include (a) a comprehensive definition of reproductive health as a human right encompassing all aspects of obstetric and gynecological care (including prevention and treatment of infertility, HIV, other STDS and gynecological cancers), as well as primary health care; (b) adolescent rights to all these forms of care, as well as full and accurate sexuality education; (c) the legitimacy of “diverse family forms” and the need for government policies that benefit all families; (d) “gender equality, equity and empowerment of women” as not only indispensable to development but also “a highly important end in itself”; and (e) a view of “gender” that includes men (despite regrettable silence on transgender and intersex lives) through demands for “shared male responsibility” around pregnancy, child care, household labor, and sexual health.

With Cairo this expansive definition of reproductive health and its firm link to “internationally recognized human rights” became embedded in the discursive frameworks of UN agencies, donors, health providers, and a wide range of activists and advocates. But for most people in most countries this shift in discourse has still not translated into real-life programs and policies.

SMITH: I would dispute the assumption that Cairo shifted the discourse from population to reproductive health. At Cairo the population paradigm remained. It was simply described in more benevolent language. The impact of Cairo was that people know to use different language, but the assumption that the cause of the world’s problems is poor people’s ability to reproduce has not fundamentally changed. Dangerous contraceptives are still promoted in third world communities and communities of color in the United States.

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I think we not only need to decenter Roe v. Wade, but we must decenter the framework of reproductive “choice.” This paradigm rests on essentially individualist, consumerist notions of “free” choice that do not take into consideration all the social, economic, and political conditions that frame the so-called choices that women are forced to make. Consequently, pro-choice advocates narrow their advocacy around legislation that affects the one choice of whether or not to have an abortion without addressing all the conditions that give rise to a woman having to make this decision in the first place.

The consequence of the “choice” paradigm is that its advocates often take positions that are oppressive to women from marginalized communities. For instance, this paradigm often makes it difficult to develop nuanced positions on the use of abortion when the fetus is determined to have abnormalities. Focusing solely on the woman’s choice to have or not have this child does not address the larger context of able-bodied supremacy that sees children with disabilities as having lives not worth living and provides inadequate resources to women who may otherwise want to have them. Thus, it is important to assess the intersection of expanded reproductive technologies with all structures of domination.

TAKESHIITA: However mundane it may seem today, contraceptive development was an important landmark in the history of reproductive rights and justice movements. Since Roe v. Wade had not yet passed when oral
contraceptives and IUDs became available during the early 1960s, these new technologies of fertility control seemed like a godsend for American women who were desperate to avoid pregnancy. Many suffered health problems, however, from these “scientific” methods, which were initially conceived by their developers as a tool to prevent “global population explosion.” In a rush to disseminate contraceptives that can easily be applied to the masses, potential dangers of the Pill and the IUD were overlooked or downplayed. Unaware of the risks, American doctors did not carefully screen contraceptive users for contra-indications, nor did they take very seriously women’s complaints of side effects, which sometimes led to severe chronic injuries and life-threatening conditions. The plight of women in the global South and women of color in the United States, who were specifically targeted by long-acting contraceptives such as the IUD, Norplant, and Depo-Provera, was even graver, while underreported. Despite their failings, we cannot deny modern contraceptives have had significant impact on women’s ability to manage their reproductive lives. Fortunately, feminist activists’ advocacy for women’s agency, safer birth-control technologies, and men to share family planning responsibilities has successfully redirected contraceptive research and development away from long-acting “imposable” methods preferred by population control advocates to women-controlled methods such as contraceptive patches, vaginal rings, and gels, as well as to birth control methods for men. In the face of the political right’s attack on reproductive rights, contraceptive developers, despite their problematic eugenicist past, have become close allies of pro-choice feminists in supporting women’s access to various contraceptive options.

As Rosalind Petchesky points out, the Program of Action of the United Nations Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994 has shifted the language of international population policies and programming that focused on reducing birth rates to one that privileges women-centered reproductive health care and women’s empowerment. Together with these changes, the framing of contraceptive technologies has also shifted. During the 1960s and 1970s contraceptive technologies were openly discussed as population control tools. “Women’s unmet need” was later used as a synonym for lack of birth control in regions of high fertility. Recently, with the installation of the women’s empowerment discourse, contraceptives are increasingly being framed as something that women in the global South desire. Including “imposable” methods that have problematically targeted underprivileged women of color, contraceptive technologies are becoming politically neutralized as they are cast as “choices” and women are transformed from family-planning service recipients to pseudo-consumers in individualist and neoliberalist terms. As Andrea Smith notes, this kind of universalist framing tends to assume that all women’s basic reproductive health care needs are fulfilled and that they are “free” to make decisions, which neglect the realities of the majority of women. Problematizing the politics of contraceptive technologies is one way to decenter Roe v. Wade and bring intersectionality to the forefront.

GUTÍERREZ: Since 1973 activists and scholars have demonstrated and documented how reproductive politics in the United States are shaped by gender and patriarchy but also by white supremacy, heteronormativity, ableism, and classism. Following the publication of Dorothy Roberts’s path-breaking treatise Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty (1998), a growing literature has documented and theorized the historical patterns and contemporary dynamics of how stratified reproduction plays out for women in the United States, as well as how women of color have resisted repeated episodes of reproductive coercion upon their communities often in the name of population control. This scholarship includes documentation of the racial politics of reproduction, including the usage of women of color for contraceptive trials (i.e., the IUD, the birth control pill, and foam), as well as the preponderance of controlling images and ideologies that circumscribe the reproductive circumstances women
experience (i.e., that African American women are teenage moms, that Mexican immigrant women have too many children, or that Asian women are tiger moms). This body of literature enables a much deeper understanding of how women’s relation to reproductive expression is impacted by their social location.

For example, the many episodes of coercive sterilization that have occurred in various communities over the years fundamentally challenge the common assumption that simply because abortion is legally available in the United States, all women here equally experience reproductive “choice.” The histories of low-income, African American, Native American, Puerto Rican, and Mexican-origin women’s forced sterilization demonstrate that racist and classist rhetoric about overpopulation, care of the irresponsible “poor,” economic development, and environmental sustainability are used to justify both official and unofficial policies that limit women’s autonomy in their reproductive experience. Members of each of these groups of women faced intentional, strategic, and successful efforts to permanently end their childbearing without their knowledge or consent, some when they were actually in the hospital to deliver a child.

Puerto Rican women were first and perhaps most greatly affected by coercive sterilization, with over one-third of those living on the island being sterilized during the 1940s and 1950s, when the surgery was first being practiced as a means of encouraging women’s employment and decreasing “overpopulation” on the island. Although institutionalized programs to sterilize women no longer exist, anthropologist Iris Lopez has demonstrated that these high rates of sterilization continued not only among women who live on the island of Puerto Rico but also for those who live in Puerto Rican communities in New York.

In later years, when the surgery became readily available on the continental United States and the procedure was 90-percent paid for by the availability of federal funds, Native American women were sterilized without their knowledge in Indian Health Service clinics, and low-income women in the South and in urban centers were sterilized without their knowledge at great rates, often at publicly funded hospitals. As I have argued elsewhere, different racial logics were utilized to justify the targeting of various communities of women, although always based in economic difference. Some doctors believed that they were doing women a favor, by limiting the number of children that they could have, or that they were ridding society of a welfare burden. Beyond bringing more attention to the reproductive abuses that have occurred in the United States, documentation of these histories has assisted organized calls for reparative measures and resistance to contemporary ideological discourses that pose the reproduction of women of color and poor women as a threat to the health and well-being of society. Over the past thirty years a parallel effort to mainstream reproductive rights organizing, led primarily by women of color, has evolved into a distinct coalition-based reproductive justice movement that calls for a broad advocacy agenda—one that goes beyond a focus on a woman’s “choice” to have an abortion.

RAPP AND GINSBURG: One of the structural barriers that constrains women’s real-life reproductive choices but that often goes unexamined is the impact of fetal disability on attitudes and practices surrounding abortion decisions. As the journalist Amy Harmon pointed out in a 2007 New York Times article: “Seventy percent of Americans said they believe that women should be able to obtain a legal abortion if there is a strong chance of a serious defect in the baby, according to a 2006 poll conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.” What does this portend for a more democratic inclusion of people with disabilities, even as we support the rights of pregnant women to make their own decisions to continue or end any given pregnancy? As many feminist disability activists have pointed out, there is insufficient dialogue between their concerns and those of reproductive justice activists.

Like the women’s health movement, the disability rights movement is both national and
international; like feminist approaches to reproductive justice it struggles to frame positions that are both ethical and activist. Ranging from philosophical to pragmatist, feminist disability activists and scholars have identified a range of issues that affect both mainstream discrimination against children and adults with disabilities and the rights and possibilities for people with disabilities to express their own sexual and reproductive aspirations. We need an ongoing conversation that takes the disability lens as a framework for thinking about reproductive choices. Why is fetally diagnosed disability so routinely considered cause for abortion? To what extent might the experiences of people living with disabilities provide a more robust social fund of knowledge that could better provide a truly informed reproductive decision as to whether or not to terminate a diagnosed pregnancy?

Some of the context that makes this wider conversation both possible and necessary emerges from recent legal changes catalyzed by disability rights activism. The passage and adjudication of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) has changed the cultural milieu in which, for example, the almost automatic sterilization of people with disabilities was considered an exceptional, even ethical practice. Other aspects of our changed context include the improved health care for infants, children, and young adults with disabilities, from neonatal intensive care units to seizure-controlling medications to increasingly sophisticated prosthetics. All enable fuller social participation—in particular in education—over the life cycle, potentially including reproduction. At the international level a vigorous disability rights movement has brought these issues of survival and inclusion into the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which has had the highest number of signatories of any human rights framework to date.

What do you think are important ongoing challenges in struggles for reproductive justice? How do you characterize the relationship between scholarship and activism on reproduction?

RAPP AND GINSBURG: The feminist reproductive health agenda has embraced the inclusion of disability rights in its broad agenda. Yet the actualization of such a commitment is anything but clear. How can feminists justify support for the abortion decisions women make and for a disability-inclusion perspective? The profound segregation and discrimination against disability prevents fully grounded knowledge of what it means to live with an impairment from entering into those deliberations. We want to underscore the significance of continued feminist conversations on this topic across movements and coalitions, which always take place in the context of changing reproductive technologies. As feminist activists we ignore “medical advances” at our peril.

SMITH: The most important scholarly interventions are happening among indigenous and women-of-color reproductive justice organizations. They are decentering Roe v. Wade by not assuming that if the decision is overturned, reproductive justice organizations cannot provide reproductive health services themselves. These groups are focusing not simply on influencing law and policy but on building a reproductive justice movement in which people begin to take charge of their reproductive health. Such groups do everything from teaching midwifery to doing community gardening as a way to address the relationship between the environment and reproductive health. These interventions also situate reproductive justice within a broader framework for social justice. Some of these interventions are not necessarily found in books but are circulating through the Web or other social networks in a way that directly influences grassroots organizing.

TAKESHITA: Recently I invited an artist and activist, Heather Ault, for an event that marks the fortieth anniversary of Roe v. Wade at the University of California, Riverside (UCR). Her project 4000 Years for Choice is a series of fifty prints that combine image and text that represent a method of contraception and abortion from the past or a historical figure’s comment on birth control. Her intention is to generate new visuals

4000 Years for Choice
and languages for the pro-choice movement that are more powerful than the iconic wire coat hanger and more inviting than the combative and defensive terms used in its call to action such as fight, struggle, defend, attack, and threat. Through her artwork Ault underscores how fundamental birth control has been to the history of humanity and suggests terms such as cherish, embrace, nourish, trust, and unite to tell stories of “women’s reproductive empowerment, wisdom, and self-care that dates back a millennium.” She writes that regardless of an audience’s position on reproductive rights, history should serve as testament to “women’s deeply ingrained desire to control pregnancies for the good of ourselves, our relationships, and our families.”

However disheartened and tired we are of the political and ideological deadlock that “pro-choice” feminists are stuck in, countering the “pro-life” movement still must remain one of our major concerns considering its incessant endeavor to narrow women’s access to reproductive health care. While securing legal rights to birth control, as contributors to this roundtable point out, is far from enough to address reproductive justice, we cannot ignore the legal challenges by private employers to mandatory contraceptive health care coverage for employees and conservative lawmakers’ constant effort to pass anti-choice legislations. Certainly feminist organizations such as Planned Parenthood and NARAL (the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League) are working tirelessly to “win” this “war on women.” But is there anything feminist scholarship can do to intervene in the impasse? I myself have often felt that no dialogue seems possible when both sides believe that their opponents are utterly immoral or irrational and share little in common. Yet there may still be room for feminist scholarship and grassroots movements to disrupt the dichotomous thinking, which is what these opposing positions on abortion have come to be, and foreground the complex gray areas of the debate.

Ault attempts to transcend the reproductive-politics gridlock by proposing alternative visuals and languages for the pro-choice movement to overcome the stigma of abortion. Using photos of (presumably) aborted fetuses, anti-abortionists have successfully created a visual narrative of pregnancy termination as equivalent to murder and women who choose to have an abortion as evil, selfish, and horrifying. Unfortunately, symbols that have been available to the pro-choice side, namely photographs of women who lost their lives in botched abortions and a wire coat hanger with a line drawn across it, have not been capable of evoking as strong an emotional response as the opponent’s gory images. With this in mind Ault’s 4000 Years for Choice aims to provide alternative beautiful images for the pro-choice movement along with historical evidence for the universality of the desire and action to control pregnancies.

Ault’s work clearly moved the audience at UCR. Curious students from all walks of campus came through the exhibit throughout the day. Some brought friends and talked to each other while viewing the artwork. Some asked the artist questions. There were as many male students taking photos of the artwork as female students.

Spending most of the day at Ault’s art exhibit and talk prompted me to respond to the third question of this roundtable. First, I suggest that it might be constructive for feminist scholars to reexamine what personal stories might accomplish. There may be something to be learned from the open-mike session of the national conference for March of Life, during which women confess their abortions and express sadness, anger, and regret. These intimate and emotional disclosures bond the speaker and audience with empathy and reinforce the group’s conviction that abortion must be eradicated. We might think about telling personal stories of women who made the difficult decision to have an abortion that they ultimately do not regret or of women who have decided not to discontinue their unintended pregnancies despite their pro-choice convictions. Real-life stories that represent the “gray” areas of abortion narratives might be instrumental in complicating the “pro-life versus...
pro-choice” divide and opening up new dialogues. They might also help establish positive images of pro-choice women that contradict the “selfish baby killers” and “angry feminists” as they have been painted.

Second, echoing the suggestion that Ault made during the course of the day, I want to suggest that there be more collaboration among artists, activists, and scholars. One thing those of us scholars who have access to college students and facilities can do would be to bring artists and activists to campus in order to expose more young people to the human side of the reproductive-choice debate that is currently swamped by political wrestling devoid of discussion that may move us toward conciliation.

GUTIÉRREZ: A reproductive-justice approach to abortion demands that all women must have not only the real choice of terminating a pregnancy but the opportunity to have the true option to deliver a child to full term if that is what she wants, free from economic constraints. Thus, issues such as access to education, health care, civil rights, and social services all must be considered under the rubric of reproductive choice in addition to the spectrum of reproductive health services, and until they are available to all women who reside in the United States, reproductive justice has not been achieved.

In addition to the fundamental right to have children, more recent activist developments increasingly demand that all women have the right not only to have however many children they want whenever they want but also to deliver those children in whatever manner that they want. This commitment to providing the kind of childbirth experience that any woman wants has certainly grown in the past ten to fifteen years; alongside a quickly growing and diversifying midwifery communities are doula practitioners who are focused on providing women with various aspects of practical support that might be necessary for anyone who may be having a child. These efforts, which build upon the work of the women’s health movement of the 1980s, are most often associated with natural childbirth, but doulas often work with women who deliver in the hospital and provide additional support for a woman before, during, and/or after childbirth, in the form of emotional and physical assistance.

In recent years the large majority of those in this practice are birth and postpartum doulas who are professionally trained in supporting a woman while she goes through the process of pregnancy. It is becoming more common for doulas to also provide support services for pregnancy termination, offering the equivalent emotional and physical support around this experience as during the birth of a child. Abortion doula services include emotional support during the procedure, after care, child care, and practical factors such as preparation. Although such practices are only beginning to become more readily available, they are certainly an important development in the abortion rights movement given the increasingly deleterious circumstances that most women must face when they must go through the procedure. . . .

BRIGGS: The deep and intensifying carework gap, in the United States and transnationally, would in my mind be a candidate for the most important reproductive-rights issue in the present moment. Not only did the Pill and abortion make heterosexual sex possible for those of us who did not want to be committed to children and a partner before we were twenty, but they also have made it possible for educational institutions, corporations, and the labor market in general to expect many of those in their twenties to delay childbearing for much of that decade of our lifespans, too. In the 1970s feminists joked that they needed a wife so they could work and still do care work and the reproductive labor of the household; now companies, universities, and government demand that we all act like the husbands of that decade—as if we never had a problem because public school is 180 days and the working year is 260, never had a sick child, never were made systematically crazy by the mismatch between school running from 8:30 to 2:30 (when it’s not an early-release day) and
work from 8:00 to 5:00 at a minimum. And this is to say nothing of the perfectly normal exceptional circumstances—you can’t even get this much coverage from public programs if your child is under six years old or has disabilities or behavior problems that kick them into the “special” programs that run, say, from 8:00 to noon. That problem is multiplied for the growing percentage of women who work more than one job, and the racist right is trying to ensure that immigrant women have no recourse even to the public programs there are, by trying to ban immigrant children from school—and while direct efforts have failed, terror that their children’s visible presence will get the family deported has succeeded in places like Alabama and Arizona, at least for some period. While this is a fierce tragedy for children, it is also worth noting that it is a huge added care-work burden for families.

