Welcome to Feminist Formations

Rebecca Ropers-Huilman, Editor, and Adela C. Licona, Editorial Board President

Welcome to the first issue of Feminist Formations. We are proud and excited to present a renewed resource for those of us who are interested in and informed by feminist knowledge and action as they shape the fields of Women's Studies, Gender Studies, and Sexuality Studies.

When Rebecca wrote her editorial for the first issue of 2009, she primarily focused on changes external to Feminist Formations. Already at that time, though, changes were beginning to occur for the journal itself. First, over the summer, the editorial board changed the title from National Women's Studies Association Journal to Feminist Formations. This new title more clearly matches our expanded focus. Specifically, we mean to signify that we encourage transnational exploration of issues that relate to Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies in a wide variety of contexts. Second, in conjunction with that title change, we developed a new mission:

Feminist Formations (formerly the NWSA Journal [1988–2009]) cultivates a forum where feminists from around the world articulate research, theory, activism, teaching, and learning, thereby showcasing new feminist formations. An interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed journal, we publish innovative work by scholars, activists, and practitioners in feminist, gender, and sexuality studies. Our subject matter includes national, global, and transnational feminist thought and practice; the cultural and social politics of genders and sexualities; and historical and contemporary studies of gendered experience. The journal values established and emerging lines of inquiry and methods that engage the complexities of gender as implicated in forms of power such as race, ethnicity, class, nation, migration, ability, and religion.

We have assembled an outstanding list of editorial and advisory board members who, through their scholarship and activism, are poised to help us fulfill this mission. Their wisdom has strengthened us in the past and will enable
us to enrich our ongoing and future contributions to Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

Rebecca’s 2009 editorial also focused on the common purposes that we share with the National Women’s Studies Association, referring particularly to building feminist community and being committed to promoting both experienced and emerging scholars. While the journal board and the NWSA continue to share common goals, we determined this past year that we can grow independently toward our visions. Feminist Formations will continue to have a presence at the NWSA conference and will partner with them and other feminist organizations in the future when it is generative to do so. Additionally, we wholeheartedly welcome the participation of NWSA members in the journal’s development. The various formations that feminism can create are indeed multiple, and both the journal and the organization will continue to contribute to those formations.

We have been working intensely to enrich the resources of Feminist Formations throughout this transition. Toward this end we have an invigorated Web presence. Please visit our Web site, www.cehd.umn.edu/Feminist-Formations, to learn more about the journal and other resources available for you. There, you can also join our Facebook page and check out the many ways to participate in the journal. Additionally, you can look at our new “Formations and Locations” section that will feature short descriptions about feminist endeavors around the world. You can also see a sample article and look at previous tables of contents to find valuable resources for your research, teaching, and activism.

While most of the articles published in this volume were accepted under the NWSAJ’s mission, they certainly highlight feminist formations in a variety of contexts and deepen our understandings of gendered lives in myriad contexts. This issue starts with Nels P. Highberg’s analysis of “The (Missing) Faces of African American Girls with AIDS.” In this article, Highberg explores how African American girls with AIDS are portrayed in popular media and considers how gendered and racialized perceptions of AIDS shape what is represented and understood (and misrepresented and misunderstood) about African American girls with AIDS. Following a compelling narrative analysis, he urges us to consider what is hidden as well as what is represented when we consider this critically important topic.

The second article in this volume, “Toward a Theory of Feminist Hospitality” by Maurice Hamington, explores the social value of hospitality within a world in which international conflicts and opportunities are ever-present. Incorporating political and feminist theory and philosophy, Hamington questions: What can we learn from feminist hospitality about how to think and act both as individuals and nations? What does feminist hospitality suggest about the sharing of resources, the taking of initiative, the ever-emergent identities of those involved, and the dynamics of inclusion that are possible? Hamington’s article argues for the integration of care ethics with feminist
hospitality in order to foster nonhierarchial host/guest relations on both local and global levels.

