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Lean Out: Gender, Economics, and Enterprise

Cluett, Peabody & Co. photo courtesy of Rensselaer County Historical Society (RCHS), Troy, NY.
Photo “Kayla and her Mom” reprinted with permission from Brenda Kenneally.
Sanford map (above) of Troy, NY, circa 1900, reprinted with permission from RCHS.
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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

WOMEN HAVE ACHIEVED THIS, I FOLLOW: WHAT IF?

In turning to questions of gender, economics and entrepreneurship, the 2016 Seneca Falls Dialogues asked participants to explore how various forms of labor and compensation affect individual lives, societal movements, and institutions. One of the sub-themes for the conference was “Arts and Activism,” which led to our choice of keynote speaker Brenda Ann Kenneally and inspired Eastman professor of music education, Philip Silvey, to propose a performance of the University of Rochester’s women’s chorus at the Dialogues. With the full support of the Department of Music at University of Rochester, chaired by Professor Honey Meconi, and the full enthusiasm of the organizing committee, this proposal became a reality and the performance was a highlight of the Dialogues, dramatizing the importance of place and the contributions of women throughout time and cultures. Held in the Wesleyan Chapel, the site of the first Women’s Rights Convention, the performance, titled “Legacy of Freedom,” featured a chorus of about 65 women including singers from the Eastman School of Music, the University of Rochester, and the greater Rochester community. They performed a capella, with occasional additions of African drums and a Nepalese singing bowl. The program featured a wide variety of music, including a South African freedom song, a setting of Lebanese-American poet Kahlil Gibran’s “On Children,” a stunning, wordless tone poem created by the members of the choir, and a stirring rendition of “Suffrage Song,” arranged for this performance by Silvey. Members of the audience and even members of the choir were moved to tears by the beauty of the performance and its resonances, both literal and figurative, in this simple, yet sacred space.

In the spirit of continued dialogues, four members of the organizing committee and the editorial board of this journal, Maria Brandt, Barb LeSavoy, Jill Swiencicki and Deborah Uman, sat down with Silvey and Meconi to discuss the performance and all the work that went into its creation. As interviewers, we were struck by the mindfulness of each decision that led to such a profound performance, and thought a summary
of some of the main ideas from this conversation would serve as an apt introduction to this second rendition of the Seneca Falls Dialogues Journal.

An early part of the conversation focused on the challenges women have long faced in the artistic arena, a challenge one can see most visibly when visiting a traditional art museum filled with painting after painting by European men. At the Eastman School of Music, all freshmen female voice majors audition for placement into choirs. Those who are not chosen to join the Eastman Chorale—a mixed gender group—are assigned to sing in the women’s chorus. Some singers may interpret this to mean the ensemble is less selective and therefore of lesser stature. Aware of these feelings, Silvey strove to create a unique identity for the chorus, urging the group to realize its potential for excellence. He also understood the complicated gender dynamics resulting from his position as a male conductor of an all-women’s ensemble. As an example, he spoke of introducing the chorus to a series of songs about the Virgin Mary, one of which they performed at the Seneca Falls concert. He recalled discussing the view of Mary as the redeemer of Eve’s sin and then hearing from one of his graduate students who pointed out the problems associated with pinning all of humanity’s sins on Eve. Rather than shrinking from this conversation, Silvey returned to his singers and changed how he talked about Mary, writing in the program notes, “rather than see these figures as literal in the traditional Biblical sense, the singers wish to think of them both as iconic women whose story conveys the vulnerability in all of humankind and the potential for restoration and redemption.”

While program notes typically feature historical and biographical information, often drawn from the writings of scholars and academics, Silvey chose to feature the ideas of his performers. As Meconi pointed out, it is the rare conductor who sees who sees concerts as learning experiences for the performers beyond the purely musical event. Silvey is one of those rare conductors and he spoke repeatedly about asking himself what the students will get from their choral experience and how it will enrich their lives. In programming for the Seneca Falls performance, Silvey had ideas of lineage and heritage at the forefront of his mind as he thought about the upcoming 100 year anniversary of the New York state women’s right
to vote. Thinking too about the Women’s Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, Silvey wanted to make the experience of singing there personal for each member of the chorus. He asked them to think about an aspirational figure, a woman who excelled in the students’ discipline or field and to research the individual, bring in pictures and quotes, and share what they learned. He called this exercise: Women Have Achieved This, I Follow—WHAT IF. When one student asked “what if I want to do something that a woman hasn’t done yet,” he answered, “Women Haven’t Achieved This, I’m First.” Later, he had the chorus members contact their oldest female relative and ask her a series of questions including: what was something you wanted to do that you felt you couldn’t because of a rule or convention; what do you remember most about your mother; and what do you want to be remembered for. With both of these projects, Silvey gave the singers opportunities to consider the limitations women face and the ways in which they transcend those limitations, with the hope that each member would be encouraged and inspired. He had the chorus wear pictures of their chosen women pinned to their concert dresses, and he used the energy and the theme from this exercise to inspire one of the most moving pieces on the program.

The composition “Reverberations” began with four notes linked to the single pitch and the partials created by a Nepalese singing bowl. Silvey introduced the bowl and the tones to the chorus on their first day of rehearsal, giving them the chance to play on the bowl and absorb its resonances. In subsequent rehearsals, Silvey and the chorus members experimented with sound and movement, until he realized they needed something around which to structure the piece. For Silvey, it was the words “legacy” and “remember,” words associated with the interview project, and he encouraged each of the singers to come up with their own words from their interviews and set it to the four pitches. The middle of the piece built on these words in an improvisatory section in which singers chose to sing their word or not, repeat it, keep humming, or stay silent. Silvey talked about the challenges of creating and performing a piece like this. Everyone shared in the collaboration but also in the uncertainty. Meconi pointed out how this collaboration gave the students a chance to see the process of creation, to understand how things go right and wrong,
and to see how a piece evolves. Great works of art, Meconi said, aren’t “just there; someone creates them.” In this instance, the singers themselves helped create the work. In performance, Silvey stopped conducting, allowing the singers to control the movement of the piece and giving them another rare opportunity—to experience music making that they initiated and created independently.

Because of the design of the Wesleyan Chapel, the singers performed “Reverberations” standing around the perimeter of the church, surrounding the audience. Although not designed for acoustic grandeur, the Chapel provided the context and the soul of the performance. For Silvey, the whole concert was structured around the idea of singing where the women’s rights convention occurred. The concert also provided what Meconi called the perfect audience, one steeped in conversations about gender and equality and cognizant of the symbolic resonances of the Chapel. Silvey described his own response to the location, explaining that he was moved during the performance, “because it was the space, and the historical connection, and the idea of the long reach back into history, and what music represents in terms of a spirit.” In particular, singing the historical “Suffrage Song” provided harmonies of the era. Singing it in Wesleyan Chapel helped performers and audience members alike feel like we were in that time period, even as the experience allowed us to “transcend the insistency of presence.”