As a growing and important body of scholarship on care work and reproductive labor, particularly in sociology, has noted, in the United States and many comparable postindustrial economies, the care-work gap is increasingly being filled by immigrant nannies and, for the elderly and those with disabilities, home-care workers.16 As many have noted, the work of immigrants in filling the care gap in one place—for middle-class people in the United States, usually but not necessarily white—merely creates one in another place, as nannies are often mothers themselves, and many leave children behind in home countries as a different kind of transnationalization of care labor. Just as it is cheaper for U.S. families to substitute immigrant labor for their own in caring for children, as declining real wages force middle-class households to have two people working for money, so too is it cheaper for immigrant nannies to “outsource” the raising of their children to family members in the global South, with their wages often making the difference between having funds for school fees and even bare survival or not.17

The care-work gap drives a host of other issues—including to some extent infant mortality rates, the rising use of reproductive technology (contemporary infertility being largely an artifact of the delayed childbearing demanded by women who seek to be in professional sectors of the labor market), surrogacy, and adoption. Adoption, as the transfer of children from the impoverished to those who are middle class, from the global South to the United States, Europe, Canada, and a handful of other places, and from the young to older parents, should trouble us more than it does, as a place where violence, coercion, and power meet (usually single) mothers and their children.18 The idea of adoption also hovers over the abortion debate in the Americas, as its more desirable other for liberals and conservatives alike; for many conservative commentators it also represents a preferable alternative to single mothers raising their children. Mothers, on the contrary, seem to have voted with their feet that they prefer either alternative to renting out their bodies for nine months, giving rise to sharply declining rates of placing children in adoption in the United States once single mothers can support their children or get an abortion and “unwed mothers’ homes” losing their coercive power, except perhaps for some young Evangelical Christian girls and women.19

For the most part, though, scholarship on the care-work gap is not brought together with concerns about abortion and adoption, nor do most historians, sociologists, or political scientists who study the dynamics of the abortion debate in the United States think of it as part of a process across the Americas that is linked to anticommunist civil wars. Among scholars there is no field of “reproductive politics,” and so the scholarship on abortion or surrogacy is unrelated to work on the medicalization of pregnancy, poverty, or infant mortality, although they are critical to understanding each other. There are reproductive economies just as there are domestic economies, and the globalization of production, finance, and labor did not take place without a concomitant global adjustment of reproduction. I would argue that we need a scholarship and a reproductive-justice movement that are about reproductive
politics writ large—from neoliberalism to reproductive governance to welfare reform, from infant mortality and racial and geographic health disparities to reproductive technologies.

PETCHESKY: It’s too easy to blame failures to secure reproductive justice for all women on the continued barrage of attacks from the right, who still see “reproductive health and rights” as code for rampant abortion and promiscuous sex; or the retreat of global health providers and policy makers into vertical, single-issue programs that favor HIV treatment or family planning and eschew a comprehensive, rights-based approach to health and sexuality as too complicated and too costly in resource-scarce societies. But responsibility also lies with social, including feminist, movements whose campaigns are still siloed and “issue” oriented rather than foregrounding the deep connections between reproductive and sexual health and rights and social transformations that challenge global capitalist priorities—the structures that keep resources scarce for the many and plentiful for the few. In the United States, I think, the most radical voices of the past decade on reproductive issues have been those of women of color and particularly the work of SisterSong in promoting a concept of reproductive justice that insists on the direct links between access to all aspects of reproductive health care, including safe abortion, and addressing poverty, racism, gender-based violence, community development, education, and labor conditions. To make this vision a reality, feminists need to be thinking deeply about systemic change—and building the broad coalitions with Occupy and other social-justice and antiracist movements to make it happen.

NOTES


10. The women-centered methods and male contraceptive methods are a trend I have seen in the research trajectories of the Population Council in New York, an organization that has played a significant role in the development of IUDs and implants, as well as the establishment of family planning programs in the global South. Over the years the organization has expanded its mission to overall reproductive health, including HIV/AIDS. Its current projects on reproductive technology development can be found on its website: http://www.popcouncil.org/topics/reprotech.asp#/Projects (accessed Sept. 2012). Adele Clarke coined the term impossible contraceptives to represent methods that last for a long time once administered and are difficult for users to discontinue at will. These include the IUD, implants, and injectables.


15. “About 4000 Years for Choice.”

16. For different reasons immigrant maids and nannies are also crucial to other kinds of ferociously transnationalized economies like the United Arab Emirates and Singapore.


Introduction to Reading 47

Courtney E. Martin and Vanessa Valenti discuss the critical role of online feminism in the 21st century. They argue that feminist blogs are the consciousness-raising groups of this era and that online technologies have produced thousands of activists, writers, bloggers, and tweeters around the world who are able to engage one another across boundaries and borders. Online feminists and feminist organizations have become allies in movements for gender equality. Martin and Valenti identify the ways in which online feminism is able to reach beyond traditional feminist institutions (e.g., relationship-building and engaging young people) as well as the challenges facing online feminist organizing (e.g., funding and sustainable infrastructure).

1. Why are feminist blogs defined as “the consciousness-raising groups of the 21st century”?

2. What is culture jamming, and how are online feminists using this tool?

3. How does online feminist activism push media stakeholders to be more accurate and less harmful?
Part One: A New Landscape

What Is Online Feminism?

Online feminist work has become a new engine for contemporary feminism. No other form of activism in history has empowered one individual to prompt tens of thousands to take action on a singular issue—within minutes. Its influence is colossal and its potential is even greater. Feminists today, young and old, use the Internet to share their stories and analysis, raise awareness and organize collective actions, and discuss difficult issues.

The beginnings of online feminism were primarily in the form of online forums, newsgroups, journals and blogs developed in response to the need for a public platform where young women could voice their opinions about the state of the world around them. Many created websites and online zines early on; Heather Corinna began Scarlet Letters in the late 1990s, the first site online to specifically address and explore women’s sexuality, and soon after, Scarleteen.com, an online resource for teen and young adult sex education. Viva La Feminista’s Veronica Arreola took the feminist ideas discussed on the listserv of online organization Women Leaders Online to create a website at Geocities.com that discussed sports, pop culture and feminist politics. Later on, she developed the first pro-choice webring. Jennifer Pozner developed Women in Media and News in order to create a space for feminist media analysis and increase women’s voices in public debate.

Women were creating powerful spaces for themselves online, helping to build the next frontier of the feminist movement. These forums began as simple websites and developed into communities of hundreds of thousands of people who needed a platform to express themselves. They found it on the Internet.

This is why so many identify feminist blogs as “the consciousness-raising groups of the 21st century.” The very functionality of blogs—the self-publishing platforms and commenting community—allow people to connect with each other, creating an intentional space to share personal opinions, experiences of injustice, and ideas, all with a feminist lens. Consciousness-raising groups were said to be the “backbone” of second-wave feminism; now, instead of a living room of 8–10 women, it’s an online network of thousands.

As years went by, social technologies began to evolve into a robust diverse field of web-based tools and platforms. YouTube allowed for vlogging, or “video blogging”; Twitter and Tumblr, or “microblogging,” allowed for easier and even more immediate sharing capabilities. Today, this evolution of online technologies has produced thousands of activists, writers, bloggers, and tweeters across the globe who live and breathe...
this movement, engaging their audience every day in the name of equality.

In a study conducted in 2011, the Pew Research Center’s Internet and American Life Project crowned young women between the ages of 18 and 29 years old as “the power users of social networking.” Eighty-nine percent of women use social networks and 93 percent of young people between the ages of 18 and 29 are online. Over 584 million people log in to Facebook alone on an average day.

In this rapidly shifting technological age, it shouldn’t be a surprise that the next generation of social movement-building in the United States is largely online.

A New Channel for Activism

The typical image of feminist activism has been pretty clear historically: women marching down the street, or protesting at a rally. From suffrage through the second wave, collective chants and painted protest signs had been defining markers of feminist action. And today, offline organizing continues to be a major tactic to galvanize the masses. Waves of protests across South Asia early this year following the death of a 23-year-old gang rape victim in Delhi are just one powerful reminder of the impact that a collective group of people can make on the ground.

The marchers that filled the streets of Delhi, however, weren’t just using their feet; they were also using their tweets. #Delhibraveheart—a hashtag, which essentially serves as a filter for a particular theme or meme—was added to millions of impassioned laments for the victim. Government leaders, who initially had an anemic reaction, were compelled to respond to the young people taking up space in the streets, but also those setting the Internet on fire with their rage. This dual approach is just the latest example that demonstrates how feminist activism has expanded to the online sphere.

The rapid innovation and creativity that characterize online activist work are game-changers in the contemporary art of making change. Compared to the weeks or months of prep time it takes to gather thousands of people in one place for a rally or march, online feminists can mobilize thousands within minutes. Whether you’re signing an online petition, participating in a Twitter campaign against harmful legislation, or blogging about a news article, technological tools have made it infinitely easier for people invested in social justice to play their part.

Another striking development in online organizing today is the role of citizen-produced media in online activist work. On feminist blogs, for example, writers post commentary about the day’s news with a feminist lens, highlighting and amplifying social justice work that is off the mainstream media’s radar, and often linking this analysis to action that readers can take. This widespread, collective effort creates the necessary consciousness and a broad range of content that organizations like Hollaback!, Color of Chance, Move On, UltraViolet, and the Applied Research Center draw on as they share articles, connect with others, sign petitions and pledges, and use online tools to mobilize on-the-ground action. Users can then be instantly contacted to request action in the future. Media-making essentially allows activists to become experts in the issues that we care about, and makers—not just advocates—of the change we want to see and be in the world.

As decade-long activists, we have lived and understand the power of boots on the ground. The feminist movement will continue to make strides through lobbying, on-the-ground organizing, and creating meaningful discourse through academia, but online feminism now offers a new entry point for feminist activism.

A Vibrant New Movement

We are currently living in the most hostile legislative environment to reproductive rights in this country in the last forty years. In 2011, we reached a record number of state restrictions on abortion. Contraception coverage is being attacked, access to basic health care services through providers like Planned Parenthood is threatened, and decisions about one’s reproductive health are
increasingly criminalized. The feminist movement continues to push back against each hurdle thrown at us. The days of proactive work and creating legislation for equality, of securing our rights rather than defending them, has seemed far beyond our capacity when there is so much responsive action to take.

Yet when millions of women and men can tweet their demand for accountability from corporations, governments, and media, we have an opportunity to shift this paradigm. For over a decade, online feminist activists have been working on feminist causes, but it has never been so visible. Now, feminist organizations, media, and corporate stakeholders, and national leaders are beginning to recognize how the power of social media and online organizing is reanimating the feminist movement.

Online Feminism, a Radicalizing Force

For years, online feminists have served as powerful allies for feminist organizations. We liveblog at conferences, tweet calls to action, and translate the sometimes jargon-laden organizational press release into catchy hashtags, nudging people to look twice before they skip to a funny cat video. As we mapped the movement and the role online feminism plays within it at our convening, we were all struck by the hours and hours of labor made visible.

The good news is that most major women’s organizations get it. They recognize that online media is a powerful tool to create change, and have begun to leverage online tools in their work. For example, The National Domestic Workers Alliance, an organization that advocates for the rights and support of domestic workers, created a social media campaign, #bethehelp, around the nomination of the Hollywood film *The Help* for an Academy Award. As controversial as the film’s portrayal of African American domestic workers was, The National Domestic Workers Alliance recognized that it was a rare moment within mainstream media where domestic workers were in the spotlight, and they didn’t shy away from seizing the day for their own radical purposes. The #bethehelp campaign was helped along by individuals joining in and popularizing the trend.

Traditional feminist organizations and online feminists are becoming more and more symbiotic in this way. Meanwhile, independent online feminists continue to invent new methods of action and catalyze new discussions that are pushing institutional feminism forward. In 2012, when the Susan B. Komen Foundation threatened to withdraw funding from Planned Parenthood because they provide abortions along with many women’s and reproductive health services, Planned Parenthood had to respond to the Komen Foundation through formal channels in a professionally appropriate tone. Individual online activists were beholden to no such conventions. Digital strategist Deanna Zandt’s Tumblr, Planned Parenthood Saved Me, featured hundreds of women from across the country sharing their stories of how Planned Parenthood’s healthcare has saved their lives. Those stories were a large force behind what compelled Komen to change direction.

Young feminists have been at the helm of online activism for the last several years. “We can’t move too quickly over the important cultural (and deeply political) feminist work that younger women are leading, largely online,” said Erin Matson, the former Action Vice President of the National Organization for Women, in an intergenerational dialogue at *In These Times.* “All this work is rapidly building into a platform that has the power to force big policy changes, and that’s exciting.”

Ties between organizations and online feminists have become stronger over the years and have sometimes provided resources for bloggers: organizations may contract bloggers to livetweet at their annual conference, pay for campaign ads on their blogs, or hire online influencers as consultants to assist with communications strategy.

But critical gaps remain between institutional feminism and online feminism. As Jensine Larsen of World Pulse pointed out at the convening, each has expertise that the other can benefit from: nonprofit organizations often have the
infrastructure (physical space, resources, workforce) that online feminists crave, and online feminists often deploy the communications innovations that nonprofit organizations struggle to generate while already stretched thin trying to achieve their larger missions.

Thus far, we’ve been exchanging our resources in piecemeal, inadequate ways. It’s time to come up with a sustainable strategy that serves all of us and strengthens the movement in the process. More meaningful collaborations between two of the most powerful sectors of the feminist movement could create huge impact.

Creating a New Pipeline of Feminist Leadership

... Leadership development online can provide a means of resisting the hierarchical, insular, monocultural structure of traditional institutions. There has been a lot of debate about whether the World Wide Web itself can provide new tools for democracy, movement-building and alternative models of leadership. The Internet is not inherently egalitarian; after all, it was first created by the military and can be used in ways that directly reinforce patriarchy and structural violence.

But you don’t have to spend years making copies, learning a special language, or knowing people who know people to become a leading voice in online feminism; you just have to have something unique to say and the technological skills needed to amplify that story or idea online. This landscape allows for decentralized movements of multiple voices, communities, and identities.

In fact, many feminist blogs were born out of young women’s frustration with entry-level jobs at nonprofits where the mission may have been feminist, but the labor distribution made them feel invisible and, too often, exploited. While more traditional feminist institutions—advocacy organizations, cultural institutions, foundations, etc.—develop initiatives designed to “engage Millennials,” they often overlook the young women in their own offices, underutilized and anxious to start flexing their leadership muscles, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of young women and men who are engaging with feminism online every single day. These organizations must stop operating on the “if we build it, they will come” assumption, and start going to meet young people where they are—whether bored and underutilized in their own offices and/or channeling their energy into active online spaces.

Making the Personal Political

The capacity for storytelling and relationship-building online allows young women—so many of them living in small pockets of conservative middle America—to feel less alone, to feel like they’re part of a community. This is one example of the hundreds of emails that feminist blogs receive on a regular basis: I just wanted to say a quick “thank you.” I have been reading this blog for about a year and a half, and it has provided me with strength to live through some situations that I know I would have never gotten from anyone or anything else in my life. You have given me hope that it might get better and I just wanted to let you know.

This kind of connectivity can be life-saving. So many young women find feminism, not in their classrooms or even controversial novels, but in online blogs like F-Bomb, a site by and for teen girls about women’s rights. Marinated in the voices and ideas of young feminists that share their sensibility, they are made to feel a part of something bigger than themselves—even as that connection is forged through the most intimate of stories.

In one of the most popular posts ever at the Crunk Feminist Collective blog, University of Alabama professor and blogger Dr. Robin Turner wrote in “Twenty things I want to say to my twentysomething self”:

You are strong (your capacity of strength is so much wider than you think) . . .

but being a strongblackwoman is not a necessity or responsibility in your life. Your frailties and vulnerabilities make you human, not weak.
You are a storyteller and people will need your stories. Don’t stop writing them down.

It is these kinds of poetic descriptions that transcend some of the more tangible ways in which online spaces like the Crunk Feminist Collective serve to mobilize young feminists. It’s not just about organizing on local issues or taking action on federal policy; it’s also about healing, reclamation, solidarity, beauty, and wisdom.

Providing an Entry Point

Decades of stigmatization have resulted in a toxic perception of what a feminist is. But that stigma is beginning to dissipate among young people as they see feminism in action online. Here, feminism is cool again.

At the end of 2011, *New York Magazine* journalist Emily Nussbaum highlighted the ways that feminist blogs use popular culture:

Instead of viewing pop culture as toxic propaganda, bloggers embraced it as a shared language; a complex code to be solved together; and not coincidentally; something fun. In an age of search engines, it was a powerful magnet: Again and again, bloggers described pop culture posts to me as a “gateway drug” for young women—an isolated teenager in rural Mississippi would Google “Beyonce” or “Real Housewives,” then get drawn into threads about abortion.

Letting young women know that they can be feminists and care about pop culture gives them social permission to care about equality. Tavi Gevinson is one striking example; she began blogging about fashion and feminism on her blog, *Style Rookie,* when she was 11-years-old. Five years later, she is the Editor-in-Chief of *Rookie Magazine,* the premiere indie online magazine for teenage girls. In *Rookie,* one piece is about how to create the perfect Fourth of July manicure; the next is a guide to protecting your civil liberties.

Another weapon feminist bloggers and writers use is humor, countering the long-held, wildly inaccurate stereotype that feminists have no funny bones.

Convincing the public that feminism can actually be fun through humorous quips on blog posts has evolved into savvy online campaigns that catch like wildfire. One recent example was the Tumblr blog *BWinders Full of Women,* created after Mitt Romney’s controversial remarks in the 2012 presidential debate about getting binders full of women for possible hires when he was Massachusetts Governor. The Tumblr included snapshots of women dressed up as binders full of women for Halloween screenshots with witty captions, mock campaign ads, etc.

Demonstrating the serious side of cultural entrepreneurship like this, the creator of the Tumblr, Veronica De Souza, wrote in her last post on the site:

Now that the election is over, I think this whole thing is done. I never thought it would get this big, or that anyone would ask me to talk about memes on CNN or that this would help me find a job. I am so thankful for everything.