In the third article, “Feminism Lost in Translation? When a Chinese Woman Speaks through an American Woman’s Voice in Pearl Buck’s East Wind, West Wind,” Haipeng Zhou focuses on Pearl Buck’s efforts to foster Chinese women’s liberation through her writing. The article first sets a context for this analysis by calling to mind the various means by which Western feminism was finding its way into Chinese culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although acknowledging Buck’s compelling feminist writing and challenging misinterpretations of her work, Zhou argues that Buck’s desire to serve as a translator both empowered and silenced many women’s voices and experiences. With Hamington’s article above, “Feminism Lost in Translation?” urges us to continue our efforts to build and draw on transcultural relations, practices and experiences that must be understood as culturally and historically situated.

The fourth article, “Loving Her Without Class: The Politics of Feminist Love in Ann Allen Shockley’s Lesbian Novel” by Mimi Iimuro Van Ausdall, explores how Shockley’s novel Loving Her both calls attention to and subsumes various aspects of the characters’ identities in its illustration of an interracial lesbian relationship. Van Ausdall ultimately argues that, while complicated, class critiques cannot be subsumed under other meaningful categories of identities or social relations, such as race, sex, and sexuality. She suggests that, “[W]e must expose the ways that capitalism encourages and even relies upon racism, sexism, homophobia, and some forms of identity politics, including some class-based identity politics, to diffuse the working class.” This article, as well as the novel it analyzes, helps readers think about the complexities and messiness of the “working through of difference” on a regular, daily basis.

The subsequent contribution is a series of scholarly reflections on the idea of the waves metaphor in feminism. In “Is It Time to Jump Ship? Historians Rethink the Waves Metaphor,” historians Kathleen Laughlin, Julie Gallagher, Dorothy Sue Cobble, Eileen Boris, Premilla Nadasen, Stephanie Gilmore, and Leandra Zarnow, each from their differently situated social locations and positionalities, offer their perspectives on what the feminist waves metaphor both illuminates and obscures. Each of their contributions considers the implications of divergent ways of thinking about our common and simultaneously fractured feminist histories.

Finally, in our With/in the Academy section, included in every regular issue, two articles provide excellent resources for teaching and leading within academic environments. The first article, “Unmirroring Pedagogies: Teaching with Intersectional and Transnational Methods in the Women and Gender Studies Classroom” by Dawn Rae Davis, fully engages a question that many of us who teach in Women’s and Gender Studies ponder: How do we teach and learn intersectional and transnational thinking and action? The article, which
provides a rich theoretical and experiential grounding, argues for an unmirroring process that decenters hegemonic knowledges and epistemologies in an attempt to decolonize learning.

The second article in this section, “Breaking the Barriers of Essentialism in Leadership Research: Positionality as a Promising Approach” by Adrianna Kezar and Jaime Lester, posits the use of positionality theory to acknowledge the fluidity of identity that is present among those leading in our postsecondary education institutions. Specifically, Kezar and Lester argue that our current understandings of leadership are limited by our failure to incorporate understandings related to intersectionality, understandings that would foreground the presence of all leaders' composite identities at all times, while acknowledging that different identities take shape differently due to the power dynamics at play in particular situations or contexts. This article urges that leadership studies move in a new direction that incorporates leaders' positionalities.

We hope you find this and future issues of Feminist Formations useful in fueling your scholarship and activism. We invite you to be a part of our transition to a new identity, and to help us grow into our mission. Please consider subscribing and encouraging your library or institution to do so. Submit your own work, and encourage your colleagues to submit theirs. Use our articles or special issues in your classes. Let us know what you need, or suggest a special issue or cluster issue to generate articles related to your needs or interests. Volunteer to review and agree to do so when we contact you. You are part of the feminist community, and you can strengthen the conversations that we strive to foster. We appreciate your support and look forward to future opportunities to collaborate with you in enriching our multi-faceted communities.