While the performance took place in October 2016, at the height of the excitement over the possibility of electing America’s first female president, our conversation occurred in January 5, 2017, only days before the presidential inauguration. In those few months, our collective mood shifted dramatically. But as we began to wrap up this conversation our thoughts turned to hope. Swiencicki recalled her emotional response to the performance as feeling like was she “in a place of hope, because we had the election and the potentiality of that in front of us. But we’re also in a space of incredible tension around social categories of identity and race, and I think I felt all of that coalesce, so I felt overcome. I want to use the word overcome with emotion about the tragedy of where we were combined with the potential of that promise of working that forward. So I think all of that came together in ways I wasn’t fully prepared for in the
performance and the ending piece just pulled at my emotions in ways that reminded me of the traumas around us and all of the sadness that comes with that and all the potential hope that we could be united, that we could come together in unity and voice and I felt like that potentiality really rested on that closing piece.” Similarly, Brandt described the performance as a gift, “that you and all of those women worked to create a piece that was so fluid and so well done, that required so much cooperation and collaboration across lines of difference, between all of you, just because of your ages where you are, maybe backgrounds, all of that in-sync-ness that you had, that the work that went into that, the love, on some level, not for me but for whatever, and to be in that room, so it’s like a vortex, so as much as I felt deeply connected to the past and maybe hopeful for the future, and that moment I was right there, locked into it. And even if it’s an illusion of unity in that moment, that illusion is real.”

The project of the Seneca Falls Dialogues is founded on hope in the face of continued discrimination and inequities, and the essays in this journal continue to move that agenda forward. Two essays open the volume, each highlighting the power of person and place pivotal to upstate New York as an origin site for feminist activism. The first, “Kate Gleason: Introducing a Twentieth-Century Businesswoman to Twenty-First Century Students,” reminds us of Kate Gleason’s innovative accomplishments as a Rochester NY engineer and business entrepreneur. “Disrupting the Lean: Performing a 2016 Declaration of Sentiments,” follows and features students writing with faculty to theorize the making of a 2016 Declaration Sentiments, as framed by the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, and as collaboratively invented and performed in their 2016 Seneca Falls Dialogue roundtable.

Five essays center the volume, each pulling at questions of gender and labor analyzed across diverse and changing contexts. “Add Women and Stir: Female Presidents in Pop Culture, 2012-2016” examines representational shifts in popular portrayals of female presidents following Hillary Clinton’s 2008 primary run. The scrutiny faced by female professionals is quantified in “Appearance Discrimination: Lookism and the Cost to the American Woman,” which offers a review of the research on views of ideal beauty and how those views affect women
in the workforce. Also interested in fashion, “Underrepresented: The Lack of Black Designers Featured in Harper’s Bazaar and Vogue” uses critical race theory as a lens to analyze the absence of Black designers in contemporary fashion magazines. Visual culture is also central in “Constructing Sexuality and Fetishizing Women in American History: Debunking Myths in Popular Culture from Pocahontas to the Cold War,” which integrates examples of student analysis to illustrate the value of visual imagery in teaching history and gender-focused courses. Closing out this section are, “Empowerment through Dialogue: Women’s Experience with Division of Labor as a Leisure Constraint in Family Life,” which explores points of tensions on divisions of labor in family travel; and “The New Normal: WGS Programs and Professionally-Driven Students,” which discusses instructional and institutional implications when including professionally-driven students in WGS Programs at community college. Two essays conclude the volume, both analyzing politics of gender and labor central to our 2016 Seneca Falls Dialogues theme, and both linking us to origins of person, place, and feminist activism that is unique to upstate New York. “Intersectionality and Feminist Pedagogy: Lessons from Teaching about Racism and Economic Inequity” utilizes Rochester, NY as a case study to argue that approaching race intersectionally and across disciplines creates a stronger model of feminist pedagogy. “Gender (As Constant) Labor:” A Consciousness Raising Dialogue on Transfeminist Scholarship and Organizing,” coauthored by faculty and students, highlights material effects of representational politics and articulates the need to center a transfeminist critique of normative regimes of power including representation of "women's" history in the United States.

Memory. Disruption. Presidential. Underrepresented. History. Empowerment. Sustaining. Intersectionality. Transfeminism. These words capture the breadth and scope of essays in volume 2 and bring us back to the 2016 Biennial Seneca Falls Dialogues conference. Photojournalist, activist, and 2016 Seneca Falls Dialogues keynote Brenda Ann Kenneally uses her artistic work to explore the how and why of class inequity in America. Her project, Upstate Girls, set in Troy, NY, followed seven women for five years as their escape routes out of generational poverty led to further entrapment. Pictured on the journal cover, one of
seven upstate girls, is Kayla and mom before their morning ride to work in Troy NY in 2007. This image and the essays that follow ask us to recognize the large spaces of inequality in which we live and work and to reconcile the gendered and racial dimensions to these inequalities. Written into the goals of The Seneca Falls Dialogues Journal is the importance of creatively engaging diverse tools for feminist activism, particularly those that support dialogues across difference. Inspired by Brenda Ann Kenneally’s Upstate Girls, and drawing on the Lean Out, Gender, Economics and Enterprise theme, *The Seneca Falls Dialogues Journal* honors the work of those who came before us as we build an accessible and inclusive publication in our continued pursuit of enlightenment and equality.

Editors
Deborah Uman, PhD
Barb LeSavoy, PhD
# The Seneca Falls Dialogues Journal

## Volume 2

### Fall 2017

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- Greater Rochester Area Branch of American Association of Women
- The Women’s Institute for Leadership and Learning

Cover design by Pat Maxwell.
In the summer of 2015, full-stack engineer Isis Wenger of the OneLogin Company began a Twitter campaign with the hashtag “#ILookLikeAnEngineer.” Wenger had appeared in a recruiting poster that her company placed in the Bay Area Rapid Transit system. In this advertisement she stands facing the viewer, wearing eyeglasses and a black company t-shirt, beside this text: “My team is great. Everyone is smart, creative, and hilarious—Isis Wenger, Platform Engineer.” The poster generated such a volume of social media commentary about Wenger’s appearance and whether she was a plausible representation of an engineer that she was moved to respond. “Some people think I’m not making ‘the right face,’” Wenger wrote in an online essay (Anchalee par.8). “Others think that this is unbelievable as to what ‘female engineers look like” (Anchalee par.8). Being an engineer, Wenger was keen to remind people that she is, in fact, what an engineer looks like. “The negative opinions about this ad that strangers feel so compelled to share illustrate solid examples of the sexism that plagues tech,” she observed (Anchalee par.6). Rather than accepting Wenger’s standing as an engineer, voices on social media questioned that standing by dissecting her appearance, posture, and expression. Wenger asked:
Do you feel passionately about helping spread awareness and increase tech diversity? Do you not fit the ‘cookie-cutter mold’ of what people believe engineers ‘should look like?’ If you answered yes to any of these questions I invite you to help spread the word and help us redefine ‘what an engineer should look like’. (Anchalee par.10)

Women responded to Wenger’s call by posting photos of themselves to the “#ILookLikeAnEngineer” hashtag in what Goodnet’s Zohar Friedman called “an awesome display of viral feminism” (par.1).