What De Souza and her peers are doing is essentially “culture jamming”—disrupting mainstream political and cultural narratives using crowd-sourced creativity and playfulness. Latoya Peterson of Racialicious spoke to this in a 2011 interview with *Persephone Magazine:*

In a way, using pop culture to deconstruct oppressive structures in society is culture jamming. We are, in many ways, creating a distortion in the smoothly packaged ideas being sold to us. Pop culture is about selling lifestyles, selling ideas; it normalizes certain elements of our culture and erases others. Why do so many people have the idea that we are all vaguely middle class? Because that’s what’s represented in our media environment.

“Culture jamming” has historically been used as a tool to shape advertisements and consumer culture into public critiques. Online activists and bloggers use media like memes to transform popular culture into a tool for social change. The result? Young people online are transformed...
from passive pop-culture consumers to engagers and makers.

Humor, pop culture, fashion, and the punchy, sassy writing, tweeting, and memes that online feminists deploy have become the most effective way to engage young people about the seriousness of injustice, using new Internet culture to speak back to pop culture.

Reclaiming the Frame

Working within a media landscape drenched in reality shows and rape jokes is no easy feat for any feminist. With women comprising only 22%3 of thought leadership in most mainstream media forums and only 3% of clout positions,4 it’s no surprise that pop culture and legacy news can be such sexist, racist, and homophobic environments. In this context, online feminism continues to constitute an alternative space, where feminist values are suffused in every point and click, and to influence legacy media.

The immediacy and viral nature of blogs and Twitter have fundamentally changed how we consume the news. Wherein the past relationship between the media and the public consisted of a top-down flow of information, the Internet has allowed the public to participate in and influence the larger public conversation.

This has resulted in a lateral relationship between the public and news media, to the point where online engagement influences the news of the day. Case in point: when a 31-year-old woman died in an Irish hospital after doctors refused to perform a termination of her pregnancy despite the fact that she was already experiencing a miscarriage, feminist blogs were instrumental in spreading the story. RH Reality Check covered the story on November 13, 2012, and by the next day Jill Filipovic of Feministe wrote about it for the Guardian, with a number of other outlets following.

These days, feminist blogs and Twitter accounts can often be a source of both breaking developments and overlooked stories for mainstream media outlets. “Paying attention to feminist media through Twitter is essential,” said Jamil Smith, segment and digital producer at MSNBC’s The Melissa Harris-Perry Show.

I originally started using the service as an RSS feed of sorts, and that’s how some of the first voices I discovered—Jennifer Pozner, Jessica Valenti, Jill Filipovic, and many more—opened up a new source of political perspective, analysis, and leadership in the media for me. Personally and professionally, I owe them all an enormous debt.

Melissa Harris-Perry herself rose to prominence in part because of her longtime online presence, including her blog, The Kitchen Table, where she discussed a variety of issues with friend and fellow Princeton Professor Yolanda Pierce.

Online feminism is not only bringing attention to the media gender gap through online activism, but also beginning to fill that space with a new generation of media influencers. Zerlina Maxwell, law student and contributor to Feministing and TheGrio, was, for example, recently featured in The New York Times as a political voice on Twitter to follow during election season. She strategically used Twitter to get noticed by mainstream outlets:

I picked a handful of folks [on Twitter] I admire that I looked up to and followed everyone they followed. Some of those producers, editors and thought leaders followed me back. Then I started tweeting at media folks if I agreed or disagreed. Figured if they saw my name they wouldn’t forget it, and that’s exactly what happened . . . Twitter shrinks the world and makes everyone accessible.

Zerlina is now a blogger for The New York Daily News, a columnist for Ebony Magazine, and a regular commentator on Fox News & Friends, providing a feminist analysis that was largely absent in these spaces. And her story—one of a law student from New Jersey turned mainstream media commentator—speaks to one of the most remarkable things about online activism: It’s bringing feminist analysis and voices into the mainstream. “Mainstreaming the voices of feminist media, particularly at national
outlets like MSNBC, is essential given the demands of our news consumers,” says Jamil Smith. “As a more technologically sophisticated populace devours its daily news diet from a number of different sources, we not only need to provide spaces for women and men in the feminist movement to contribute to the dialogue and analysis we present on our air—but if we fail to do so, we’ll be the ones left behind.”

Holding Powerbrokers Accountable

The new lateral relationship between the online public and the media has also created possibilities for a stronger culture of accountability. Sexism, transphobia, and nationalism in mainstream media are far too commonplace, but online responses to these biases are helping to push media stakeholders to be more accurate and less harmful. Online activism has convinced The New York Times, for example, to publicly acknowledge victim-blaming content in their articles and reexamine their coverage of transgender people.

Another powerful example: In the summer of 2012, The Applied Research Center and Colorlines launched a campaign, “Drop the I-Word,” calling on news publications to stop referring to undocumented immigrants as “illegals,” “illegal alien” and “illegal immigrant.” After a multimedia action strategy, including an online pledge and toolkit, a Twitter campaign and widespread blog coverage, mainstream media picked up the initiative. Announcements followed by those renouncing the usage of the term “illegal immigrant,” like The Miami Herald, Fox News Latino, ABC News and The Huffington Post, as well as those who continue to use it, including The New York Times. Today, the Drop the I-Word campaign continues to influence media and individuals in their efforts to create better public representation of undocumented immigrant communities. (And still sends letters to The New York Times in response to their continued use of the word.)

Feminists can mobilize online in response to politician and corporate actions as well. When the news broke that Representative Todd Akin told KTVI-TV that pregnancy from rape is rare because “if it’s a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down,” feminists responded immediately. “Todd Akin” quickly became a trending topic on Twitter. Tumblrs, social media campaigns and Internet memes followed suit, calling Akin unelectable. Thousands took to Akin’s Facebook page urging him to withdraw from the race. While he didn’t take his constituents’ and colleagues’ advice, social media no doubt played a role in his loss on Election Day.

Akin’s story was covered all over the country, but stories of movement toward accountability are happening in different pockets of the online community on a regular basis, demonstrating the need for positive and pro-active communication. In June 2011, Vanessa Valenti wrote a blog post critiquing New York Senator Kirsten Gillibrand for saying that the women’s movement was “stalled,” because too many women were “not engaged” and “don’t want their voices to be heard” on MSNBC’s Morning Joe. She was on discussing her new initiative, “Off the Sidelines.” As a very engaged participant in the women’s movement and co-founder of a blog whose success has been built on the hundreds of thousands of voices seeking to be heard, Vanessa felt a responsibility to disagree:

I’m not saying there’s anything wrong with trying to mobilize women who aren’t politically active, because of course there are folks out there who aren’t. But how can you say they don’t want their voices heard when you’re the one speaking for them? Because that is one of the biggest lessons we here at Feministing have learned—young women do want their voices heard, they just need a platform to do it. We’re here, we’re engaged, and we sure as hell don’t have a stalled movement. Our hundreds of thousands of readers every month at this blog alone is proof of that.

The next morning, the Senator called her personally to discuss her remarks. It was a powerful moment for her, and an honor that Senator Gillibrand had, in fact, heard and valued a young
Creating Space for Radical Learning

The feminist movement isn’t without its complicated history. Combating racism, homophobia, classism, and other forms of oppression within feminist communities is a decades-old struggle that is far from over. But the Internet has allowed for a more open space of accountability and learning, helping to push mainstream feminism to be less monolithic.

Professor and theorist Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” in 1989 as a recognition of the intersecting and overlapping identities that women hold, contributing to varied experiences of oppression. Intersectionality is today a well-known and often-discussed theory of practice within the online feminist world.

A lot of feminist dialogue online has focused on recognizing the complex ways that privilege shapes our approach to work and community. Andrea Plaid of Racialicious spoke at the convening of the unaccounted for labor of constantly educating people with white privilege about racial justice issues. She said: “What we need is more white allies [to challenge racism online] . . . continue to come get your people, without excuse.”

One powerful example of this dialogue is the wave of online conversations among women of color online that emerged from the increased attention to “SlutWalk” marches in the mainstream media. “SlutWalks” began in Toronto following a police officer’s statement that women should avoid acting like “sluts” as an act of rape prevention. Women around the world protested the idea that women’s safety should be tied to their appearance, but the choice by some to reclaim the word “slut” as a rallying cry was not universally embraced. Many felt that the word held a different valence for women of color than for white women and that the experiences of women of color were not being included or respected by protest organizers. This was amplified when a picture was shared of an offensive protest sign that a white woman was holding at New York City’s SlutWalk, quoting John Lennon and Yoko Ono’s song, “Woman is the N—r of the World.” The incident sparked emboldened, necessary conversations about racism within the feminist movement, and the women of color who felt that the movement didn’t identify with many of their lived experiences. The author of the QueerBlackFeminist blog wrote:

I don’t think the intent of the organizers of Slutwalk has ever been to trivialize rape. I firmly believe that Nonetheless, intent is of dire importance at this time. Or the ignorance of the real differences and experience of “womanhood,” and the intersections of race, class, gender, sex, sexuality and violence that structure the lives of women of color will continue to be a dividing line in feminist movement.

I am hopeful that we will keep these conversations, these critiques, open.

As people continue to hold one another accountable, as open and honest dialogue persists, as blogs written by diverse voices establish wider and wider audiences, the way we approach feminist activism and leadership is changing.

PART II: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Urgency of Now

Nonprofit Organizing in the Margins

Online organizing is a relatively new field of work and as such, we are still struggling to establish sustainable infrastructure. For nonprofits like UltraViolet, Hollaback!, and SPARK Movement, who manage to raise some operating support, funding isn’t coming fast enough (or enough, period). “We’ve had to hustle really hard for every dollar, in part because most foundations just don’t have a portfolio that we can fit into,” says Hollaback! co-founder and Executive Director Emily May. Although Hollaback! has
250 leaders organizing online and on land across the world, the organization has only two full-time members of staff to support their organizers.

Currently, no women’s foundations have initiatives specifically dedicated to online feminist work. There are those who have portfolios committed to funding “nontraditional feminist work,” like the incredible FRIDA, a fund that supports young feminists in youth-led organizing. But no major foundation or women’s fund has intentionally and explicitly developed a portfolio for online feminist organizations and initiatives.

The Band-Aid Business Structure

Feminist blogs and for-profit online organizations each have our own story of struggle behind why we haven’t been able to develop a sustainable infrastructure, but there’s one problem that’s common: Most of us have what we call “the band-aid business structure”; we operate as LLCs or sole proprietorships relying on third-party advertising or random fundraising drives to pay for server costs and other technical fees. Otherwise, many of us work full-time elsewhere, or rely on social media consulting or speaking engagements as temporary sources of income to supplement our free labor.

Feminist blogs are the least sustained entities within online feminism. Daily website and editorial maintenance generally requires at least one person to be behind a highly active blog every day, as well as general management of media inquiries, organizational partnerships, and advertisements. But ad revenue, even earned by the highest trafficked blogs, can’t begin to cover this work. Feministing, which has a readership of over half a million every month, made just $30,000 in 2011, so imagine the number of readers needed to support a movement with this model.

Unfortunately, many of the more lucrative revenue models that organizations have adopted elsewhere online come at a cost and raise difficult ethical questions for feminist blogs. While large sites like Jezebel make money on amassing lucrative page views, the mission of feminist blogs is to send people away from our sites to take action, not trap them there. Many of us don’t want corporate sponsorship from companies that are antithetical to our mission and don’t want to sell our devoted readers’ emails to third-party companies. Even one of the biggest success stories of an online social justice organization, Change.org, recently changed its policy to accept right-wing and conservative petitions for the sake of sustaining and expanding the company.

Crowdfunding

Since one of the most powerful things about online feminism is its community, online activists often reach out to their constituencies for funding, whether it be to help pay for their website server costs or a specific project they’re trying to jump start. This strategy has been termed “crowdfunding,” where money is raised online in a collaborative effort for an organization, individual, or project.

Feminist video blogger Anita Sarkeesian started a campaign on the popular crowdfunding website Kickstarter to raise $6,000 to create videos about depictions of women in video games for her Feminist Frequency series. After being attacked by misogynist trolls who vandalized her Wikipedia page, hacked her website, and sent her death and rape threats, her online fans rallied to support her and her project, ultimately raising nearly $160,000.

Queer Nigerian Afrofeminist writer and media activist Spectra raised over $10,000 for her social media and communications training for African women’s and LGBT organizations. Miriam Zoila Pérez raised over $4,000 for her self-authored “The Radical Doula Guide,” a booklet inspired by her blog Radical Doula that addresses the political context of supporting people during pregnancy and childbirth. These examples, and so many more, demonstrate that crowdfunding can be an effective way for individuals, collectives, or institutions to raise money while circumventing the need for non-profit status, which many online feminists don’t have.
It’s far from a systematic or sustainable solution, however. Chances are that none of the activists mentioned above will be going to their communities for support again anytime soon, assuming they’ve essentially “rapped” their networks.

Crowdfunding is great for discrete projects—a video series, a training, a book—but doesn’t lend itself well to creating the infrastructure needed to sustain online organizations. Additionally, the larger a project is, the harder it is to reach the fundraising goal: Only 38% of $10,000 projects on Kickstarter, the most popular crowdfunding site, reach their goal, and that rate drops drastically as the goal gets higher.6

Membership and Subscription Model

In counter-point to the foundation and crowdfunding strategies to raise funds, a membership model allows supporters to give funds to online activists that are not project directed. This allows these organizations the freedom to be flexible in their activities with the stability of a constant income stream.

MoveOn, one of the most well-known progressive online nonprofits, follows this membership model; the average donation to MoveOn.org Political Action, according to their site, is less than $20. Women, Action, & the Media (WAM!) is also funded through this system, offering discounts and benefits in exchange for a $45 fee.

A variation on membership is the subscription model common to content producers. A number of media outlets provide enhanced online access for an annual fee, such as Bitch Magazine.

But many online platforms balk at the idea of sequestering their content and providing it only to paying customers. And anyone relying on ongoing donations runs a risk that those donations could disappear at any time. Because most membership models are built on a monthly or yearly system, long-term planning can be extremely difficult.

What’s at Stake

Online feminism may continue to grow and evolve, but whether it will reach the potential it needs to sustain itself—and make the real, transformative impact the world needs—is yet to be seen. An unfunded online feminist movement isn’t merely a threat to the livelihood of these hard-working activists, but a threat to the larger feminist movement itself. Without greater support, the online feminist movement faces a number of risks.

We will remain reactive and myopic.

. . . In spite of the powerful successes of online feminists, our stories of impact have a disappointing common trend: They’re almost all reactive and short-term. The lack of infrastructure and sustainability for the online feminist movement makes it nearly impossible to think about more meaningful, long-term strategizing. More than ever, we need to create effective pro-active campaigns and policies to prevent sexist encroachments in the first place, rather than being in a perpetual state of pushback.

There will be an incredibly high burnout rate.

In April 2012, one of the largest global feminist blogs online, Gender Across Borders, ceased operating. After three years of collaboration with international organizations and companies, offering over 30,000 readers feminist analysis and global activism opportunities every month, founder Emily Fillingham and the team of editors decided it was just too difficult to maintain. “Unfortunately, none of us could afford to keep it up. We made a lot of progress in just a few years, but it still wasn’t enough to earn us any funding,” said editor Colleen Hodgetts. And they’re not the first; dozens of underpaid, overworked and exhausted online activists have left the movement, their voices lost and the mix—as a result—much less rich.

An unfunded movement further privileges the privileged.

. . . If we don’t support this work, the most privileged in the online movement—those who already have the resources and time to blog
Chapter 10: Nothing Is Forever

... every day, and do organizing work for free—will have the most amplified voices. Women of color and other groups are already overlooked for adequate media attention and already struggle disproportionately in this culture of scarcity. If feminist movements don’t create supportive spaces, the leadership pipeline will grow smaller and more insular, and fewer voices will get promoted.

Anti-feminists will leverage the Internet.

Misogyny, both blatant and covert, is rampant online. Online harassment and threats are a daily experience for online activists, and young women and girls are increasingly bombarded with vitriolic and harmful messaging on the very same forums we use for activism. Radically anti-feminist commentator Ann Coulter has over 300,000 followers on Twitter—four times the number of followers as Planned Parenthood. Pinterest—the social networking site of 17 million visits per day—has become immersed in diet tips and images of Victoria Secret models. Anti-feminist video bloggers outnumber feminists in search results for “feminist” on YouTube. Not only is it up to us to build our influence and challenge the sexism and bigotry that exists online, but also to continue to provide safe spaces for young people to engage with one another in healthy and empowering ways.

We’ll repeat the same mistakes.

“If the gender identities were different, it would be a different conversation. How do we combat all of the things in our socialization that teach us that we don’t deserve sustainability? We have to embrace the entitlement of saying—’No, I deserve these things, and I need them and I’m not going to wait for someone to hand them to me.’”

—Miriam Zoila Pérez, Radical Doula

The “psychology of deprivation” we speak of is not a new phenomenon for feminist activists. We acknowledge that historically, the feminist movement has not valued its own labor. It has largely depended on unpaid work, slowly evolving into exhaustion and eventual burnout. We believe this is a huge part of what’s been holding the movement back from creating the real policy and structural change it needs. We pass this model down to the young women and girls who look up to us: that it’s necessary to work for free, and to risk our physical and mental health, and our relationships in order to make change. We convince them that these martyr-like sacrifices are “heroic” and “inspiring,” when, in fact, we know they’ve only been harmful to our well-being and to the movement. We must create a new culture of work, a vibrant and valued feminist economy that could resolve an issue that’s existed for waves before us—and create a more hopeful legacy for the generations to come.

What’s Needed Now?

To avoid these pitfalls and embrace the opportunities ahead, the online community will have to be strategic and partner with a range of their feminist allies—advocacy and nonprofit organizations, philanthropists and entrepreneurs, corporate leadership with a feminist sensibility, educators, community organizers, artists, and youth—among so many others. It is time to strengthen the connective tissue between those who are most savvy and connected online, and those pushing feminist agendas in our courtrooms, classrooms, boardrooms, and beyond. The results could be profound.

We need to create more spaces and times where strategy and collaboration are prioritized, supported, and expected, and where feminists of all ages—but especially the young and online—have a chance to do the profound work of dreaming together.

Notes

1. Corrected 4/12/13: Based on feedback, this paragraph has been corrected to better reflect the understanding of the work by those mentioned.

2. Madden, Mary and Kathryn Zickuhur, “65% of Online Adults Use Social Networking Sites.” Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2011,
Introduction to Reading 48

The authors of this reading formed a creative collective in which they could share ideas, experiences, and writings on the concept of women of color. They collaborated on this article and, in the tradition of collectives such as the Combahee River Collective, the reading represents their shared insights and words. The goals of the article include (1) exploring the complexities of women of color feminisms, (2) discussing three major components of women of color feminisms, and (3) documenting the contribution of creative collectivity in sustaining radical change.

1. What are the three major components of women of color feminisms? Offer examples of each component.

2. How does creative collectivity contribute to struggles for gender justice?

3. Why do the authors believe it is important to remind the next generation that “we were never meant to survive” (Lorde 1978, 31–32)?

BUILDING ON “THE EDGE OF EACH OTHER’S BATTLES”

A FEMINIST OF COLOR MULTIDIMENSIONAL LENS

The Santa Cruz Feminist of Color Collective

INTRODUCTION

In a University of California, Santa Cruz seminar, Professor Angela Davis provoked us with these questions: What is the future of women of color feminism? Given the recent emergence of transnational scholarly, artistic, and activist strategies, is “women of color” relevant today? This question marked the beginning of a collective journey of research and reflection that has
culminated in these words. We argue that the formation “women of color” resonates in feminist and philosophical debates as a critique of and alternative to oppressive, canonical farms of knowledge that restrict interventions by women, people of color, and queers in the academy and beyond. We came together around the conviction that the formation of “women of color” enables a way of seeing the world through a lens that refracts light in many ways to reveal a world full of possibilities, a world that is constantly shifting and in motion. In this article, we think through this metaphor of a multidimensional lens to articulate the “who, why, and how” of women of color feminisms, identity-formation, political project, and methodology.

To explore the questions Davis raised, we formed a writing group with the intention of collective accountability rooted in community. For the past eight years, our collective has worked to rearticulate women of color feminisms through a multidimensional lens as a way of examining the legacies of women of color scholarship. In this article, we explore the dimensions of women of color feminisms—identity-formation, political project, and methodology. This is the who, the why, and the how of women of color feminist practice, theory, and living. These three aspects are indivisible and create generative openings and conflicts for our work as scholars, artists, advocates, and activists. This multidimensional lens eludes essentialist traps of identity, enunciates the importance of intellectual political projects, and produces creativity and community through methodological practices that embrace contradictions. “Women of color” is an expansive formulation—one that inspires an exploration of and challenge to its limits as a concept, even as we dwell in it to articulate these three co-constitutive dimensions.

This collectively written article illuminates the complicated layers of women of color feminist philosophies. Women of color and decolonial feminist philosophers offer approaches that enable the decolonization of knowledge-production. We build on Maria Lugones’s work; she utilizes women of color feminist thought to critique the universalism of knowledge-formations and to theorize an intersectional and intersubjective, decolonial analysis (Lugones 2010).

OUR COLLECTIVE

We began writing together in the early years of the new millennium on Ohlone land, where redwood forests meet the Pacific coast. We came together from different disciplines around our commitments to radical transformation and the project of mapping feminist of color trajectories and ancestries of thought. Invested in women of color as a political identity-formation and not simply an identity-marker, we contribute to critical interventions in the production of academic knowledge. We have met around countless kitchen tables, in cyberspace, at the university, and at mobilizations, sharing fears and desires, translating ourselves for one another, and creating coalition despite our conflicts. We experienced our collaborative writing as a form of healing. We opened a space to express the structural violence we were experiencing in the academy and began an intense process of learning one another’s histories of migration, colonization, exile, and displacement. Through Jacqui Alexander’s textual guidance we built solidarity by sharing our stories with one another and holding a space for our pain and trauma (Alexander 2005). We forged a collective identity as feminists of color, drawing out our interconnections with struggles across the globe without obscuring the privilege associated with our social positioning in the U.S. academy. In what follows, we express both the sentiments guiding our collaborative efforts and simultaneously contribute to the debates and visibility of women of color feminist philosophy (Zack 2000).

As a writing collaborative, working through the tension between individual and collective ways of knowing, we resist binary mappings of race, gender, sexuality, and nationhood onto our bodies—these legacies of colonialism that mark and exploit us. We remind the generation that follows us, as we have been reminded: We live
in a world in which “we were never meant to survive” (Lorde 1978, 31–32). We hope this explication of women of color feminisms offers a generative means through which to consider the resonances, tensions, and possibilities nestled within its complications.

IDENTITY-FORMATION

Who are we and with whom do we choose to align? Identity is always forming; it is a historical process that shifts depending on context and community: We are always becoming. Developing a political identity enacts resistance, which Lugones signals as the tension between subjectification and active subjectivity (Lugones 2010, 746). Subjectification is the forming of the subject when acted upon by structural mechanisms of power. Active subjectivity is a “resistant presence . . . of the colonized against the colonial invasion of self in community from the inhabitation of that self” (748). By highlighting the process of identity-formation of resistant presence within the cultural production entitled Pandora’s, a multimedia theater performance produced and performed by women of color, we show how the broad collaborations within this production elucidate the capaciousness of women of color as an identity-formation and point toward a shared radical political project and methodology.

In “Remembering This Bridge,” Alexander reflects on one of the first publications to put forward the formulation “women of color”: the anthology This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color. Here Alexander emphasizes the process of identity-formation for women of color:

We are not born women of color. We become women of color. In order to become women of color, we would need to become fluent in each other’s histories, to resist and unlearn an impulse to claim first oppression, most-devastating oppression, one-of-a-kind oppression, defying comparison oppression. We would have to unlearn the impulse that allows mythologies about each other to replace knowing about one another. (Alexander 2005, 269)

“Women of color” is a political identity-formation rooted in histories of resistance to categorizations that have divided and oppressed “people of color.” Race is not biological, but rather an ever-shifting, socially constructed demarcation rooted in legacies of colonization, genocide, and slavery that carry contemporary economic and political implications in our everyday global lives (Omi and Winant 1994; Du Bois 2006; Lugones 2010). To understand the process of racialization is not to simply buy into constructed identity categories—“Black” “Arab” “Hispanic” “Muslim” “Mexican” “Native” “Asian” “Middle Eastern.” Understanding racialization requires being aware of why these categories exist and how they dynamically adapt to devalue histories, reduce heritages, and keep people apart and disoriented. Women of color feminisms mend frayed connections by tracing the way knowledge shifts depending on historical, social, and political contexts. Although these racialization processes mark all of us, we can work to see ourselves in ways that exceed these fixed categories through the process of building coalitions.

A relational approach to multiple genealogies binds together the identity-formation of women of color formation (Lowe 1997). Shared political commitments to recognizing “common contexts of struggle” nourish this formation (Mohanty, Russo, and Tones 1991). As Chandra Mohanty argues, these are distinct struggles of resistance that make structures of oppression visible (Mohanty et al. 1991, 7). Formations of “women of color” shift from subjectification to active subjectivity, where collectivized and at times paradoxical identities emerge from coalitional strategies across racial, sexual, class, gender, and generational differences. Historically, “of color” has been used to establish solidarity across social, cultural, and geographic communities in the U.S.

The concept “of color” does not so much function to demarcate an inside and an outside,
an “us” versus “them,” but instead creates the possibility of a larger “we.” As a coalitional identity, “of color” rejects the dichotomous colonial logics of separation. Mobilizing “of color” in this identity-formation traces the interconnectedness of racial histories, one that foregrounds complexities rather than reifying the categories themselves.

To illustrate this first dimension, identity-formation, we turn to Pandora’s, a multimedia theater production, which premiered off Broadway in New York in June 2008 and presented the queer Latina as a coalitional identity. Pandora’s mixed theater and film, two forms of inherently collaborative media. New York-based Sister Outsider Entertainment, spearheaded by Elisha Miranda, brought together film collective, Womyn Image Makers, and a group of writers and performers to collaborate in the production of Pandora’s. Every aspect of production intentionally reinforced coalitional practices among those who contributed to the show and demonstrated an active site of expanding women of color feminism. The collaborations that created this production illustrate a resistance to essentialism and commitment to alliance-building. Pandora’s embodies collaborations that are layered, and not limited to particular sexualized and racialized figures that can be clearly marked as “women,” “Latina,” or “of color.” The show utilizes storytelling to create a dialogue among generations and histories, while holding in tension the differences and relations among the contributors. We argue that Pandora’s exemplifies the possibility of forging coalitional identity through intergenerational cultural production.

The theater and film production begins in the dark with the voice of elder warrior poet, Audre Lorde.

*And when we speak we are afraid*

*our words will not be heard*

*nor welcomed*

*but when we are silent*

we are still afraid

*So it is better to speak*

*remembering*

*we were never meant to survive*

As we hear Lorde say “speak” for the second time, her image appears on the screen above the stage, opening the video segment of the production that brings to life the many who live, struggle, and build coalition in the borderlands. Pandora’s premiere was timed to commemorate the Stonewall riots anniversary, pointing to untold queer of color histories and the contemporary lives of queer women of color. Below the screen, on stage is Pandora’s, an imagined nightclub for queer Latinas represented by a bar, some stools and tables, a door, and bathrooms. The show highlights ten monologues and eight short documentaries that chronicle, in the words of Angela Davis, the “crosscutting overlapping and often contradictory relations among race and class and gender and sexuality” in the lives of queer Latinas (Pandora’s 2008). . . .

The performances and film shorts show both the challenges and achievements of subjects who are undocumented immigrants, genderqueer, homeless youth, impacted by “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” military policies, struggling with religion and spirituality, and creating new ideas of home and family. The complexities include identifying as Afro-Latinas, passing as straight, as well as Xicana Indigenas and Filipinas, who share a Spanish colonial history. All of these identities or subjectivities imply different kinds of relationships to colonial states and multiple communities across borders of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation. The distinctions embodied within queer Latinas made visible through the monologues and short documentaries speak to the complexities and shifting formation of women of color. We are not the same, we are rooted in particularities, and that is our greatest strength. This is how we identify ourselves to one another. . . .
Pandora’s produces an alternative form of knowledge, as do other spaces of cultural representation that, like conferences or anthologies, construct decolonized communal spaces that can hold the productive tensions and possibility of engaging difference. The knowledge surfaces as we translate ourselves to one another and learn one another’s struggles and histories (Latina Feminist Group 2001).

“Women of color” is a political identity, a way of acknowledging our interconnections, reflecting upon our common contexts of struggle, and recognizing the different ways that structures impose violence, separation, and war on each of us. From here, a coalitional identity begins to emerge. This is the “who” of how we understand “women of color.” Less about how each of us is categorized, this dimension instead emphasizes our commitment to collective well-being for ourselves, each other, and our earth. Who will we stand in solidarity with in this journey? How do we hold ourselves accountable to one another along this journey?

**RADICAL POLITICAL PROJECT**

“Women of color” as political project enunciates community, shared commitment, and an acknowledgment of the differences among us. As a project, it calls us to recognize our connections and disconnections to the colonized land on which we live in order to be accountable to forms of exploitation enacted by the U.S. (Fregoso 2003; Anzaldúa 2007). Our explication of the radical political project recognizes the expansiveness of mapping transcommunal and intergenerational connections that do not occur in dominant historical narratives, while simultaneously making room for the inherent tensions and contradictions that arise. Along our journey we hold one another accountable to these commitments.

A women of color, feminist, radical, political project excavates and connects histories of violence that are blockaded within different forms of U.S. historiography, including “radical” forms of nationalism (Chicano, Black Power) that maintain borders of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism (Pérez 2003). Women of color have negotiated forms of racism, sexism, and homophobia in women’s, gay, and nationalist movements, thus creating a feminist radical space. These movements provoked a social revolution within the U.S., and in many ways also tended to reinscribe the colonial hierarchies implicit in nationalism and U.S. state-formation. In the words of the Combahee River Collective, “It was our experience and disillusionment within these liberation movements, as well as experience on the periphery of the white male left, that led to the need to develop a politics that was antiracist, unlike those of white women, and antisexist, unlike those of Black and white men” (Combahee River Collective 2002, 235). The conflicts within these liberation movements opened the terrain for radical women of color politics.

Instead of feeding nostalgia about past revolutionary struggle, we trace them as transgenerational genealogies to draw lessons for this historical moment (Lorde 1984). Mohanty and Alexander assert that “use of words like ‘genealogies’ or ‘legacies’ is not meant to suggest a frozen or embodied inheritance of domination and resistance, but an interested, conscious thinking and rethinking of history and historicity” (Alexander and Mohanty 1997, xvi). Women of color emerged as a political category following the circulation of the identity-formation of “lesbian of color.” Davis explains “the term lesbian of color acquired currency before women of color entered into our political vocabulary” (Lowe 1997, 311). Lesbians of color, and women of color, needed ample space for dialogue to work out conflicts as well as to construct and build coalitions.

Political solidarity depends on a careful negotiation of difference. For Lugones, difference stems from colonialism and aligns with the logic of oppression. Understanding the relationship among difference, colonialism, and oppression provides a basis for creative coalition:

The emphasis is on maintaining multiplicity at the point of reduction—not in maintaining a hybrid “product,” which hides the colonial difference—in
the tense workings of more than one logic, not to be synthesized but transcended. Among the logics at work are the many logics meeting the logic of oppression; many colonial differences, but one logic of oppression. The responses from the fragmented loci can be creatively in coalition, a way of thinking of the possibility of coalition that takes up the logic of de-coloniality, and the logic of coalition of feminists of color: the oppositional consciousness of a social erotics (Sandoval 2000) that takes on the differences that make being creative, that permits enactments that are thoroughly defiant of the logic of dichotomies (Lorde 1984). The logic of coalition is defiant of the logic of dichotomies; differences are never seen in dichotomous terms, but the logic has as its opposition the logic of power. The multiplicity is never reduced. (Lugones 2010, 755)

Women of color feminisms reflect a multiplicity of perspectives. These formations grow out of U.S.-based gendered racialization and in solidarity with anticolonial movements in the third world. Maylei Blackwell argues that the category women of color “emerged out of a transnational imaginary of third world liberation struggles” (Blackwell 2003, 3). This broad understanding of linking communities of resistance abroad and in the U.S. underlies the radical political project and offers a clear thread of continuity to the present. Within this, our interconnections also allow us to acknowledge our collective responsibility for global inequalities.

An important example of this emerges during the movement against apartheid in South Africa. Frances Beal, who was instrumental in the formation of the Third World Women’s Alliance, and is considered central in theorizing intersecting oppressions or “intersectionality” in the U.S., theorizes the connections of “the system of capitalism” and “its afterbirth—racism” by discussing the distorted views that capitalist ideologies construct of Black women and men (Beal 2005, 109). Beal evokes Sojourner Truth’s legendary speech at a “Women’s Rights Convention in the nineteenth century” where Truth asks, “Ain’t I a woman?” signaling legacies of racism and sexism together with realities of intensive labor in the U.S. under systems of slavery and capitalism alike, what Lugones calls the colonial/modern gender system or the coloniality of gender (Beal 2005; Lugones 2007; 2010).

Although Beal never uses the term women of color directly, she does formulate “Non-White Females”; she argues “exploitative industries” are the reason the “wage scale for non-white women” is the lowest (Beal 2005, 114–15). Critiquing the racist hierarchies in labor unions, Beal questions the decisions of the white male leadership of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU)—whose membership is majority Black and Puerto Rican women—revealing that the “ILGWU has invested heavily in business enterprises in racist, apartheid South Africa—with union funds” (115). Beal makes an important connection here between the exploitation of Black and Puerto Rican women workers in the U.S. and the support of colonialism in South Africa. Beal boldly reveals the bare necessity for Black women and white women to be able to work together, “Any white group that does not have an anti-imperialist and anti-racist ideology has absolutely nothing in common with the Black women’s struggle” (120).

Similarly Lugones takes white feminists to task for reducing feminism to a critique of patriarchy, or what she calls the light side of the colonial/modern gender system (Lugones 2007). Particular categorizations of race and gender produced hierarchies with material impacts in the lives of marginalized peoples. Decolonization requires thinking racialization and imposed gender systems together, along with class and sexuality. . . .

Mohanty and Alexander, among others, show the possibility of working within women of color feminist political projects while enacting transnational or global feminist analyses, not for the purpose of theorizing a false “sisterhood” but to map interconnections within unequal power relations (Alexander 1997). Mohanty and Alexander’s collaborative anthology unpacks the limitations of women of color feminist formations, through the acknowledgment of various forms of racialization and gender systems that are linked to distinct histories and complex
geographies. We are concerned with certain developments in transnational feminist literature that position transnational feminism as distinct from U.S. women of color feminisms (see Soto 2005, 117). Although women of color is not translatable to contexts outside the U.S., denying the analytical connection to forms of subaltern feminism outside of the U.S. sustains an imperialistic feminist gaze.

Gloria Anzaldúa describes borderlands as an alternative epistemological space, a relational, intersubjective epistemology that refuses Eurocentrism’s individualism and dichotomous hierarchies. A women of color radical political project calls attention to the spaces of resistance that have been hidden by Eurocentric modernity and its discourses. Thinking through the borderlands bridges dichotomies by seeing from a double- or third-space perspective rooted in local histories. Building on Anzaldúa, Lugones explains, “The emphasis is on maintaining multiplicity at the point of reduction” (Lugones 2010, 755). This calls for coalitional efforts, found in the work of feminists of color, and requires dwelling in resistance with specific attention to the day-to-day interweavings of social relations or the “intimate everyday resistant interactions to the colonial difference” (743). As we dwell in each other’s histories, an intersubjective accountability grows in the heart of our women of color feminist political project. This dimension of the lens explains the “why” of women of color feminisms. This political project embodies a commitment to knowledge-production and action based on accountability to communities seeking justice.