While the “#ILookLikeAnEngineer” campaign reflects women’s ongoing struggle for visibility and respect in the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) professions, in Rochester, NY, and particularly on the campus of the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), for more than a century there has been a woman’s face attached to the notion of what an engineer looks like. That woman is Kate Gleason. Born in Rochester in 1865, Gleason became the first woman to enroll in Cornell University’s Sibley College of Engineering and Mechanic Arts. She worked for many years in her family’s business, a machine shop that evolved over the decades into a successful gear-making enterprise that today operates as the Gleason Corporation. In 1914 Kate Gleason became the first woman to join the American Society of Mechanical Engineers. Gleason’s connection to engineering is honored at RIT, where the Kate Gleason College of Engineering attracts students and faculty from around the world.

While Kate Gleason is best remembered as a path-breaking woman engineer, many of her other activities and achievements have been obscured by this honor. The Gleason Corporation is across the street from the mansion-turned-museum of another local technical and industrial icon: George Eastman, founder of the Eastman Kodak Corporation. Eastman’s cultural, civic, and philanthropic legacies are visible in the city’s landscape, with the University of Rochester’s Eastman School of Music, the Eastman Theater housing the Rochester

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1 Wenger published her essay under the name Isis Anchalee.
2 For a helpful overview of Kate Gleason’s life, see Janis F. Gleason.
Philharmonic Orchestra, the Eastman Dental Center providing quality care at an affordable cost, and the George Eastman Museum hosting the largest photographic collection in the world. Eastman is remembered for Kodak cameras and film, but also for more than Kodak—he is regarded as a defining personality for his historical period and as a towering figure in the entire history of the city of Rochester. Kate Gleason’s legacy on the local landscape is muted by comparison. Her revolutionary concrete housing development in the town of East Rochester for workers like those employed by her family, her creation of a golf course and country club near this development, her groundbreaking role as a woman bank president, her efforts to rebuild a French town after the First World War, and her patent-winning trailer-car company lack visibility and, hence, memory in the community.

“Kate Gleason, Engineer” has had staying power, while Kate Gleason, builder, developer, entrepreneur, innovator, banker, philanthropist, and social reformer, have faded by comparison. The idea of “Kate Gleason, Engineer” is not only problematic because it elides her various (and varied) other achievements; it is problematic because her claim to the designation of engineer is perhaps the most ambiguous of those achievements. Gleason, like Eastman, came of age at a time when the professions were taking shape in the United States. The American Society of Mechanical Engineers was founded only in 1880, at a time when many of those working in the field—like Kate Gleason’s father William Gleason—had not only failed to attend engineering schools but lacked much in the way of formal schooling altogether. Kate Gleason had taken courses at both Cornell and the Mechanics Institute of Rochester (which became RIT), but she never completed her degree due to the demands of the family’s business. Stories about her as a practicing engineer were sometimes exaggerated or untrue. Henry Ford called the Gleason Works’ gear planer “the most remarkable machine work ever done by a woman,” but Gleason was quick to tell all who would listen that her father and brother had designed that device, not her.

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³ On the history of the development of mechanical engineering as a profession, see Calvert.
(Gleason 55). In the spring of 1910, Gleason wrote the *New York Times* asking them to correct a piece referring to her as “Feminine Mechanical Genius.” The closest Kate Gleason had come to designing the by-then-famous Gleason bevel gear planer, she wrote, was having family members who did so. “My place in the business is Secretary and Treasurer,” she told the *Times*. “You see I have captured two jobs but neither of them have anything at all to do with designing” (Gleason 55). Kate Gleason was extremely knowledgeable about gears and mechanics, but that knowledge was put to the task of selling such products to Gleason’s customers, rather than working on the products themselves. It was at the task of selling Gleason gears that Kate Gleason achieved success after success, and she, her family, and their company became quite wealthy as a result.

The fall of 2015 marked Kate Gleason’s sesquicentennial. Faculty in the Museum Studies Program at RIT (including the authors of this article, along with Juilee Decker and Rebecca DeRoo) determined in the spring of that year that this important anniversary should not go unnoticed on the campus. We planned to honor Gleason with a mobile exhibit that would appear in several corners of the campus and, ultimately, an exhibition that would include a fixed display in the library. As our planning took shape in the summer of 2015, so did the “#ILookLikeAnEngineer” campaign. That campaign made visible the ongoing struggle of women in engineering for full-fledged professional recognition. As we prepared to honor Kate Gleason, our challenge was to present a woman who was both not entirely and much more than an engineer.

Without diminishing the achievement in engineering for which she is recognized at RIT and was renowned in her lifetime, we wanted to show that Kate Gleason could be understood in new and wider ways. If “Kate Gleason, Engineer” was a misleading and limiting way to characterize her, how might we better capture the breadth of her achievements?

While the local parallel to Kate Gleason during her lifetime was George Eastman, the contemporary parallels to Gleason are figures like
Steve Jobs of Apple, Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook, and Elon Musk of PayPal, Tesla, and SpaceEx. Jobs, Zuckerberg, and Musk are known not only for their technical acumen, but also for their ability to imagine products that anticipate people’s needs and modes of living. They are known for selling technologies that are both ahead of the market and capable of reshaping markets. Musk, in particular, has wedded his latest business endeavors to larger social concerns. He, Zuckerberg, and Jobs are, in short, polymaths and people of vision. Kate Gleason was such a person, and we concluded that, while the descriptor “engineer” did not capture the extent of her accomplishments and endeavors, the term “visionary” did.

Her vision is what united Kate Gleason’s varied interests and activities, including her work in building, banking, engineering, manufacturing and other fields. She had the capacity to see beyond conditions that were in order to glimpse those which might be—in business, in community development, and for women. Kate Gleason, we reckoned, is what a visionary looks like.

“Visionary” is an evocative term for Kate Gleason, for it speaks not only to the importance of what one sees but also the importance of how one is seen. Indeed, the politics of representation were at stake for Gleason in her lifetime, just as they are for Wenger and other women in the STEM fields today. Wenger’s hashtag campaign was an effort to assert women’s agency, their power to represent themselves. Similarly, Kate Gleason worked to determine her own image. “Susan B. Anthony...had impressed one fact upon me while I was growing up,” she recalled. “Any advertising is good,” Anthony said. “Get praise if possible, blame if you have to. But never stop being talked about” (Gleason 47). This advice suggests what today might be called “personal branding,” and Gleason’s adherence to it—unsurprising, given her business dealings—indicates her effort to manage her own public presence, modulating it where possible and magnifying it whenever possible. At the heart of such representational agency is the question of whether women are viewed as engineers or whether representations of
engineering construct the field so as to exclude them from view and, thereby, access.

Kate Gleason can serve as a helpful antecedent to those, such as the “#ILookLikeAnEngineer” campaigners, seeking to heighten women’s visibility in STEM professions. At a moment when the likes of Steve Jobs, Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg, and other men loom large in the cultural imaginary, Gleason may also serve as a useful antecedent to those asserting women’s role not only in reshaping professions, but in reshaping society. As our exhibition team developed its own representation of Gleason for a college audience, we bore in mind the multiple ways she could be seen—and the many ways in which she could be an empowering example for students.

**REMEMBERING KATE GLEASON: CONSTRUCTING THE EXHIBITION AND ENGAGING THE STUDENTS**

Tina Olsin Lent

The exhibition, *Kate Gleason Visionary: a tribute on her 150th birthday*, was originally conceptualized to commemorate the sesquicentennial of Kate Gleason’s birth. As already discussed by Michael Brown, our main goal was to disseminate the message that Kate Gleason should be seen as a visionary to our target audience of college-age students in a way they would find compelling. In its earliest iteration in June, 2015, we planned the exhibition as mobile and temporary, something that would pop up in one space, come down within a couple of hours, then pop up over the next several days at different venues all over the RIT campus. This was our solution to two major problems we had to overcome to make the idea of an exhibition into a reality: we had no access to a venue on campus where an exhibition could be installed and we had no original objects that had belonged to Kate Gleason that we could exhibit. A pop-up exhibition gave us the ability to take the exhibit to different places where large numbers of students congregated, allowed us to use simple flat panels to present our message, and enabled us to exploit the element of surprise as we appeared in a previously empty space with numerous
faculty and students handing out cupcakes to celebrate Kate Gleason’s 150th birthday.

As originally imagined, the pop-up exhibition would consist of flat Mylar panels displayed on a portable unit designed for trade shows and conference displays that was already owned by the RIT Archives.\(^4\) Fully assembled, the unit was slightly elliptical, measuring 88 inches in height and 78½ inches across the front and back, with a seam down the center, creating two 29 inch panels on each side, for a total of four panels (fig.1).\(^5\) Our need to design the exhibit specifically for this device gave our abstract conceptualization of what its content could be, a definite push toward what it would be. We had planned to illustrate the multi-faceted nature of Gleason’s accomplishments, and it isn’t too surprising that we came up with four central facets to her career, engineering, manufacturing, building, and banking, one for each of the mobile unit’s four discrete panels.

In designing these panels we endeavored to follow three of the best practices in exhibition design: first, that text blocks should be no more than 75 words long; second, that the text should be subordinate to

\(^4\) The unit was produced by Nimlok, a division of Orbus Exhibit & Display Group. We were extremely grateful to Archivist Becky Simmons and Deputy Archivist Jody Sidlauskas for their generosity in letting us use the unit and their assistance in teaching us how to set it up (repeated several times).

\(^5\) The individual panels were 28-7/8 inches, exactly.
the visual elements; and third, that the combination of images and text should convey a lively, appealing, and coherent narrative. We quickly realized that because we were all academics, conveying any concept in 75 words was impossible, so ours came in closer to 150 words. We also decided that Gleason’s banking career was shorter and narratively less interesting than the other aspects of her career, so it became integrated into a summary of her accomplishments on the final iteration of the fourth panel. These four text panels would be unified narratively by the construction of Gleason as both an entrepreneur and an innovator who supported the causes of labor and woman suffrage—qualities that made her relevant and interesting to contemporary RIT students. Altogether, this constituted our “big idea,” the central, unifying concept that animates every exhibition (Klobe 38). Visually, this idea was reinforced by a large horizontal band of images of Gleason’s enterprises that ran across the top of the four panels, and was echoed in a smaller horizontal band at the bottom showing side elevations of the houses she built in East Rochester (fig.2). At the end of July 2015, we learned that an exhibition venue on the RIT campus, the Sunken Gallery in the Wallace Library, would be available to us from November 16 through December 18, 2015, dates that coincided with Gleason’s actual birthday, November 24. We were delighted, then overwhelmed when we realized what this meant. The main exhibition case in the Sunken Gallery measured 252 inches (21 feet) long, 64 inches high, and 14 inches deep. To use this space, we had to completely rethink how we could actualize our “big idea” using original three-dimensional and two-dimensional objects—which we had to first identify, locate, arrange to borrow, transport to campus, and figure out how to display. The case was flanked by 7’ high concrete block walls on both sides, which were ideal for hanging duplicates of the panels planned for the mobile unit; these would now do

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6 Didactic panels at museums appealing to general audiences keep the word count limited; at the Smithsonian Museums, main didactic panels use no more than 75 words, while those at The Strong National Museum of Play are limited to 65 words. Since we were in an academic institution and knew our audience was college educated, we felt we were speaking to our audience.
double duty by serving as the onsite exhibition’s didactic panels. Suddenly we had two different versions of the exhibition to plan, each of differing sizes, layouts, and narrative demands.

The Museum Studies faculty spent the rest of the summer researching Kate Gleason’s life and career, visiting sites associated with her professional life, scouring local collections for objects related to her, and honing our thesis. We hired a communications firm to design an exhibition logotype to brand everything associated with it, to develop a poster, and ultimately to design and fabricate the panels for the mobile unit, which required more professional skills than we had.

Fig.2. The text panels (designed by K2 Communications, Rochester NY).
By the end of September our logotype was completed. It consisted of a medallion featuring a high-contrast image of Kate Gleason against a brick red disk surrounded by a gear that was itself positioned between two more “gear flowers.” The words “Kate Gleason Visionary,” ran below it. This logotype was the basis for the final poster design and appeared on all related print and digital material (fig.3). Around this time, we realized that the number of original three-dimensional objects available for the exhibition had grown well beyond what we had imagined possible: we had identified a silver tea set from Gleason’s home in Septimonts, France, at the RIT Archives Collection, along with a volume of *The History of Woman Suffrage* inscribed to Kate Gleason by Susan B. Anthony; we found bevel gears, a model bevel gear planing machine, and Kate Gleason’s sales book at the Gleason Corporation; we located catalogues for Gleason’s trailer company and for a second tract of concrete houses in the East Rochester Department of Local History; and we had examined period clothing and mannequins at the Rochester Historical Society. In addition, we had identified literally hundreds of original two-dimensional objects related to Gleason’s life and career in the Rochester Public Library Local History and Genealogy Division, and in the Department of Rare Books, Special Collections and Preservation at the University of Rochester.
By early October we had completed drafts of the text for the mobile unit’s panels, had created a rough sketch of our idea for their layout to guide the designers, and had also made sketches of how the objects in the exhibition case could be arranged to facilitate the flow of our narrative. Our intention was to make our point visually, to show Gleason’s multifaceted accomplishments without any explanatory text panels in the case. The large text panels flanking the case, and the exhibition title itself (to be included as a banner within the case), should provide sufficient information for the viewer to understand our “big idea.” Within the case the only text used identified the specific objects being shown and their sources.