**METHODOLOGY**

The who and why of women of color feminisms inform the how. The legacy of women of color feminisms shows us the way to think and act with a larger vision of the world that exceeds the territorial, political, emotional, economic, and spiritual limits of the nation-state and fixed categories of identity. The methodological dimension of the women of color feminist lens explains how we move together and stand beside one another in tension and through translation.

Intersectionality, the practice of recognizing the intersection of differences, has become the shorthand for the methodological practice of women of color. Long legacies of radical feminist thought and political work gave birth to women of color feminist methodologies. For example, the Combahee River Collective describes their coming together as complicating a simple understanding of race and gender: “a combined antiracist and anti-sexist position drew us together initially, and as we developed politically we addressed ourselves to heterosexism and economic oppression under capitalism” (Combahee River Collective 2002, 236). Inspired by Harriet Tubman and the guerrilla action she led in 1863 that freed 750 slaves in South Carolina, this Collective traces Black women’s legacies of resistance through their writing practice. Blackwell refers to the way the Combahee River Collective remembers Harriet Tubman as “retrofitted memory,” which she defines as “a practice whereby social actors read the interstices, gaps, and silences of existing historical narratives in order to retrofit, rework, and refashion older narratives to create new historical openings, political possibilities, and genealogies of resistance” (Blackwell 2011, 102). Similarly, we retrofit memory by tracing the intertwined roots of this coalitional approach through our own collaborative writing, different anthologizing practices, and account ability through responsible citational practices.

Collaborating across social positions, identity-formations, national allegiances, and lived experiences gave birth to a method of analysis that is now commonly known as “intersectionality.” An academic and activist trend has reduced and dehistoricized this methodological approach to a mainstream mantra: *raceclassgender, raceclassgender*. Davis questions “the current ubiquity of the category intersectionality and the citational practices that tend to disappear the complicated and collaborative processes that helped to produce this category” (Davis 2004). Consider,
for example, the remarkably uniform attribution of the term *intersectionality* to Kimberle Williams Crenshaw’s 1991 article “Mapping the Margins.” Crenshaw’s groundbreaking article legitimized (through its publication in the Stanford Law Review) a state-based legal approach to address the cases of women of color who are consistently left vulnerable due to legal defenses that rely upon either gender or race frameworks and cannot hold multiple categories or their intersections (Crenshaw 1991). Although this work of challenging rigid legal frames is absolutely necessary, the citational practices that re-center the concept of intersectionality as the theory of one scholar are problematic. This effectively fixes the concept and deracines it from the collaborative work feminist of color communities engaged in for decades to strategize resistance and defend their lives (see Zinn et al. 1990).

We situate intersectionality, and the collaborative context in which it emerged, in the rich genealogy of women of color feminist activist scholarship. First, we need to understand why an intersectional analysis is important. Lugones argues that women of color and third world feminists demonstrate how intersectionality serves to critique feminist universalism. “If woman and black are terms for homogeneous, atomic, separable categories, then their intersection shows us the absence of black women rather than their presence. So, to see non-white women is to exceed categorical logic” (Lugones 2010, 742). Then we need to remember how and why intersectional analyses developed. Delinking the method of analysis from its genealogies and context of production contributes to the ongoing erasure of subaltern histories and praxis.

Women of color feminisms analyze systemic violence through the positioning of those historically pushed to social, political, economic, sexual, and racial margins. The knowledge produced at these borders forges connections across struggles, lending the perspectives and tools necessary for expansive projects not limited to the university. Fixating on only one dimension of the indivisible “feminist of color” lens—for example, identity—conflates women of color bodies with a field of inquiry. This undermines the possibilities of building alliances across national borders. Most notably, third world and transnational feminists argue that “women of color” is a specifically U.S.-based racial identity formation that cannot be mapped across global contexts. Reading other parts of the world through U.S. race politics, or insisting on a universal sisterhood or biological womanhood, is deeply problematic. U.S. feminists of color can contribute insights from their analysis of power relations, while still recognizing and honoring the specificity of history and geopolitics. This methodological approach demands accountability to our positioning in the belly of the beast. Through political identification we recognize how our “common vantage points” (Smith 2009) intersect with “relations of rule” or systems of oppression like heteropatriarchy, capitalism, racism, and colonialism.

The practice of anthologizing, a significant site of women of color feminist knowledge-production, produces an opening for people concerned with interconnected structures to come together and think, act, and dialogue collectively, weaving what Toni Cade Bambara writes in her foreword to *This Bridge*, “potent networks of all the daughters of the ancient mother cultures” (Bambara 2002). Tracing the circulation of “A Black Feminist Statement” illustrates the network of people with common visions of building solidarity across struggles. Zillah Eisenstein’s *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* first anthologized the Combahee River Collective’s manifesto (Eisenstein 1978). In 1981, it appeared in *This Bridge Called My Back*, followed by a 1982 publication in *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*, an anthology that outlines *Black Women’s Studies* (Hull et al. 1982). In 1983 it was published in Smith’s edited text *Home Girls* (Smith 1983). Many of these women worked together to establish Kitchen Table Press to publish and circulate their writing. Conference organizing commonly functions to catalyze anthologizing practices. The production of an

We call for a purposeful relinking of the method of analysis to the embodied histories from which it came, honoring its rich genealogies. This marks our intergenerational connection to the legacy of women of color feminisms through collaborative writing and responsible citational practices. We come to understand our present moment by tracing genealogies of struggle. We work within the productive tension among method of analysis, political project, and identity-formation to maintain both our agility in response to the ever-evolving technologies of oppression and to affirm our space and place in this world for enacting decolonial futures.

**OUR CREATIVE PROCESS: AN ARGUMENT FOR EMBODIED SCHOLARSHIP**

When we began to gather as a collective, the larger issue of translation was a central point of friction. How could we begin to learn one another and build trust across our differences and familial homelands of Iran, Peru, Colombia, and Mexico? Schutte asserts that “unless exceptional measures are taken to promote a good dialogue” it is extremely difficult to have a nonhierarchical dialogue (Schutte 1998, 56). She continues, “Even so, it is my view that no two cultures or languages can be perfectly transparent to each other. There is always a residue of meaning that will not be reached in cross-cultural endeavors”; Schutte refers to this as “incommensurability” (56). Schutte’s analysis is based on the relations between dominant and subaltern people across borders, and although we were all raised in the U.S., in many ways our collective-building was a journey of negotiating positions and languages. Within the academy, we shared the category of women of color graduate students, yet when we sat down to take stock, we realized our respective histories, visions of the world, ways of relating and speaking, and intellectual formations were distinct from one another. We worked through the doubt, fear, insecurities, and mistrust to arrive at a grounded collaborative dialogue that translates into this writing. . . .

Our vision of solidarity both recognizes and transcends nation-state borders. As activist-scholars we call for critical attention to the “third world,” the unrecognized “third world” within the U.S., and displaced Native peoples on whose lands the U.S. is built. This site of feminism argues that we are all responsible for global inequalities because of our interconnections. We fight against white supremacy while resisting the demonization of individuals identified as white (Frankenberg 1993; Harris 1993). Feminists of color recognize the damage that heteropatriarchy and colonialism have done to so many communities in the U.S. and around the world. This lens exemplifies the intersubjective shift that defies binary colonial logics. We are energized by the possibilities of a feminist of color lens, a broader paradigm that rejects gender binaries and other forms of dichotomous thinking, thereby allowing for “unlikely alliances” (Anzaldúa 1990; Lowe 1997; Smith 2008). This feminist of color lens brings into focus decolonial senses of *nos/otras*, our interconnections and the life-sustaining gift that is our earth.9

**NOTES**


2. The initial collaborative writing group included Elisa Diana Huerta.

3. The phrase “free people of color,” used in the 1850s and more recently as “lesbians of color” and “women of color,” has been useful for building coalitions along multiple axes of race, gender, class, and sexuality to organize politically. See May 2007.
4. Following Rosa Linda Fregoso’s understanding of genealogy, “For Foucault, genealogy is a historical method that gives voice to marginal and submerged people in their resistance to the forces of power and domination. . . . The practice of genealogy alerts us to alternative accounts of the resistances, struggles, and conflicts that in fact constitute history. Genealogy is a method reflected in the scholarly practices of feminist, multicultural, queer, and postcolonial historiographers and researchers” (Fregoso 2003, 105).

5. The Salsa Soul Sisters speak to us, among many others. See Gumbs 2010.

6. Lugones argues that this categorical logic is an exercise in purity with the objectivity of control. Instead, mestizaje and intersectionality are exercised in impurity and follow the logic of curdling: “Mestizaje defies control through simultaneously asserting the impure, curdled multiple state and rejecting fragmentation into pure parts. . . . (T)he mestiza is unclassifiable, unmanageable. She has no pure parts to be ‘had,’ controlled” (Lugones 1994, 460). For a longer discussion of Lugones’s logic of curdling in relation to intersectionality, see Garry 2011.

7. For a critical discussion of Robin Morgan’s work, see Mohanty 2003.

8. We borrow “relations of rule” from Lionel Cantú’s adaptation of Dorothy Smith’s concept (Cantú 2000).

9. Anzaldúa’s concept of “Nos/Otras” or “nosostras,” roughly translates into English as “us” but holds “las ostras,” “the others,” too (Keating 2008).

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Moraga, Cherrie L., and Gloria E. Anzaldúa, eds. 2002. This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color. Berkeley: Third Woman Press.
This reading addresses the complex and varied feminist theories developed by Native American women activists, the struggle against sexism within Native communities and society at large, and the importance of developing coalitions with non-Native feminists. In addition, Andrea Smith analyzes current Native feminist sovereignty projects that address both colonialism and sexism through an intersectional framework. Smith, who is Cherokee, is a longtime antiviolence and Native American activist and scholar. She is a leading expert on violence against women of color.

1. Why is gender justice integral to issues of survival for indigenous people?
2. How does the boarding school project reveal connections between interpersonal gender violence and state violence?
3. How does Native feminist theory and activism contribute to feminist politics at large?

NATIVE AMERICAN FEMINISM, SOVEREIGNTY, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Andrea Smith

When I worked as a rape crisis counselor, every Native client I saw said to me at one point, “I wish I wasn’t Indian.” My training in the mainstream antiviolence movement did not prepare me to address what I was seeing—that sexual violence in Native communities was inextricably linked to processes of genocide and colonization. Through my involvement in organizations such as Women of All Red Nations (WARN, Chicago), Incite! Women of Color against Violence (www.incite-national.org), and various other projects, I have come to see the importance of developing organizing theories and practices that focus on the intersections of state and colonial violence and gender violence. In my ongoing research projects on Native American critical race feminisms, I focus on documenting and analyzing the theories produced by Native women activists that intervene both in sovereignty and feminist struggles. These analyses serve to complicate the generally simplistic manner in which Native women’s activism is often articulated within scholarly and activist circles.

NATIVE WOMEN AND FEMINISM

One of the most prominent writings on Native American women and feminism is Annette

Jaimes’s (Guerrero) early 1990s article, “American Indian Women: At the Center of Indigenous Resistance in North America.” Here, she argues that Native women activists, except those who are “assimilated,” do not consider themselves feminists. Feminism, according to Jaimes, is an imperial project that assumes the giveness of U.S. colonial stranglehold on indigenous nations. Thus, to support sovereignty Native women activists reject feminist politics:

Those who have most openly identified themselves [as feminists] have tended to be among the more assimilated of Indian women activists, generally accepting of the colonialist ideology that indigenous nations are now legitimate sub-parts of the U.S. geopolitical corpus rather than separate nations, that Indian people are now a minority with the overall population rather than the citizenry of their own distinct nations. Such Indian women activists are therefore usually more devoted to “civil rights” than to liberation per se.... Native American women who are more genuinely sovereigntyist in their outlook have proven themselves far more dubious about the potentials offered by feminist politics and alliances.

According to Jaimes, the message from Native women is the same, as typified by these quotes from one of the founders of WARN, Lorelei DeCora Means:

> We are American Indian women, in that order. We are oppressed, first and foremost, as American Indians, as peoples colonized by the United States of America, not as women. As Indians, we can never forget that. Our survival, the survival of every one of us—man, woman and child—as Indians depends on it. Decolonization is the agenda, the whole agenda, and until it is accomplished, it is the only agenda that counts for American Indians.

The critique and rejection of the label of feminism made by Jaimes is important and shared by many Native women activists. However, it fails to tell the whole story. Consider, for instance, this quote from Madonna Thunder Hawk, who cofounded WARN with Means:

> Feminism means to me, putting a word on the women’s world. It has to be done because of the modern day. Looking at it again, and I can only talk about the reservation society, because that’s where I live and that’s the only thing I know. I can’t talk about the outside. How I relate to that term feminism, I like the word.

> When I first heard, I liked it. I related to it right away. But I’m not the average Indian woman; I’m not the average Indian activist woman, because I refuse to limit my world. I don’t like that. . . . How could we limit ourselves? “I don’t like that term; it’s a white term.” Pssshhh. Why limit yourself? But that’s me.

> My point is not to set Thunder Hawk in opposition to Means: Both talk of the centrality of land and decolonization in Native women’s struggle. Although Thunder Hawk supports many of the positions typically regarded as “feminist,” such as abortion rights, she contends that Native struggles for land and survival continue to take precedence over these other issues. Rather, my argument is that Native women activists’ theories about feminism, about the struggle against sexism both within Native communities and the society at large, and about the importance of working in coalition with non-Native women are complex and varied. These theories are not monolithic and cannot simply be reduced to the dichotomy of feminist versus nonfeminist. Furthermore, there is not necessarily a relationship between the extent to which Native women call themselves feminists, the extent to which they work in coalition with non-Native feminists or value those coalitions, whether they are urban or reservation-based, and the extent to which they are “genuinely sovereigntyist.” In addition, the very simplified manner in which Native women’s activism is theorized straightjackets Native women from articulating political projects that both address sexism and promote indigenous sovereignty simultaneously.

Central to developing a Native feminist politics around sovereignty is a more critical analysis of Native activist responses to feminism and sexism in Native communities. Many narratives of Native women’s organizing mirror Jaimes’s
analysis—that sexism is not a primary factor in Native women’s organizing. However, Janet McCloud recounts how the sexism in the Native rights movement contributed to the founding of the Indigenous Women’s Network in 1985:

I was down in Boulder, Colorado and Winona LaDuke and Nilak Butler were there and some others. They were telling me about the different kinds of sexism they were meeting up with in the movement with the men, who were really bad, and a lot of these women were really the backbone of everything, doing a lot of the kind of work that the movement needed. I thought they were getting discouraged and getting ready to pull out and I thought, “wow, we can’t lose these women because they have a lot to offer.” So, we talked about organizing a women’s conference to discuss all the different problems. . . . Marsha Gomez and others decided to formally organize. I agreed to stay with them as a kind of a buffer because the men were saying the “Indignant Women’s Organization” and blah, blah, blah. They felt kind of threatened by the women organizing.3

My interviews with Native women activists also indicate that sexism in Native communities is a central concern:

Guys think they’ve got the big one, man. Like when [name of Native woman in the community] had to go over there and she went to these Indians because they thought they were a bunch of swinging dicks and stuff, and she just let them have it. She just read them out. What else can you do? That’s pretty brave. She was nice, she could have laid one of them out. Like you know, [name of Native man in the community], well of course this was more extreme, because I laid him out! He’s way bigger than me. He’s probably 5’11, I’m five feet tall. When he was younger, and I was younger, I don’t even know what he said to me, it was something really awful. I didn’t say nothing because he was bigger than me, I just laid him out. Otherwise you could get hurt. So I kicked him right in his little nut, and he fell down on the floor—“I’m going to kill you! You bitch!” But then he said, you’re the man! If you be equal on a gut and juice level, on the street, they don’t think of you as a woman anymore, and therefore they can be your friend, and they don’t hate you. But then they go telling stuff like “You’re the man!” And then what I said back to him was “I’ve got it swinging!”

And although many Native women do not call themselves feminists for many well-thought-out reasons, including but not limited to the reasons Jaimes outlines, it is important to note that many not only call themselves feminists but also argue that it is important for Native women to call themselves feminists. And many activists argue that feminist, far from being a “white” concept, is actually an indigenous concept white women borrowed from Native women.

(Interviewee 1)

I think one of the reasons why women don’t call themselves feminists is because they don’t want to make enemies of men, and I just say, go forth and offend without inhibition. That’s generally why I see women hold back, who don’t want to be seen as strident. I don’t want to be seen as a man-hater, but I think if we have enough man-haters, we might actually have the men change for once. . . . I think men, in this particular case, I think men are very, very good at avoiding responsibility and avoiding accountability and avoiding justice. And not calling yourself a feminist, that’s one way they do that. Well, feminism, that’s for white women. Oh feminists, they’re not Indian. They’re counter-revolutionary. They’re all man-haters. They’re all ball-busters. They’ve gotten out of order. No, first of all that presumes that Native women weren’t active in shaping our identity before white women came along. And that abusive male behavior is somehow traditional, and it’s absolutely not. So I reject that. That’s a claim against sovereignty. I think that’s a claim against Native peoples. I think it’s an utter act of racism and white supremacy. And I do think it’s important that we say we’re feminists without apology.

(Interviewee 2)

[On Native women rejecting the term “feminist”]
I think that’s giving that concept to someone else, which I think is ridiculous. It’s something that there has to be more discussion about what that means. I always considered, they took that from us, in a way. That’s the way I’ve seen it. So I can’t see
it as a bad thing, because I think the origins are from people who had empowered women a long time ago.