We organized the exhibition case into two sections, using three contrasting photographic portraits of Gleason to mark the beginning, the middle, and the end. The photograph at the left showed her in daytime clothing while the one at the right showed her in evening clothing, designating the public Kate Gleason as a working woman, and the private Kate Gleason as an activist for suffrage and reform, as well as a prominent member of Rochester society. The center image, a contemporary newspaper photograph, anchored both personas and drew the visitor into the gallery. Following the schema set by the photographs, the mannequin on the far left wore a daytime outfit that a woman of Gleason’s class would have worn in the first decade of the 20th century, while the evening dress at the far right side was similar to the one in the photograph of Gleason from the late 1910s or early 1920s. On the left hand side, the exhibition included two models of bevel gears, Gleason’s sales book, an income tax form signed by her, a catalogue of gear planers from the Gleason Works and another from the earlier Gleason Tool Company, and a certificate from The National Machine Tool Builders Association awarded in 1910 to Kate Gleason and her father, William Gleason. On the wall behind these objects, further representing her career, were photographs of her with workers from Gleason, a $20 bill she had signed as president of the First National Bank of East Rochester, and a drawing of Concrest, the first housing subdivision she designed in East Rochester. On the right hand side of the case,
illuminating her private life, were a catalogue from Concrest, three volumes of *The History of Woman Suffrage*, with the inscription from Susan B. Anthony visible, the silver tea set, and on the wall were advertisements for her trailer company, a “Votes for Women” pouch she owned, an enlarged photograph of the Susan B. Anthony inscription, and a few photographs of her at her Rochester home, Clones (figs.4, 5).7

Once the exhibition was hung in the Sunken Gallery and had its opening party on November 19, the exhibition team’s attention turned to managing the pop-up exhibitions, which were scheduled immediately before and after the Thanksgiving break. There were four original venues planned: the Kate Gleason College of Engineering (Friday, November 20), the Student Alumni Union (Monday, November 23), the School of Architecture (Monday, November 30), and the Saunders College of Business (Wednesday, December 2). A fifth venue, the Gene Polisseni Center, home of the RIT ice hockey team, became available at the last moment, and the pop-up exhibition was there during games from Friday, November 20, through Saturday, November 21.

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Figure 4 shows the entire Sunken Gallery, including the central case and the two side walls. Shortened versions of the mobile unit’s panels hang on either side of the case. Notice that the dark orange band that appears on the mobile unit in Figure 1 have been eliminated to accommodate the benches affixed to the walls. Figure 5 shows the central case.

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7 Figure 4 shows the entire Sunken Gallery, including the central case and the two side walls. Shortened versions of the mobile unit’s panels hang on either side of the case. Notice that the dark orange band that appears on the mobile unit in Figure 1 have been eliminated to accommodate the benches affixed to the walls. Figure 5 shows the central case.
While our main goal was to present Kate Gleason’s multifaceted accomplishments to our college audience in a way they would find relevant, we also had a secondary goal of engaging a number of them, primarily the Museum Studies majors and those non-majors taking our classes, in direct involvement in the exhibition process itself. Some students were involved through the creation of ancillary exhibition events and objects, while others were involved through physical work on the exhibition and pop-up installations. The design of ancillary projects began in October in Juilee Decker’s Museums & the Digital Age class. Students divided into teams and developed projects, which included a Scavenger Hunt, Pop-Up art, trivia cards, research on Gleason’s home movies, the creation of a 3D-printed concrete bust of Gleason, social media activity, a website, and a digital publication. For the Scavenger Hunt students searched out and identified Kate Gleason-related objects on campus, wrote rhyming riddles as the clues, then disseminated three clues daily for four days on social media.\(^8\)

Another team of students designed stickers using the central element of the exhibition’s logotype, but in four bright, contrasting colors.

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\(^8\) Phillip Fowler, Susana Flores, and Elizabeth Gwilt designed the Scavenger Hunt. A sample clue read: “I hang on the wall here in my green dress, watching students study for System Dynamics tests. What am I?” Answer: “Portrait of Gleason on 2nd floor, Building 09-Gleason, atrium.” A sticker was designed for winners of the Scavenger Hunt.
in homage to Andy Warhol, each representing different pop-up venues (fig.6). Each sticker carried the hashtag #PopInPopUp, which directed students to information about Gleason and the upcoming pop-up. This team designed two additional stickers, one showing Gleason in a hockey helmet for the pop-up at the Gene Polisseni Center (Fig.7, which was the most popular of all), and a special one for the winners of the Scavenger Hunt. Everyone loved the stickers so much that we made posters from each image and widely circulated them.

The trivia cards appeared at each of the pop-up venues and students working the event quizzed people walking by. There was activity on social media, including Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, using the additional hashtags #kg150, #concretekate, and #PopInPopUp.

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9 The Andy Warhol-style stickers were designed by Kenzie Mencer Robbins and Kelli Spampinato.

10 An example from social media: “Did you know that Kate Gleason was the first female bank president in the US without family ties to the institution? Learn more when you stop by the popup exhibit at the Saunders College of Business on Wednesday, December 2 from 11:30-1:30. Treat yourself to cupcakes and stickers as we honor Kate!”

11 Ginny Gross designed the trivia cards. A sample trivia question read: “RIT proudly displays the Kate Gleason bust in what college? A. College of Liberal Arts; B. NTID; C. College of Engineering; D. College of Computing Sciences.”
There was also a website and a digital publication informing people about Gleason and the exhibition. All of the projects continued throughout the duration of the exhibition and all were fully realized by the students.

Several students participated directly in the installation of the exhibition in the Sunken Gallery and several more provided regular assistance for the several pop-up exhibitions. The work involved in the pop-ups exceeded our expectations, as we had to transport the mobile unit to various sites on campus, set it up, hang the

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12 Michaela Chapman, Hailey Cothran, and Kerry Jeyschune created the social media activity.

13 The website content was organized by Dave Maynard and the digital publication was designed by Alissa Roy; Nicole Dombi was designer of both projects. One copy of the digital publication, which described all of the students’ ancillary projects for the exhibition, was printed and remained in the gallery during the month of the exhibition.

14 Another project, film research on Kate Gleason’s home movies (made c. 1928-30), from the collection of the University of South Carolina’s Moving Image Research Collections, was worked on by four students, Heather Clarke, Emily King, Sam Pike, and Carly Washburn. Digitized versions of the films ran on a laptop during the exhibition opening. One student, Daniel Krull, undertook the project of making a 3D printed version of the bronze bust of Gleason created by artist Don Sottile, which wasn’t completed during the run of the exhibition.

15 Gallery assistance came from students Jen Roeszies and Amanda Packard. There was also additional help from library staff, including Becky Simmons, RIT Archivist, and Kari Horowicz, Art & Special Collections Librarian. Assistance with the pop-ups came from Jean Pietrowski, Kerry Jeyschune, Kelli Spampinato, and most regularly of all, from Katy Kusse and Daniel Krull.
text panels, organize the stickers, trivia cards, and cupcakes, then talk about Kate Gleason to everyone who walked by. Since we were working during the last week of November and the first week of December, this meant that everything had to be pulled and carried outside, across campus, in the cold and the wind, and often in several inches of snow (fig. 8). Without a reliable crew of students and faculty, the pop-ups would never have been possible.

Fig. 8. Faculty (Rebecca DeRoo, Michael Brown, and Rebecca Edwards) in the center and students (Daniel Krull and Katy Kusse) on far left and right, transporting the mobile unit to Pop-Up Exhibit #2 in the Student Alumni Union on November 23. (Photo by Tina Olsin Lent).

How successful were we at attaining our goals? The opening reception at the Sunken Gallery was very well attended, and we subsequently invited special visitors to campus for individualized tours of the exhibition. During our many visits to the gallery, we observed people reading the wall panels and being absorbed by the objects in the
case. In some instances we watched students walking by, noticing the mannequins and other objects, and being drawn into the space to see what was there. In other instances, classes visited the gallery with their instructors. Based on our various metrics, we know there were more than 200 unique views of the exhibition website, 80 people attended the exhibition opening, at least 100 students attended with classes, and approximately 600 people viewed the pop-ups. The latter metric is based on the consumption of 50 dozen cupcakes handed out at the events (fig. 9). In sum, by December of 2015 there were at least 1,000 people in the Rochester region who had become a bit more familiar with Kate Gleason and her many and varied accomplishments.

**Fig. 9.** Kate Gleason Birthday cake at the exhibition opening and cupcakes at the pop-ups. (Photos by Tina Olsin Lent).

**REMEMBERING KATE GLEASON: AFTERTHOUGHTS ON CELEBRATING A WOMAN VISIONARY**

Rebecca A. R. Edwards

We sought to introduce our visionary, born in the nineteenth century, to a twenty-first century audience. Though this exhibition originated in a
university campus setting, we kept in mind that our audience extended beyond university students. We knew that we were also introducing Kate Gleason to faculty, administrators, and staff, as well as guests from off-campus. One might imagine, given that her name graces the College of Engineering, that Gleason’s story is as well known as her name on campus, but this is not the case. In some ways, she is reduced merely to a name on a building here. Nor is her story well known in the wider Rochester community. We might have analyzed Gleason’s peripheral place in public memory, especially relative to a comparable local figure like George Eastman, from a critical feminist perspective. Like Gleason, Eastman was a single person, innovator, business leader, and philanthropist. But Gleason was a woman. Devoting herself to a career and not a family, exactly like Eastman, makes her an oddity, while it makes him a bold captain of industry. The exhibition could have explored the role of gender in Gleason’s life and legacy.

We might also have analyzed the role played by class. Her family and personal wealth created opportunities for Gleason to challenge gendered boundaries in ways that were not readily available to working-class women. Indeed, an intersectional exploration of class, gender, and race in Gleason’s story would have allowed us to complicate that story, showing how she both acted within and against these categories.

But, as an exhibition team, we were facing some difficult choices about what we were trying to do and how best to accomplish it. An audience needs to know a story and have a sense of narrative before that story can be communicated. With this exhibit, we had first to do the work of introducing Gleason. We also had to be cognizant of the occasion that we were marking, Gleason’s 150th birthday. We were seeking to celebrate her.

Independently, neither factor dictated that we had to avoid controversy or complexity. Together, however, they suggested that this was an exhibit that called for a nuanced tone. We decided that we wanted to keep the focus on Gleason, on her story, on her achievements. We gambled that the logical next set of questions would arise for viewers organically.
And we were not disappointed. Visitors to the pop-up exhibits did frequently ask us some variation on the question: “I live/work/go to school here. Why haven’t I heard of her before?” And in those conversations we could take the opportunity to provide richer answers. Popping up could be a springboard. Or it could just pop, as people stopped, read a little, looked at images, and moved on without further reflection. As an exhibition team, we had to be satisfied that they had learned a little about the woman who gave the College of Engineering at RIT her name. After 150 years, Kate Gleason deserved that, at least.

Among the multiple interventions that an exhibition about Gleason might have staged, we chose to present her as a potentially empowering antecedent to those reshaping representations of women in technical professions today. At a moment when professionals like Isis Wenger—and students like her on our campus—are contesting women’s exclusion and generating their own representations in the STEM fields, we believed that Kate Gleason’s story could serve as a usable past.

At a moment, too, when men like Musk, Zuckerberg, and Jobs have dominated discussions of how technology and its creators are reshaping the world, we believed that Kate Gleason’s story could amplify in such discussions the visionary role of women. By highlighting Gleason’s innovative contributions to a variety of fields, her linking of business and technology to social needs, and her forward-looking approach to all of these endeavors, we presented to twenty-first century students a figure who was both a twentieth-century businesswoman and a great deal more.

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APPENDIX: REMEMBERING KATE GLEASON: THE EXHIBITION TEXT PANELS

Michael J. Brown, Juilee Decker, Rebecca DeRoo, Rebecca A.R. Edwards, & Tina Olsin Lent

Introduction
Kate Gleason’s name is so familiar to everyone in the RIT community that it can obscure our recognition of her many and varied accomplishments. Born in Rochester on 25 November 1865, she was an entrepreneur and innovator who became internationally recognized for her acumen in business promotion and community development. Her interests were wide-ranging, spanning the fields of engineering, manufacturing, banking, and building. Over the course of her career, she managed multiple businesses and factories, and was instrumental in the planning and construction of several communities, in East Rochester, NY, Beaufort, SC, Sausalito, CA, and Septmonts, France. Her concerns for advancing the rights of women and the well being of workers underlay all of her projects. That her accomplishments exceeded the expectations of women of her day was recognized by Susan B. Anthony, who described Kate Gleason as the ideal businesswoman, of whom she had dreamed for fifty years.

Engineering
Engineering was part of Kate Gleason’s life from the start. She grew up around her father’s machine shop and in 1884 became the first woman to enroll in Cornell University’s Sibley College of Engineering and Mechanic Arts. When called home to help the family business in 1885, she put her engineering knowledge to work, becoming a salesperson for the company’s machine tools and managing its finances. As the American economy slumped in the 1890s, she encouraged the firm to develop its line of gear-cutting machines, which became essential to automobile production. She also set sail to win customers for Gleason products in Europe, and her efforts helped place the business on solid ground. Accounts of how she dazzled machinists with her detailed knowledge of bevel gears won her a sterling reputation and the company
more business. In 1914 Kate Gleason became the first woman elected to the American Society of Mechanical Engineers.

Manufacturing

Building upon 30 years of successful administration and a career as a traveling sales agent for her father’s company, Kate Gleason disengaged from the gear business in 1915. Like the bevel gear itself, she changed direction. Her professional pursuits shifted from machine tooling to trailer manufacturing. Such vehicles were adaptable for work or leisure due to their abilities to transport passengers, livestock, nursery goods, mail, and, of course, the commodity of Rochester’s “other” industry—pianos! The trailer was also a site for enhancement, as well as technical advancement, as evidenced by her design for a “Hi-Speed Trailercar”—a camper that was “a practical and luxurious movable hotel on wheels” offering the comforts of home. By 1921, however, Gleason’s interest in trailers had waned and she sold the Northway Trailercar Company and moved on to other projects. She never stopped thinking of ideas, claiming “the greatest fun I have in life is building-up, trying to create.” The projects she undertook in her middle years bear witness to her continued entrepreneurial spirit: “I have done what I set out to do, and much more” (qtd. in Rochester Public Library, para. 2).