This reversal of the typical claim that “feminism” is white then suggests that Native feminist politics is not necessarily similar to the feminist politics of other communities or that Native feminists necessarily see themselves in alliance with white feminists. In addition, the binary between feminist versus nonfeminist politics is false because Native activists have multiple and varied perspectives on this concept. For instance, consider one woman’s use of “strategic” feminism with another woman’s affirmation of feminist politics coupled with her rejection of the term “feminist.” These women are not neatly categorized as feminists versus nonfeminists.

NATIVE FEMINISM AND SOVEREIGNTY

If we successfully decolonize, the argument goes, then we will necessarily eliminate problems of sexism as well. This sentiment can be found in the words of Ward Churchill. He contends that all struggles against sexism are of secondary importance because, traditionally, sexism did not exist in Indian nations. Churchill asks whether sexism exists in Indian country after Native peoples have attained sovereignty.

His reply, “Ask Wilma Mankiller,” former principal chief of the Cherokee Nation. Well, let’s ask Mankiller. She says of her election campaign for deputy chief that she thought people might be bothered by her progressive politics and her activist background. “But I was wrong,” she says:

No one challenged me on the issues, not once. Instead, I was challenged mostly because of one fact—I am female. The election became an issue of gender. It was one of the first times I had ever really encountered overt sexism. . . . (people) said having a female run our tribe would make the Cherokees the laughing stock of the tribal world.

Regardless of its origins in Native communities, then, sexism operates with full force today and requires strategies that directly address it. Before Native peoples fight for the future of their nations, they must ask themselves, who is included in the nation? It is often the case that gender justice is often articulated as being a separate issue from issues of survival for indigenous peoples. Such an understanding presupposes that we could actually decolonize without addressing sexism, which ignores the fact that it has been precisely through gender violence that we have lost our lands in the first place. In my activist work, I have often heard the sentiment expressed in Indian country: we do not have time to address sexual/domestic violence in our communities because we have to work on “survival” issues first. However, Indian women suffer death rates because of domestic violence twice as high as any other group of women in this country. They are clearly not surviving as long as issues of gender violence go unaddressed. Scholarly analyses of the impact of colonization on Native communities often minimize the histories of oppression of Native women. In fact, many scholars argue that men were disproportionately affected by colonization because the economic systems imposed on Native nations deprived men of their economic roles in the communities more so than women. By narrowing our analyses solely to the explicitly economic realm of society, we fail to account for the multiple ways women have disproportionately suffered under colonization—from sexual violence to forced sterilization. As Paula Gunn Allen argues:

Many people believe that Indian men have suffered more damage to their traditional status than have Indian women, but I think that belief is more a reflection of colonial attitudes toward the primacy of male experience than of historical fact. While women still play the traditional role of housekeeper, childbearer, and nurturer, they no longer enjoy the unquestioned positions of power, respect, and decision making on local and international levels that were not so long ago their accustomed functions.
This tendency to separate the health and well-being of women from the health and well-being of our nations is critiqued in Winona LaDuke’s 1994 call to not “cheapen sovereignty.” She discusses attempts by men in her community to use the rhetoric of “sovereignty” to avoid paying child support payments.

What is the point of an Indian Child Welfare Act when there is so much disregard for the rights and well-being of the children? Some of these guys from White Earth are saying the state has no jurisdiction to exact child support payments from them. Traditionally, Native men took care of their own. Do they pay their own to these women? I don’t think so. I know better. How does that equation better the lives of our children? How is that (real) sovereignty?

The U.S government is so hypocritical about recognizing sovereignty. And we, the Native community, fall into the same hypocrisy. I would argue the Feds only recognize Indian sovereignty when a first Nation has a casino or a waste dump, not when a tribal government seeks to preserve ground water from pesticide contamination, exercise jurisdiction over air quality, or stop clear-cutting or say no to a nuclear dump. “Sovereignty” has become a politicized term used for some of the most demeaning purposes.10

Beatrice Medicine similarly critiques the manner in which women’s status is often pitted against sovereignty, as exemplified in the 1978 Santa Clara Pueblo v. Martinez case. Julia Martinez sued her tribe for sex discrimination under the Indian Civil Rights Act because the tribe had dictated that children born from female tribal members who married outside the tribe lost tribal status whereas children born from male tribal members who married outside the tribe did not. The Supreme Court ruled that the federal government could not intervene in this situation because the determination of tribal membership was the sovereign right of the tribe. On the one hand, many white feminists criticized the Supreme Court decision without considering how the Court’s affirmation of the right of the federal government to determine tribal membership would constitute a significant attack against tribal sovereignty.11 On the other hand, as Medicine notes, many tribes take this decision as a signal to institute gender-discriminatory practices under the name of sovereignty.12 For these difficult issues, it is perhaps helpful to consider how they could be addressed if we put American Indian women at the center of analysis. Is it possible to simultaneously affirm tribal sovereignty and challenge tribes to consider how the impact of colonization and Europeanization may impact the decisions they make and programs they pursue in a manner which may ultimately undermine their sovereignty in the long term? Rather than adopt the strategy of fighting for sovereignty first and then improving Native women’s status second, as Jaimes suggests, we must understand that attacks on Native women’s status are themselves attacks on Native sovereignty. Lee Maracle illustrates the relationship between colonization and gender violence in Native communities in her groundbreaking work, I Am Woman (1988):

If the State won’t kill us
we will have to kill ourselves.

It is no longer good etiquette to head hunt savages.

We’ll just have to do it ourselves.

It’s not polite to violate “squaws”

We’ll have to find an Indian to oblige us.

It’s poor form to starve an Indian

We’ll have to deprive our young ourselves

Blinded by niceties and polite liberality

We can’t see our enemy.

so, we’ll just have to kill each other.13

It has been through sexual violence and through the imposition of European gender
PART III: POSSIBILITIES

relationships on Native communities that Europeans were able to colonize Native peoples in the first place. If we maintain these patriarchal gender systems in place, we are then unable to decolonize and fully assert our sovereignty.

NATIVE FEMINIST SOVEREIGNTY PROJECTS

Despite the political and theoretical straight-jacket in which Native women often find themselves, there are several groundbreaking projects today that address both colonialism and sexism through an intersectional framework. One such attempt to tie indigenous sovereignty with the well-being of Native women is evident in the materials produced by the Sacred Circle, a national American Indian resource center for domestic and sexual violence based in South Dakota. Their brochure Sovereign Women Strengthen Sovereign Nations reads:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribal Sovereignty</th>
<th>Native Women's Sovereignty</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Tribal Nations Have an Inherent Right to:</td>
<td>All Native Women Have an Inherent Right to:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) A land base: possession and control is unquestioned and honored by other nations. To exist without fear, but with freedom.

2) Self-governance: the ability and authority to make decisions regarding all matters concerning the Tribe without the approval or agreement of others. This includes the ways and methods of decision-making in social, political and other areas of life.

3) An economic base and resources: the control, use and development of resources, businesses or industries the Tribe chooses. This includes resources that support the Tribal life way, including the practice of spiritual ways.

4) A distinct language and historical and cultural identity: Each tribe defines and describes its history, including the impact of colonization and racism, tribal culture, worldview and traditions.

Colonization and violence against Native people means that power and control over Native people’s life way and land have been stolen. As Native people, we have the right and responsibility to advocate for ourselves and our relatives in supporting our right to power and control over our tribal life way and land tribal sovereignty.

***

Violence against women, and victimization in general, means that power and control over an individual’s life and body have been stolen. As relatives of women who have been victimized, it is our right and responsibility to be advocates supporting every woman’s right to power and control over her body and life—personal sovereignty.

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Another such project is the Boarding School Healing Project, which seeks to build a movement to demand reparations for U.S. boarding school abuses. This project, founded in 2002, is a coalition of indigenous groups across the United States, such as the American Indian Law Alliance, Incite! Women of Color against Violence, Indigenous Women’s Network, and Native Women of Sovereign Nations of the South Dakota Coalition against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. In Canada, Native peoples have been able to document the abuses of the residential school system and demand accountability from the Canadian government and churches. The same level of documentation has not taken place in the United States. The Boarding School Healing Project is documenting these abuses to build a movement for reparations and accountability. However, the strategy of this project is not to seek remedies on the individual level, but to demand collective remedy by developing links with other reparations struggles that fundamentally challenge the colonial and capitalist status quo. In addition, the strategy of this project is to organize around boarding schools as a way to address gender violence in Native communities.

That is, one of the harms suffered by Native peoples through state policy was sexual violence perpetrated by boarding school officials. The continuing effect of this human rights violation has been the internalization of sexual and other forms of gender violence within Native American communities. Thus, the question is, how can we form a demand around reparations for these types of continuing effects of human rights violations that are evidenced by violence within communities, but are nonetheless colonial legacies. In addition, this project attempts to organize against interpersonal gender violence and state violence simultaneously by framing gender violence as a continuing effect of human rights violations perpetrated by state policy. Consequently, this project challenges the mainstream anti-domestic/sexual violence movement to conceptualize state-sponsored sexual violence as central to its work. As I have argued elsewhere, the mainstream antiviolence movement has relied on the apparatus of state violence (in the form of the criminal justice system) to address domestic and sexual violence without considering how the state itself is a primary perpetrator of violence. The issue of boarding schools forces us to see the connections between state violence and interpersonal violence. It is through boarding schools that gender violence in our communities was largely introduced. Before colonization, Native societies were, for the most part, not male dominated. Women served as spiritual, political, and military leaders. Many societies were matri-lineal and matrilocal. Violence against women and children was infrequent or unheard of in many tribes. Native peoples did not use corporal punishment against their children. Although there existed a division of labor between women and men, women’s and men’s labor was accorded similar status. In boarding schools, by contrast, sexual/physical/emotional violence proliferated. Particularly brutalizing to Native children was the manner in which school officials involved children in punishing other children. For instance, in some schools, children were forced to hit other children with the threat that if they did not hit hard enough, they themselves would be severely beaten. Sometimes perpetrators of the violence were held accountable, but generally speaking, even when teachers were charged with abuse, boarding schools refused to investigate. In the case of just one teacher, John Boone at the Hopi school, FBI investigations in 1987 found that he had sexually abused more than 142 boys, but that the principal of that school had not investigated any allegations of abuse. Despite the epidemic of sexual abuse in boarding schools, the Bureau of Indian Affairs did not issue a policy on reporting sexual abuse until 1987 and did not issue a policy to strengthen the background checks of potential teachers until 1989. Although not all Native peoples see their boarding school experiences as negative, it is generally the case that much if not most of the current dysfunctionality in Native communities can be traced to the boarding school era.
The effects of boarding school abuses linger today because these abuses have not been acknowledged by the larger society. As a result, silence continues within Native communities, preventing Native peoples from seeking support and healing as a result of the intergenerational trauma. Because boarding school policies are not acknowledged as human rights violations, Native peoples individualize the trauma they have suffered, thus contributing to increased shame and self-blame. If both boarding school policies and the continuing effects from these policies were recognized as human rights violations, then it might take away the shame from talking about these issues and thus provide an opportunity for communities to begin healing.

Unfortunately, we continue to perpetuate this colonial violence through domestic/sexual violence, child abuse, and homophobia. No amount of reparations will be successful if we do not address the oppressive behaviors we have internalized. Women of color have for too long been presented with the choices of either prioritizing racial justice or gender justice. This dualistic analysis fails to recognize that it is precisely through sexism and gender violence that colonialism and white supremacy have been successful. A question to ask ourselves then is, what would true reparations really look like for women of color who suffer state violence and interpersonal gender violence simultaneously? The Boarding School Healing Project provides an opportunity to organize around the connections between interpersonal gender violence and state violence that could serve as a model for the broader antiviolence movement.

In addition, this project makes important contributions to the struggle for reparations as a whole. That is, a reparations struggle is not necessarily radical if its demands do not call into question the capitalist and colonial status quo. What is at the heart of the issue is that no matter how much financial compensation the United States may give, such compensation does not ultimately end the colonial relationship between the United States and indigenous nations. What is at the heart of the struggle for native sovereignty is control over land and resources rather than financial compensation for past and continuing wrongs. If we think about reparations less in terms of financial compensation for social oppression and more about a movement to transform the neocolonial economic relationships between the United States and people of color, indigenous peoples, and Third World countries, we see how critical this movement could be to all of us. The articulation of reparations as a movement to cancel the Third World debt, for instance, is instructive in thinking of strategies that could fundamentally alter these relations.

**NATIVE FEMINISM AND THE NATION STATE**

Native feminist theory and activism make a critical contribution to feminist politics as a whole by questioning the legitimacy of the United States specifically and the nation-state as the appropriate form of governance generally. Progressive activists and scholars, although prepared to make critiques of the U.S. government, are often not prepared to question its legitimacy. A case in point is the strategy of many racial justice organizations in the United States to rally against hate crimes resulting from the attacks of 9/11 under the banner, “We’re American too.” However, what the analysis of Native women activists suggests is that this implicit allegiance to “America” legitimizes the genocide and colonization of Native peoples, as there could be no “America” without this genocide. Thus by making anticolonial struggle central to feminist politics, Native women make central to their organizing the question of what is the appropriate form of governance for the world in general. Does self-determination for indigenous peoples equal aspirations for a nation-state, or are there other forms of governance we can create that are not based on domination and control?

Questioning the United States, in particular, and questioning the nation-state as the appropriate form of governance for the world, in general, allow us to free our political imagination to begin thinking of how we can begin to build a
world we would actually want to live in. Such a political project is particularly important for colonized peoples seeking national liberation because it allows us to differentiate “nation” from “nation-state.” Helpful in this project of imagination is the work of Native women activists who have begun articulating notions of nation and sovereignty that are separate from nation-states. Whereas nation-states are governed through domination and coercion, indigenous sovereignty and nationhood are predicated on interrelatedness and responsibility. As Crystal Echohawk states:

Sovereignty is an active, living process within this knot of human, material and spiritual relationships bound together by mutual responsibilities and obligations. From that knot of relationships is born our histories, our identity, the traditional ways in which we govern ourselves, our beliefs, our relationship to the land, and how we feed, clothe, house and take care of our families, communities and Nations.18

It is interesting to me... how often non-Indians presume that if Native people regained their landbases, that they would necessarily call for the expulsion of non-Indians from those landbases. Yet, it is striking that a much more inclusive vision of sovereignty is articulated by Native women activists. For instance, this activist describes how indigenous sovereignty is based on freedom for all peoples:

If it doesn’t work for one of us, it doesn’t work for any of us. The definition of sovereignty [means that]... none of us are free unless all of us are free. We can’t, we won’t turn anyone away. We’ve been there, I would hear stories about the Japanese internment camps... and I could relate to it because it happened to us. Or with Africans with the violence and rape, we’ve been there too. So how could we ever leave anyone behind?

This analysis mirrors much of the work currently going on in women of color organizing in the United States and in other countries. Such models rely on this dual strategy of what Sista II Sista (Brooklyn) describes as “taking power” and “making power.”19 That is, it is necessary to engage in oppositional politics to corporate and state power (“taking power”). However, if we only engage in the politics of taking power, we will have a tendency to replicate the hierarchical structures in our movements. Consequently, it is also important to “make power” by creating those structures within our organizations, movements, and communities that model the world we are trying to create. Many groups in the United States often try to create separatist communities based on egalitarian ideals. However, if we “make power” without also trying to “take power” then we ultimately support the political status quo by failing to dismantle those structures of oppression that will undermine all our attempts to make power. The project of creating a new world governed by an alternative system not based on domination, coercion, and control does not depend on an unrealistic goal of being able to fully describe a utopian society for all at this point in time. From our position of growing up in a patriarchal, colonial, and white supremacist world, we cannot even fully imagine how a world not based on structures of oppression could operate. Nevertheless, we can be part of a collective, creative process that can bring us closer to a society not based on domination. To quote Jean Ziegler from the 2003 World Social Forum held in Porto Alegre, Brazil: “We know what we don’t want, but the new world belongs to the liberated freedom of human beings. ‘There is no way; you make the way as you walk.’ History doesn’t fall from heaven; we make history.”

Notes

1. Quotes that are not cited come from interviews conducted in Rapid City, New York City, Santa Cruz, Minneapolis, and Bemidji in 2001. These interviews are derived primarily from women involved in Women of All Red Nations (WARN) and the American Indian Movement (AIM). All are activists today.

2. M. Annette Jaimes and Theresa Halsey, “American Indian Women: At the Center of Indigenous


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**Introduction to Reading 50**

R. W. Connell’s article traces the emergence of a worldwide discussion of men and gender-equality reform and assesses the prospects of reform strategies involving men. Connell does so by locating recent policy discussions in the wider context of the cultural problematization of men and boys, the politics of “men’s movements,” the divided interests of men and boys in gender relations, and the increasing research evidence about the changing and conflict-ridden social construction of masculinities. Connell’s analysis ranges from local to global, but the primary concern is with the global nature of debate about the role of men and boys in relation to gender equality.

1. Why is research on diverse social constructions of masculinity critical to worldwide efforts to achieve gender equality?

2. Connell states that men have a lot to lose from pursuing gender equality. But Connell also argues that men’s advantages are conditions for the price they pay for their benefits. Discuss.

3. What are the “grounds for optimism” and the “grounds for pessimism” set out in this reading?
CHANGE AMONG THE GATEKEEPERS

MEN, MASCULINITIES, AND GENDER EQUALITY IN THE GLOBAL ARENA

R. W. Connell

Equality between women and men has been a doctrine well recognized in international law since the adoption of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1958), and as a principle it enjoys popular support in many countries. The idea of gender equal rights has provided the formal basis for the international discussion of the position of women since the 1975–85 UN Decade for Women, which has been a key element in the story of global feminism (Bulbeck 1988). The idea that men might have a specific role in relation to this principle has emerged only recently.

The issue of gender equality was placed on the policy agenda by women. The reason is obvious: It is women who are disadvantaged by the main patterns of gender inequality and who therefore have the claim for redress. Men are, however, necessarily involved in gender-equality reform. Gender inequalities are embedded in a multidimensional structure of relationships between women and men, which, as the modern sociology of gender shows, operates at every level of human experience, from economic arrangements, culture, and the state to interpersonal relationships and individual emotions (Holter 1997; Walby 1997; Connell 2002). Moving toward a gender-equal society involves profound institutional change as well as change in everyday life and personal conduct. To move far in this direction requires widespread social support, including significant support from men and boys.

Further, the very gender inequalities in economic assets, political power, and cultural authority, as well as the means of coercion, that gender reforms intend to change, currently mean that men (often specific groups of men) control most of the resources required to implement women’s claims for justice. Men and boys are thus in significant ways gatekeepers for gender equality. Whether they are willing to open the gates for major reforms is an important strategic question.

In this article, I will trace the emergence of a worldwide discussion of men and gender-equality reform and will try to assess the prospects of reform strategies involving men. To make such an assessment, it is necessary to set recent policy discussions in the wider context of the cultural problematization of men and boys, the politics of “men’s movements,” the divided interests of men and boys in gender relations, and the growing research evidence about the changing and conflict-ridden social construction of masculinities.

In an article of this scope, it is not possible to address particular national agendas in detail. I will refer to a number of texts where these stories can be found. Because my primary concern is with the global character of the debate, I will give particular attention to policy discussions in UN forums. These discussions culminated in the 2004 meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which produced the first world-level policy document on the role of men and boys in relation to gender equality (UN Commission on the Status of Women 2004.)

MEN AND MASCULINITIES IN THE WORLD GENDER ORDER

In the last fifteen years, in the “developed” countries of the global metropole, there has been a

great deal of popular concern with issues about men and boys. Readers in the United States may recall a volume by the poet Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book about Men* (1990), which became a huge best seller in the early 1990s, setting off a wave of imitations. This book became popular because it offered, in prophetic language, simple solutions to problems that were increasingly troubling the culture. A therapeutic movement was then developing in the United States, mainly though not exclusively among middle-class men, addressing problems in relationships, sexuality, and identity (Kupers 1993; Schwalbe 1996).

More specific issues about men and boys have also attracted public attention in the developed countries. Men’s responses to feminism, and to gender-equality measures taken by government, have long been the subject of debate in Germany and Scandinavia (Metz-Göckel and Müller 1985; Holter 2003). In anglophone countries there has been much discussion of “the new fatherhood” and of supposed changes in men’s involvement in families (McMahon 1999). There has been public agonizing about boys’ “failure” in school, and in Australia there are many proposals for special programs for boys (Kenway 1997; Lingard 2003). In anglophone countries there has been much discussion of “the new fatherhood” and of supposed changes in men’s involvement in families (McMahon 1999). There has been public agonizing about boys’ “failure” in school, and in Australia there are many proposals for special programs for boys (Kenway 1997; Lingard 2003). Men’s violence toward women has been the subject of practical interventions and extensive debate (Hearn 1998). There has also been increasing debate about men’s health and illness from a gender perspective (Hurrelmann and Kolip 2002).

Accompanying these debates has been a remarkable growth of research about men’s gender identities and practices, masculinities and the social processes by which they are constructed, cultural and media images of men, and related matters. Academic journals have been founded for specialized research on men and masculinities, there have been many research conferences, and there is a rapidly growing international literature. We now have a far more sophisticated and detailed scientific understanding of issues about men, masculinities, and gender than ever before (Connell 2003a).

This set of concerns, though first articulated in the developed countries, can now be found worldwide (Connell 2000; Pease and Pringle 2001). Debates on violence, patriarchy, and ways of changing men’s conduct have occurred in countries as diverse as Germany, Canada, and South Africa (Hagemann-White 1992; Kaufman 1993; Morrell 2001a). Issues about masculine sexuality and fatherhood have been debated and researched in Brazil, Mexico, and many other countries (Arilha, Unbehaum Ridenti, and Medrado 1998; Lerner 1998). A men’s center with a reform agenda has been established in Japan, where conferences have been held and media debates about traditional patterns of masculinity and family life continue (Menzu Senta 1997; Roberson and Suzuki 2003). A “traveling seminar” discussing issues about men, masculinities, and gender equality has recently been touring in India (Roy 2003). Debates about boys’ education, men’s identities, and gender change are active from New Zealand to Denmark (Law, Campbell, and Dolan 1999; Reinicke 2002). Debates about men’s sexuality, and changing sexual identities, are also international (Altman 2001).

The research effort is also worldwide. Documentation of the diverse social constructions of masculinity has been undertaken in countries as far apart as Peru (Fuller 2001), Japan (Taga 2001), and Turkey (Sinclair-Webb 2000). The first large-scale comparative study of men and gender relations has recently been completed in ten European countries (Hearn et al. 2002). The first global synthesis, in the form of a world handbook of research on men and masculinities, has now appeared (Kimmel, Hearn, and Connell 2005).

The rapid internationalization of these debates reflects the fact—increasingly recognized in feminist thought (Bulbeck 1998; Marchand and Runyan 2000)—that gender relations themselves have an international dimension. Each of the substructures of gender relations can be shown to have a global dimension, growing out of the history of imperialism and seen in the contemporary process of globalization (Connell 2002). Change in gender relations occurs on a world scale, though not always in the same direction or at the same pace.
The complexity of the patterns follows from the fact that gender change occurs in several different modes. Most dramatic is the direct colonizaton of the gender order of regions beyond the metropole. There has also been a more gradual recomposition of gender orders, both those of the colonizing society and the colonized, in the process of colonial interaction. The hybrid gender identities and sexualities now much discussed in the context of postcolonial societies are neither unusual nor new. They are a feature of the whole history of imperialism and are visible in many contemporary studies (e.g., Valdés and Olavarria 1998).

Imperialism and globalization change the conditions of existence for gender orders. For instance, the linking of previously separate production systems changes the flow of goods and services in the gendered division of labor, as seen in the impact of industrially produced foods and textiles on household economies. Colonialism itself often confronted local patriarchies with colonizing patriarchies, producing a turbulent and sometimes very violent aftermath, as in southern Africa (Morrell 1998). Pressure from contemporary Western commercial culture has destabilized gender arrangements, and models of masculinity, in Japan (Ito 1992), the Arab world (Ghoussoub 2000), and elsewhere.

Finally, the emergence of new arenas of social relationship on a world scale creates new patterns of gender relations. Transnational corporations, international communications systems, global mass media, and international state structures (from the United Nations to the European Union) are such arenas. These institutions have their own gender regimes and may form the basis for new configurations of masculinity, as has recently been argued for transnational business (Connell 2000) and the international relations system (Hooper 2001). Local gender orders now interact not only with the gender orders of other local societies but also with the gender order of the global arena.

The dynamics of the world gender order affect men as profoundly as they do women, though this fact has been less discussed. The best contemporary research on men and masculinity, such as Matthew C. Gutmann’s (2002) ethnographic work in Mexico, shows in fine detail how the lives of particular groups of men are shaped by globally acting economic and political dynamics.

Different groups of men are positioned very differently in such processes. There is no single formula that accounts for men and globalization. There is, indeed, a growing polarization among men on a world scale. Studies of the “super-rich” (Haseler 2000) show a privileged minority reaching astonishing heights of wealth and power while much larger numbers face poverty, cultural dislocation, disruption of family relationships, and forced renegotiation of the meanings of masculinity.

Masculinities, as socially constructed configurations of gender practice, are also created through a historical process with a global dimension. The old-style ethnographic research that located gender patterns purely in a local context is inadequate to the reality. Historical research, such as Robert Morrell’s (2001b) study of the masculinities of the colonizers in South Africa and T. Dunbar Moodie’s (1994) study of the colonized, shows how a gendered culture is created and transformed in relation to the international economy and the political system of empire. There is every reason to think this principle holds for contemporary masculinities.

**SHIFING GROUND: MEN AND BOYS IN GENDER-EQUALITY DEBATES**

Because of the way they came onto the agenda of public debate, gender issues have been widely regarded as women’s business and of little concern to men and boys. In almost all policy discussions, to adopt a gender perspective substantially means to address women’s concerns.

In both national and international policy documents concerned with gender equality, women are the subjects of the policy discourse. The agencies or meetings that formulate, implement,
or monitor gender policies usually have names referring to women, such as Department for Women, Women’s Equity Bureau, Prefectural Women’s Centre, or Commission on the Status of Women. Such bodies have a clear mandate to act for women. They do not have an equally clear mandate to act with respect to men. The major policy documents concerned with gender equality, such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (United Nations [1979] 1989), often do not name men as a group and rarely discuss men in concrete terms.

However, men are present as background throughout these documents. In every statement about women’s disadvantages, there is an implied comparison with men as the advantaged group. In the discussions of violence against women, men are implied, and sometimes named, as the perpetrators. In discussions of gender and HIV/AIDS, men are commonly construed as being “the problem,” the agents of infection. In discussions of women’s exclusion from power and decision making, men are implicitly present as the power holders.

When men are present only as a background category in a policy discourse about women, it is difficult to raise issues about men’s and boys’ interests, problems, or differences. This could be done only by falling into a backlash posture and affirming “men’s rights” or by moving outside a gender framework altogether.

The structure of gender-equality policy, therefore, created an opportunity for antifeminist politics. Opponents of feminism have now found issues about boys and men to be fertile ground. This is most clearly seen in the United States, where authors such as Warren Farrell (1993) and Christina Hoff Sommers (2000), purporting to speak on behalf of men and boys, bitterly accuse feminism of injustice. Men and boys, they argue, are the truly disadvantaged group and need supportive programs in education and health, in situations of family breakup, and so forth. These ideas have not stimulated a social movement in relation to divorce. The arguments have, however, strongly appealed to the neoconservative mass media, which have given them international circulation. They now form part of the broad neoconservative repertoire of opposition to “political correctness” and to social justice measures.

Some policy makers have attempted to straddle this divide by restructuring gender-equality policy in the form of parallel policies for women and men. For instance, some recent health policy initiatives in Australia have added a “men’s health” document to a “women’s health” document (Schofield 2004). Similarly, in some school systems a “boys’ education” strategy has been added to a “girls’ education” strategy (Lingard 2003).

This approach acknowledges the wider scope of gender issues. But it also risks weakening the equality rationale of the original policy. It forgets the relational character of gender and therefore tends to redefine women and men, or girls and boys, simply as different market segments for some service. Ironically, the result may be to promote more gender segregation, not less. This has certainly happened in education, where some privileged boys’ schools have jumped on the “gender equality” bandwagon and now market themselves as experts in catering to the special needs of boys.

On the other hand, bringing men’s problems into an existing framework of policies for women may weaken the authority that women have so far gathered in that policy area. In the field of gender and development, for instance, some specialists argue that “bringing men in”—given the larger context in which men still control most of the wealth and institutional authority—may undermine, not help, the drive for gender equality (White 2000).

The role of men and boys in relation to gender equality emerged as an issue in international discussions during the 1990s. This development crystallized at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. Paragraph 25 of the Beijing Declaration committed participating governments to “encourage men to participate
fully in all actions towards equality” (United Nations 2001). The detailed “Platform for Action” that accompanied the declaration prominently restated the principle of shared power and responsibility between men and women and argued that women’s concerns could be addressed only “in partnership with men” toward gender equality (2001, pars. 1, 3). The “Platform for Action” went on to specify areas where action involving men and boys was needed and was possible: in education, socialization of children, child care and housework, sexual health, gender-based violence, and the balancing of work and family responsibilities (2001, pars. 40, 72, 83b, 107c, 108c, 120, 179).

Participating member states followed a similar approach in the twenty-third special session of the UN General Assembly in the year 2000, which was intended to review the situation five years after the Beijing conference. The “Political Declaration” of this session made an even stronger statement on men’s responsibility: “[Member states of the United Nations] emphasise that men must involve themselves and take joint responsibility with women for the promotion of gender equality” (United Nations 2001, par. 6). It still remained the case, in this and the accompanying “Outcome Document,” that men were present on the margins of a policy discourse concerned with women.

The role of men and boys has also been addressed in other recent international meetings. These include the 1995 World Summit on Social Development, its review session in 2000, and the special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS in 2001. In 1997 the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) convened an expert group meeting about “Male Roles and Masculinities in the Perspective of a Culture of Peace,” which met in Oslo and produced studies on the links among personal violence, war, and the construction of masculinities (Breines, Connell, and Eide 2000).

International meetings outside the UN system have addressed similar issues. In 1997 the Nordic Council of Ministers adopted the Nordic Action Plan for Men and Gender Equality. In the same year the Council of Europe conducted a seminar on equality as a common issue for men and women and made the role of men in promoting equality a theme at a ministerial conference. In 1998 the Latin American Federation of Social Science (FLACSO) began a series of conferences about masculinities, boys, and men across Latin America and the Caribbean. The first conference in this series had the specific theme of gender equity (Valdés and Olavarria 1998). The European Commission has recently funded a research network on men and masculinities.

DIVIDED INTERESTS: SUPPORT AND RESISTANCE

There is something surprising about the worldwide problematizing of men and masculinities, because in many ways the position of men has not greatly changed. For instance, men remain a very large majority of corporate executives, top professionals, and holders of public office. Worldwide, men hold nine out of ten cabinet-level posts in national governments, nearly as many as the parliamentary seats, and most top positions in international agencies. Men, collectively, receive approximately twice the income that women receive and also receive the benefits of a great deal of unpaid household labor, not to mention emotional support, from women (Gierycz 1999; Godenzi 2000; Inter-Parliamentary Union 2003).

The UN Development Program (2003) now regularly incorporates a selection of such statistics into its annual report on world human development, combining them into a “gender-related development index” and a “gender empowerment measure.” This produces a dramatic outcome, a league table of countries ranked in terms of gender equality, which shows most countries in the world to be far from gender-equal. It is clear that, globally, men have a lot to lose from pursuing gender equality because men, collectively, continue to receive a patriarchal dividend.
But this way of picturing inequality may conceal as much as it reveals. There are multiple dimensions in gender relations, and the patterns of inequality in these dimensions may be qualitatively different. If we look separately at each of the substructures of gender, we find a pattern of advantages for men but also a linked pattern of disadvantages or toxicity (Connell 2003c).

For instance, in relation to the gender division of labor, men collectively receive the bulk of income in the money economy and occupy most of the managerial positions. But men also provide the workforce for the most dangerous occupations, suffer most industrial injuries, pay most of the taxation, and are under heavier social pressure to remain employed. In the domain of power men collectively control the institutions of coercion and the means of violence (e.g., weapons). But men are also the main targets of military violence and criminal assault, and many more men than women are imprisoned or executed. Men’s authority receives more social recognition (e.g., in religion), but men and boys are underrepresented in important learning experiences (e.g., in humanistic studies) and important dimensions of human relations (e.g., with young children).

One could draw up a balance sheet of the costs and benefits to men from the current gender order. But this balance sheet would not be like a corporate accounting exercise where there is a bottom line, subtracting costs from income. The disadvantages listed above are, broadly speaking, the conditions of the advantages. For instance, men cannot hold state power without some men becoming the agents of violence. Men cannot be the beneficiaries of women’s domestic labor and “emotion work” without many of them losing intimate connections, for instance, with young children.

Equally important, the men who receive most of the benefits and the men who pay most of the costs are not the same individuals. As the old saying puts it, generals die in bed. On a global scale, the men who benefit from corporate wealth, physical security, and expensive health care are a very different group from the men who provide the workforce of developing countries. Class, race, national, regional, and generational differences cross-cut the category “men,” spreading the gains and costs of gender relations very unevenly among men. There are many situations where groups of men may see their interest as more closely aligned with the women in their communities than with other men. It is not surprising that men respond very diversely to gender-equality politics.

There is, in fact, a considerable history of support for gender equality among men. There is certainly a tradition of advocacy by male intellectuals. In Europe, well before modern gender-equality documents were written, the British philosopher John Stuart Mill published “The Subjection of Women” (1912), which established the presumption of equal rights; and the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen, in plays like A Doll’s House ([1923] 1995), made gender oppression an important cultural theme. In the following generation, the pioneering Austrian psychoanalyst Alfred Adler established a powerful psychological argument for gender equality (Connell 1995). A similar tradition of men’s advocacy exists in the United States (Kimmel and Mosmiller 1992).

Many of the historic gains by women’s advocates have been won in alliance with men who held organizational or political authority at the time. For instance, the introduction of equal employment opportunity measures in New South Wales, Australia, occurred with the strong support of the premier and the head of a reform inquiry into the public sector, both men (Eisenstein 1991). Sometimes men’s support for gender equality takes the form of campaigning and organizing among men. The most prominent example is the U.S. National Organization of Men Against Sexism (NOMAS), which has existed for more than twenty years (Cohen 1991). Men’s groups concerned with reforming masculinity, publications advocating change, and campaigns among men against violence toward women are found widely, for instance, in the United Kingdom, Mexico, and South Africa (Seidler 1991; Zingoni 1998; Peacock 2003).
Men have also been active in creating educational programs for boys and young men intended to support gender reform. Similar strategies have been developed for adult men, sometimes in a religious and sometimes in a health or therapeutic context. There is a strong tradition of such work in Germany, with programs that combine the search for self-knowledge with the learning of antisexist behavior (Brandes and Bullinger 1996). Work of the same kind has developed in Brazil, the United States, and other countries (Denborough 1996; Lyra and Medrado 2001).

These initiatives are widespread, but they are also mostly small-scale. What of the wider state of opinion? European survey research has shown no consensus among men either for or against gender equality. Sometimes a third/third/third pattern appears, with about one-third of men supporting change toward equality, about one-third opposing it, and one-third undecided or intermediate (Holter 1997, 131–34). Nevertheless, examinations of the survey evidence from the United States, Germany, and Japan have shown a long-term trend of growing support for change, that is, a movement away from traditional gender roles, especially among members of the younger generation (Thornton 1989; Zulehner and Volz 1998; Mohwald 2002).