Building

In the 1910s and 1920s, Kate Gleason built a country club and more than one hundred homes in East Rochester. Best known is Concrest, a community comprising more than fifty concrete homes, which she designed to be attractive, efficiently built, and affordable. She was inspired by her travels and created the homes to evoke cottages in European villages; she sited them on pastoral, winding streets, curving around a hill, and adjacent to a park. These 20 ft x 20 ft houses, priced at $4000, provided a path to home ownership for workers, who could pay $40 a month for “a home with a deed, title, porch light, garage, fine view, fireplace, electricity, green grass, French windows....” She used poured concrete to construct the homes as it was fireproof, economical, and durable—she wanted the homes to last one hundred years. In 1921,
Concrest was featured in the trade journal *Concrete* and in 1922, Kate Gleason became the first female member of the American Concrete Institute.

**Accomplishments**

Kate Gleason’s career can be summed up by a list of “firsts” she accomplished. She was the first woman enrolled in Cornell’s engineering program in 1884. She was the first woman who qualified for membership in several professional engineering organizations in 1914, including Verein Deutscher Ingenieure, the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, the Rochester Engineering Society, as well as the American Concrete Institute in 1922. Beyond this, she was the secretary and treasurer of Gleason Works from 1890-1913, while also serving as its chief sales representative. She was also very active in the development of East Rochester, building and managing eight factories, serving as the president of The First National Bank of East Rochester (1918-1920), and overseeing the construction of more than 100 homes. She said that she wanted one thing, “[…]to demonstrate that a business woman can work as well as a man.” Kate Gleason’s accomplishments in Rochester up to 1922, and the work she did elsewhere during the final decade of her life, attest to her success.

**Acknowledgements**

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DISRUPTING THE LEAN: PERFORMING A 2016 DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Nearly 170 years ago, sixty-eight women and thirty-two men signed the 1848 Declaration of Sentiments at the Seneca Falls Convention in affirmation “that all men and women are created equal.” Reflecting on women’s gender equality advances, we revisit the words of the Declaration of Sentiments as a reminder of where women’s fight for rights in the United States coalesced. On the 150th anniversary of its signing, Hillary Rodham Clinton perceptively cautioned, “if all we do is honor the past, then we will miss the central point of the Declaration of Sentiments, which was, above all, a document about the future” (211). Heeding that future, women have earned many freedoms called for in the Declaration, but we are still fighting against an array of lingering and new questions. Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s 1848 words, “few can nerve themselves to meet the storm,” hold contemporary importance in marshaling forward today’s struggle for gender parity (“In Defense of Women’s Rights” 27). Stanton’s legacy and that of the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention remind us that a few powerful voices can shake foundations. Inspired by the spirit of disruption, this article narrates the making of a “2016 Declaration of Sentiments,” invented in a roundtable, “Disrupting the Lean: Performing a 2016 Declaration of Sentiments,” at the fifth Biennial Seneca Falls Dialogues (SFD).
As a map for the essay, we open with a brief theoretical overview on literature that informs student-authored manifestos written in feminist theory or senior seminar courses at The College at Brockport. The manifesto assignment asks students to select a contemporary issue that they find interesting and/or disconcerting, and in a concise position paper, expose and analyze it using a feminist frame of reference. Informed by the schools of feminist thought summarized below, these writings probe cross-cutting questions of labor and gender equity in education, reproduction, breast-feeding, identities, politics, and global feminisms. Each manifesto closes with strategic questions that authors posed in our SFD session to elicit dialogue among roundtable participants. The questions hone in on gender and labor as inspired by the “Lean Out: Gender, Economics, and Enterprise” conference theme. Using these manifesto readings and guiding questions, we engaged SFD audience members in a poetic word-making exercise, which we compiled into a “2016 Declaration of Sentiments,” collaboratively authored and recited by our roundtable participants. We conclude the essay with this 2016 Declaration. The original 1848 Declaration follows in an appendix. Looking back but thinking forward, we give you our words and our voice as we seek to bring activism and agency back to Seneca Falls.

**Our Voices: From Theory to Praxis**

At the time of the 1848 Convention, much of society viewed women as emotional beings with little rational capacity. The gender separation of public as a male domain and private as a female domain further confined women to spheres of domesticity. In the eighteenth century, numerous social theorists defended this separation. For example, Jean Jacques Rousseau maintained that man’s most natural form resides in nature where power and competition define relations. As Susan Okin notes, Rousseau conceptualized women’s natural form as subordinate to man, serving his desires, and fulfilling her reproductive function through childbirth (106-139). In his book, *Emile: or, On Education* (1762), Rousseau argued that “the development of rationality [was] the most important educational goal for boys, but not for girls” (Qtd in Tong 14).
British philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft was an avid critic of Rousseau’s work and countered much of what he wrote in *Emile* in her 1792 *Vindications of the Rights of Women*. She asserted, “To render women truly useful members of society...they should be led...to acquire a rational affection for the country, founded on knowledge” (292). Wollstonecraft argued that the only means to reconcile women’s inequality and supposed lack of rationality was to grant them access to the same educational rights that society offered to men.

Liberal feminism was, in essence, born as a response to women’s lack of civic entitlements. This liberal feminist rubric, a reform-based approach to equality measured against standards of man, both informed and served as a driving force behind the 1848 *Declaration of Sentiments*. As the nineteenth century unfolded, liberal feminist thought expanded to include calls for equal liberty. Akin to Wollstonecraft, philosophers John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill did not regard women as intellectually deficient; rather, they argued that women had been denied certain rights and opportunities that would allow them to demonstrate their rational capacity. In line with liberal reform as wed to public policy, Mill and Taylor focused on structures of marriage, family, divorce, and property to assert that “society must provide women with the same political rights and economic opportunities” as it did men (Qtd in Tong 16). Along with other feminists of the time, both Mill and Taylor championed women’s suffrage as necessary for combatting oppression. Since the penning of the 1848 *Declaration*, liberal feminism has evolved into multiple branches of thought and action, each informed by unique bodies of theoretical knowledge. As an example, Melissa Brown’s “The Myth of Purity” problematizes abstinence-only sex education and questions the impact of liberal feminist thinking on sex education in the United States.

In contrast to liberal feminism’s reform-based approach to equality, radical feminism seeks to disrupt patriarchal dominance and establish new parameters for achieving gender parity. Radical thinkers consider sexism the most widely practiced form of oppression in society. Framed as the “sex wars,” radical thinkers theorized opposing ways of reading bodies. For example, Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, viewing the body as a site of oppression, argued against sexual harassment and
prostitution, while Kate Millett and Gayle Rubin, viewing the body as a site of liberation, argued for fluidity in gender and sexual expression. In line with radical thinkers, the authors of “Body Autonomy” and “Free the Nipple,” Brook Ophardt and Maggie Rosen, respectively, consider how the female body is politicized, sexualized, and exploited for economic gain.