There is, however, also significant evidence of men’s and boys’ resistance to change in gender relations. The survey research reveals substantial levels of doubt and opposition, especially among older men. Research on workplaces and on corporate management has documented many cases where men maintain an organizational culture that is heavily masculinized and unwelcoming to women. In some cases there is active opposition to gender-equality measures or quiet undermining of them (Cockburn 1991; Collinson and Hearn 1996). Research on schools has also found cases where boys assert control of informal social life and direct hostility against girls and against boys perceived as being different. The status quo can be defended even in the details of classroom life, for instance, when a particular group of boys used misogynist language to resist study of a poem that questioned Australian gender stereotypes (Kenworthy 1994; Holland et al. 1998).

Some men accept change in principle but in practice still act in ways that sustain men’s dominance of the public sphere and assign domestic labor and child care to women. In strongly gender segregated societies, it may be difficult for men to recognize alternatives or to understand women’s experiences (Kandiyoti 1994; Fuller 2001; Meuser 2003). Another type of opposition to reform, more common among men in business and government, rejects gender-equality measures because it rejects all government action in support of equality, in favor of the unfettered action of the market.

The reasons for men’s resistance include the patriarchal dividend discussed above and threats to identity that occur with change. If social definitions of masculinity include being the breadwinner and being “strong,” then men may be offended by women’s professional progress because it makes men seem less worthy of respect. Resistance may also reflect ideological defense of male supremacy. Research on domestic violence suggests that male batterers often hold very conservative views of women’s role in the family (Ptacek 1988). In many parts of the world, there exist ideologies that justify men’s supremacy on grounds of religion, biology, cultural tradition, or organizational mission (e.g., in the military). It is a mistake to regard these ideas as simply outmoded. They may be actively modernized and renewed.


grounds for optimism: capacities for equality and reasons for change

The public debates about men and boys have often been inconclusive. But they have gone a long way, together with the research, to shatter one widespread belief that has hindered gender reform. This obstacle is the belief that men cannot change their ways, that “boys will be boys,” that rape, war, sexism, domestic violence, aggression, and self-centeredness are natural to men.
We now have many documented examples of the diversity of masculinities and of men’s and boys’ capacity for equality. For instance, life-history research in Chile has shown that there is no unitary Chilean masculinity, despite the cultural homogeneity of the country. While a hegemonic model is widely diffused across social strata, there are many men who depart from it, and there is significant discontent with traditional roles (Valdés and Olavarriá 1998). Though groups of boys in schools often have a dominant or hegemonic pattern of masculinity, there are usually also other patterns present, some of which involve more equal and respectful relations with girls.

Research in Britain, for instance, shows how boys encounter and explore alternative models of masculinity as they grow up (Mac an Ghaill 1994; O’Donnell and Sharpe 2000). Psychological and educational research shows personal flexibility in the face of gender stereotypes. Men and boys can vary, or strategically use, conventional definitions of masculinity. It is even possible to teach boys (and girls) how to do this in school, as experiments in Australian classrooms have shown (Davies 1993; Wetherell and Edley 1999).

Changes have occurred in men’s practices within certain families, where there has been a conscious shift toward more equal sharing of housework and child care. The sociologist Barbara J. Risman (1998), who has documented such cases in one region of the United States, calls them “fair families.” It is clear from her research that the change has required a challenge to traditional models of masculinity. In the Shanghai region of China, there is an established local tradition of relative gender equality, and men are demonstrably willing to be involved in domestic work. Research by Da Wei Wei (Da 2004) shows this tradition persisting among Shanghai men even after migration to another country.

Perhaps the most extensive social action involving men in gender change has occurred in Scandinavia. This includes provisions for paternity leave that have had high rates of take-up, among the most dramatic of all demonstrations of men’s willingness to change gender practices. Øystein Holter sums up the research and practical experience: “The Nordic ‘experiment’ has shown that a majority of men can change their practice when circumstances are favorable. . . . When reforms or support policies are well-designed and targeted towards an ongoing cultural process of change, men’s active support for gender-equal status increases” (1997, 126).

Many groups of men, it is clear, have a capacity for equality and for gender change. But what reasons for change are men likely to see?

Early statements often assumed that men had the same interest as women in escaping from restrictive sex roles (e.g., Palme 1972). Later experience has not confirmed this view. Yet men and boys often do have substantial reasons to support change, which can readily be listed.

First, men are not isolated individuals. Men and boys live in social relationships, many with women and girls: wives, partners, mothers, aunts, daughters, nieces, friends, classmates, workmates, professional colleagues, neighbors, and so on. The quality of every man’s life depends to a large extent on the quality of those relationships. We may therefore speak of men’s relational interests in gender equality. For instance, very large numbers of men are fathers, and about half of their children are girls. Some men are sole parents and are then deeply involved in caregiving—an important demonstration of men’s capacity for care (Risman 1986). Even in intact partnerships with women, many men have close relationships with their children, and psychological research shows the importance of these relationships (Kindler 2002). In several parts of the world, young men are exploring more engaged patterns of fatherhood (Olavarria 2001). To make sure that daughters grow up in a world that offers young women security, freedom, and opportunities to fulfill their talents is a powerful reason for many men to support gender equality.

Second, men may wish to avoid the toxic effects that the gender order has for them. James Harrison long ago issued a “Warning: The Male Sex Role May Be Dangerous to Your Health” (1978). Since then health research has documented specific problems for men and boys.
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Among them are premature death from accident, homicide, and suicide; occupational injury; higher levels of drug abuse, especially of alcohol and tobacco; and in some countries at least, a relative unwillingness by men to seek medical help when it is needed. Attempts to assert a tough and dominant masculinity sustain some of these patterns (Sabo and Gordon 1995; Hurrelmann and Kolip 2002).

Social and economic pressures on men to compete in the workplace, to increase their hours of paid work, and sometimes to take second jobs are among the most powerful constraints on gender reform. Desire for a better balance between work and life is widespread among employed men. On the other hand, where unemployment is high the lack of a paid job can be a damaging pressure on men who have grown up with the expectation of being breadwinners. This is, for instance, an important gender issue in post-Apartheid South Africa. Opening alternative economic paths and moving toward what German discussions have called “multioptional masculinities” may do much to improve men’s well-being (Widersprüche 1998; Morrell 2001a).

Third, men may support gender change because they see its relevance to the well-being of the community they live in. In situations of mass poverty and underemployment, for instance in cities in developing countries, flexibility in the gender division of labor may be crucial to a household that requires women’s earnings as well as men’s. Reducing the rigidity of masculinities may also yield benefits in security. Civil and international violence is strongly associated with dominating patterns of masculinity and with marked gender inequality in the state. Movement away from these patterns makes it easier for men to adopt historically “feminine” styles of nonviolent negotiation and conflict resolution (Zalewski and Parpart 1998; Breines, Connell, and Eide 2000; Cockburn 2003). This may also reduce the toxic effects of policing and incarceration (Sabo, Kupers, and London 2001).

Finally, men may support gender reform because gender equality follows from their political or ethical principles. These may be religious, socialist, or broad democratic beliefs. Mill argued a case based on classical liberal principles a century and a half ago, and the idea of equal human rights still has purchase among large groups of men.

Grounds for Pessimism: The Shape of Masculinity Politics

The diversity among men and masculinities is reflected in a diversity of men’s movements in the developed countries. A study of the United States found multiple movements, with different agendas for the remaking of masculinity. They operated on the varying terrains of gender equality, men’s rights, and ethnic or religious identities (Messner 1997). There is no unified political position for men and no authoritative representative of men’s interests.

Men’s movements specifically concerned with gender equality exist in a number of countries. A well-known example is the White Ribbon Campaign, dedicated to mobilizing public opinion and educating men and boys for the prevention of men’s violence against women. Originating in Canada, in response to the massacre of women in Montreal in 1989, the White Ribbon Campaign achieved very high visibility in that country, with support from political and community leaders and considerable outreach in schools and mass media. More recently, it has spread to other countries. Groups concerned with violence prevention have appeared in other countries, such as Men Against Sexual Assault in Australia and Men Overcoming Violence (MOVE) in the United States. These have not achieved the visibility of the White Ribbon Campaign but have built up a valuable body of knowledge about the successes and difficulties of organizing among men (Lichterman 1989; Pease 1997; Kaufman 1999).

The most extensive experience of any group of men organizing around issues of gender and sexual politics is that of homosexual men, in antidiscrimination campaigns, the gay liberation
movement, and community responses to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Gay men have pioneered in areas such as community care for the sick, community education for responsible sexual practices, representation in the public sector, and overcoming social exclusion, which are important for all groups of men concerned with gender equality (Kippax et al. 1993; Altman 1994).

Explicit backlash movements also exist but have not generally had a great deal of influence. Men mobilizing as men to oppose women tend to be seen as cranks or fanatics. They constantly exaggerate women’s power. And by defining men’s interests in opposition to women’s, they get into cultural difficulties, since they have to violate a main tenet of modern patriarchal ideology—the idea that “opposites attract” and that men’s and women’s needs, interests, and choices are complementary.

Much more important for the defense of gender inequality are movements in which men’s interests are a side effect—nationalist, ethnic, religious, and economic movements. Of these, the most influential on a world scale is contemporary neoliberalism—the political and cultural promotion of free-market principles and individualism and the rejection of state control.

Neoliberalism is in principle gender neutral. The “individual” has no gender, and the market delivers advantage to the smartest entrepreneur, not to men or women as such. But neoliberalism does not pursue social justice in relation to gender. In Eastern Europe, the restoration of capitalism and the arrival of neoliberal politics have been followed by a sharp deterioration in the position of women. In rich Western countries, neoliberalism from the 1980s on has attacked the welfare state, on which far more women than men depend; supported deregulation of labor markets, resulting in increased casualization of women workers; shrunk public sector employment, the sector of the economy where women predominate; lowered rates of personal taxation, the main basis of tax transfers to women; and squeezed public education, the key pathway to labor market advancement for women. However, the same period saw an expansion of the human-rights agenda, which is, on the whole, an asset for gender equality.

The contemporary version of neoliberalism, known as neoconservatism in the United States, also has some gender complexities. George W. Bush was the first U.S. president to place a woman in the very heart of the state security apparatus, as national security adviser to the president. And some of the regime’s actions, such as the attack on the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, were defended as a means of emancipating women.

Yet neoconservatism and state power in the United States and its satellites such as Australia remain overwhelmingly the province of men—indeed, men of a particular character: power oriented and ruthless, restrained by little more than calculations of likely opposition. There has been a sharp remasculinization of political rhetoric and a turn to the use of force as a primary instrument in policy. The human rights discourse is muted and sometimes completely abandoned (as in the U.S. prison camp for Muslim captives at Guantánamo Bay and the Australian prison camps for refugees in the central desert and Pacific islands).

Neoliberalism can function as a form of masculinity politics largely because of the powerful role of the state in the gender order. The state constitutes gender relations in multiple ways, and all of its gender policies affect men. Many mainstream policies (e.g., in economic and security affairs) are substantially about men without acknowledging this fact (Nagel 1998; O’Connor, Orloff, and Shaver 1999; Connell 2003b).

This points to a realm of institutional politics where men’s and women’s interests are very much at stake, without the publicity created by social movements. Public-sector agencies (Jensen 1998; Mackay and Bilton 2000; Schofield, forthcoming), private-sector corporations (Marchand and Runyan 2000; Hearn and Parkin 2001), and unions (Corman et al. 1993; Franzway 2001) are all sites of masculinized power and struggles for gender equality. In each of these sites, some men can be found with a commitment to gender equality, but in each case that is an embattled position. For gender-equality outcomes, it is important to have support from
men in the top organizational levels, but this is not often reliably forthcoming.

One reason for the difficulty in expanding men’s opposition to sexism is the role of highly conservative men as cultural authorities and managers. Major religious organizations, in Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, are controlled by men who sometimes completely exclude women, and these organizations have often been used to oppose the emancipation of women. Transnational media organizations such as Rupert Murdoch’s conglomerate are equally active in promoting conservative gender ideology.

A specific address to men is found in the growing institutional, media, and business complex of commercial sports. With its overwhelming focus on male athletes; its celebration of force, domination, and competitive success; its valorization of male commentators and executives; and its marginalization and frequent ridicule of women, the sports/business complex has become an increasingly important site for representing and defining gender. This is not traditional patriarchy. It is something new, welding exemplary bodies to entrepreneurial culture. Michael Messner (2002), one of the leading analysts of contemporary sports, formulates the effect well by saying that commercial sports define the renewed centrality of men and of a particular version of masculinity.

On a world scale, explicit backlash movements are of limited importance, but very large numbers of men are nevertheless engaged in preserving gender inequality. Patriarchy is defended diffusely. There is support for change from equally large numbers of men, but it is an uphill battle to articulate that support. That is the political context with which new gender-equality initiatives have to deal.

WAYS FORWARD: TOWARD A GLOBAL FRAMEWORK

Inviting men to end men’s privileges, and to remake masculinities to sustain gender equality, strikes many people as a strange or utopian project. Yet this project is already under way. Many men around the world are engaged in gender reforms, for the good reasons discussed above.

The diversity of masculinities complicates the process but is also an important asset. As this diversity becomes better known, men and boys can more easily see a range of possibilities for their own lives, and both men and women are less likely to think of gender inequality as unchangeable. It also becomes possible to identify specific groups of men who might engage in alliances for change.

The international policy documents discussed above rely on the concept of an alliance between men and women for achieving equality. Since the growth of an autonomous women’s movement, the main impetus for reform has been located in women’s groups. Some groups within the women’s movement, especially those concerned with men’s violence, are reluctant to work with men or are deeply skeptical of men’s willingness to change. Other feminists argue that alliances between women and men are possible, even crucial. In some social movements, for instance, environmentalism, there is a strong ideology of gender equality and a favorable environment for men to support gender change (Connell 1995; Segal 1997).

In local and central government, practical alliances between women and men have been important in achieving equal-opportunity measures and other gender-equality reforms. Even in the field of men’s violence against women, there has been cooperation between women’s groups and men’s groups, for instance, in prevention work. This cooperation can be an inspiration to grassroots workers and a powerful demonstration of women and men’s common interest in a peaceful and equal society (Pease 1997; Schofield, forthcoming). The concept of alliance is itself important, in preserving autonomy for women’s groups, in preempting a tendency for any one group to speak for others, and in defining a political role for men that has some dignity and might attract widespread support.
Given the spectrum of masculinity politics, we cannot expect worldwide consensus for gender equality. What is possible is that support for gender equality might become hegemonic among men. In that case it would be groups supporting equality that provide the agenda for public discussion about men’s lives and patterns of masculinity.

There is already a broad cultural shift toward a historical consciousness about gender, an awareness that gender customs came into existence at specific moments in time and can always be transformed by social action (Connell 1995). What is needed now is a widespread sense of agency among men, a sense that this transformation is something they can actually share in as a practical proposition. This is precisely what was presupposed in the “joint responsibility” of men invoked by the General Assembly declaration of the year 2000.1

From this point of view, the recent meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is profoundly interesting. The CSW is one of the oldest of UN agencies, dating from the 1940s. Effectively a standing committee of the General Assembly, it meets annually, and its current practice is to consider two main themes at each meeting. For the 2004 meeting, one of the defined themes was “the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality.” The section of the UN secretariat that supports the CSW, the Division for the Advancement of Women, undertook background work. The division held, in June–July 2003, a worldwide online seminar on the role of men and boys, and in October 2003 it convened an international expert group meeting in Brasilia on the topic.

At the CSW meetings, several processes occur and (it is to be hoped) interact. There is a presentation of the division’s background work, and delegations of the forty-five current member countries, UN agencies, and many of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) attending make initial statements. There is a busy schedule of side events, mainly organized by NGOs but some conducted by delegations or UN agencies, ranging from strategy debates to practical workshops. And there is a diplomatic process in which the official delegations negotiate over a draft document in the light of discussions in the CSW and their governments’ stances on gender issues.

This is a politicized process, inevitably, and it can break down. In 2003 the CSW discussion on the issue of violence against women reached deadlock. In 2004 it was clear that some participating NGOs were not happy with the focus on men and boys, some holding to a discourse representing men exclusively as perpetrators of violence. Over the two weeks of negotiations, however, the delegations did reach consensus on a statement of “Agreed Conclusions.”

Balancing a reaffirmation of commitment to women’s equality with a recognition of men’s and boys’ potential for action, this document makes specific recommendations across a spectrum of policy fields, including education, parenthood, media, the labor market, sexuality, violence, and conflict prevention. These proposals have no force in international law—the document is essentially a set of recommendations to governments and other organizations. Nevertheless, it is the first international agreement of its kind, treating men systematically as agents in gender-equality processes, and it creates a standard for future gender-equality discussions. Most important, the CSW’s “Agreed Conclusions” change the logic of the representation of men in gender policy. So far as the international discourse of gender-equality policy is concerned, this document begins the substantive presentation of gender equality as a positive project for men.

Here the UN process connects with the social and cultural possibilities that have emerged from the last three decades of gender politics among men. Gender equality is an undertaking for men that can be creative and joyful. It is a project that realizes high principles of social justice, produces better lives for the women whom men care about, and will produce better lives for the majority of men in the long run. This can and should be a project that generates energy, that finds expression in everyday life and the arts as well as in formal policies, and that can illuminate all aspects of men’s lives.
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NOTE

1. Twenty-third special session, UN General Assembly, “Political Declaration,” para. 6.

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**Topics for Further Examination**

- Look up research on men who participated in the first and second waves of feminism in the United States. Find and explore websites devoted to profeminist men’s organizations in different countries around the world.
- Explore the intersection of movements for gender, racial, and sexual equality as they have come together in #BlackLivesMatter. Why did queer women of color emerge as the backbone of #BlackLivesMatter?