Building on the concept of gender fluidity, postmodern feminists assert that there isn’t any one way to be a feminist but rather multiple and plural ways to realize and express feminist ideals. Judith Butler, a prominent postmodern and queer thinker, theorizes gender and sex as social constructs, and related, gender performativity as a series of repetitive masculine and feminine acts that society expects in binary male and female behaviors (31-34). Leveraging Butler’s thinking, queer theorists, such as J. Jack Halberstam, propose disrupting binary perceptions and structures that perpetuate gender rigidity (xi-xv). Increasingly, queer and postmodern feminist thought inform lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersex, and transgender knowledge. “Female Masculinities,” by Brooke Love, and “GaGa Politics,” by Tambria Schroeder, challenge readers to queer their notions of labor and politics and recognize the limitations of binary thinking.

Unquestionably, we can attribute many of the rights that we appreciate today to the strong foundation that liberal feminism provided through voices raised at the Seneca Falls Convention and into the early twentieth century. Alternatively, western liberal feminism’s largely white, privileged lens has reproduced many racist, classist, and heteronormative practices that oppress, as opposed to liberate, the already marginal. It has, at times, banished lesbian, transgender, and women of color from key feminist undertakings. Countering these exclusions, Black feminist thought considers ways that race, sex, gender, and class, as social categories of identity, comprise multiple and overlapping sites of oppression. Kimberlé Crenshaw theorizes this phenomenon as “intersectionality” (1241-1299). Patricia Hill Collins’ *Matrix of Domination* examines intersectionality and analyzes ways that societal configurations in education, politics, and law systematically reproduce structures of inequality rooted in identity (273-290). bell hooks expands the concept of multiple intersecting oppressions by arguing for feminist
ways of knowing that are accessible to wide ranges of identities across
geographies of person and place (1-17). Audre Lorde helps us see ways that
white dominance silences and erases many Black women’s voices in a
movement that ironically reached for female equality (110-113). Similarly,
Angela Davis, a tireless advocate for gender and racial parity, theorizes on
private and public spheres of Black female labor and reproduction (442-
457). In opposition to Betty Freidan’s, *The Feminine Mystique*, which
characterized 1960s white suburban women as unfulfilled housewives,
many Black women longed for the privilege to work inside their own homes
rather than as domestic laborers for white families. Ida B. Wells Barnett,
Mary Church Terrell, and Fannie Barrier Williams are just a few of many
salient Black female champions who we know too little about because their
contributions in the late 1800s to early 1900s have been obscured by white
female dominance. Closely related, transnational and postcolonial
feminisms consider the issues of oppressed women around the world as a
consequence of Western colonization. Chandra Mohanty, one of many
important thinkers within this space, has helped reframe feminist
knowledge to include the varied, rich contributions of women across the
globe. In “Global Feminism,” Audrey Lai confronts the limitations and
exclusionary nature of Western feminisms.

Over time, the subjugation of alternative voices has led many
individuals to disengage from feminism and the feminist label. However,
the intent of feminist theory and praxis evolves in meaning and saliency
as it acknowledges its critiques and progresses in its purpose. We
recognize the voids that must be addressed as we try to reconcile growing
tensions around social and gender inequalities. Today, younger activists
tend to be drawn to feminist thinking that is more radical, inclusive, and
intersectional, and to a movement that seeks to revolutionize rather than
reform.

Since the turn of the century, Cobble et al note, “the most defining
feature of this generation of feminists is its inability to be defined” (185).
Women are using their lived experiences to understand and address
different forms of oppression. Some say this approach has weakened the
feminist movement while others argue that this situated-knowing
viewpoint is precisely what makes the current generation so strong.
Despite diversity in voice, Cobble et al affirm that the one unifying element for feminists today is a desire to finish the unfinished work of the women’s movement (171). We often use language and imagery to do this work, to express women’s unique experiences and build upon the momentum of our predecessors. This was true in 1848 and it remains true today.

“The Myth of Purity” by Melissa Brown

The Purity Myth (2009), by Jessica Valenti, inspired me to speak on how purity is taught as a form of sex education in parts of the United States, even though it is a mythical, outdated concept. During my high school health class in 2011, I was introduced to the “tape-trick.” The nurse handed out pieces of tape and asked us to stick them on our hands. Then she told us to rip the tape off and look at the sticky part of the tape that had touched our skin. As we examined the tape, the nurse instructed us to compare ourselves to the tape. She said that if we didn’t want to be dirty like used tape, we should save ourselves for marriage and our future husbands, which also presumed that we were all heterosexual. The nurse told us to look at the leftover skin and dirt that was stuck on that tape and said that the same thing would happen to us with our sexual partners—that with each successive partner, we became like the piece of tape that would never bond to us the way that it had the first time. In short, she informed us that if we had sex before marriage, we would be like used-up tape. Dirty. Unwanted.

Many are shocked by this educational approach, but the fact is that many schools teach flawed thinking about sex. I was given an abstinence-only education and scared into not having sex before marriage. Instructors compared me to objects rather than someone who, if given a proper education, could think and make smart sexual decisions. Each year, my coach gave the female student athletes a document to sign. We had to commit to not do drugs, drink, or have sex. As if this kind of disciplining wasn’t intrusive enough, it made me feel like I was always being watched.

Abstinence-only sex education denies reality. Educating youth about sex and the options they have for birth control is crucial. Schools need to teach consent and the differences between consensual sex, sexual
assault, and rape. Using liberal feminist thinking, I ask, should all schools be required to teach comprehensive sex education, and have progressions in liberal feminist thought reshaped what we know and teach about sex education in schools?

“Body Autonomy” by Brooke Ophardt

When we examine different representations of work, the commodification of reproduction is often overlooked. Since before the Civil War, personal gain in America has exploited women’s ability to reproduce. This was done most explicitly with slave women. Angela Davis, theorizing race, class, and intersectionality, reminds us of women who were forced to bear as many children as possible so their masters could have more slaves to use or sell at their disposal (452-458). Davis also looks at reproductive commodification through emerging technologies, like surrogacy, and considers how it will continue to divide women (452). She states, “the availability of the technology further mythologizes motherhood as the true vocation of women. In fact, the new reproductive medicine sends out a message to those who are capable of receiving it: motherhood lies just beyond the next technology” (Davis 455). It’s important to note the last sentence of this quote: “to those who are capable of receiving it.” Like Davis, Rickie Solinger, reproduction historian and author of Reproductive Politics: What Everyone Needs to Know, is quick to remind us that not every woman can access reproductive technology (106-111). The cost of new technologies adds additional layers of capitalist opportunities to exploit at the expense of women’s bodies.

Surrogacy is presented as employment for many impoverished women in the world. In Our Bodies, Whose Property, Anne Phillips discusses this labor, writing about the class divisions between women who participate in surrogacy as labor providers and women who employ surrogates as service consumers. In the United States, we see these classist divides emerge between women who can access reproductive technology and healthcare and women who cannot. When we consider reproduction as a form of work, we see the removal of women’s bodily autonomy and rights over the product being created: the fetus. With today’s political climate, the possibility of women’s rights being eroded in
favor of the commodification of reproduction is more profound than ever. We must be mindful of the effects such a decision could have on society. Using radical and Marxist feminist thinking, I ask, who benefits economically when women's bodies are stripped of their autonomy during pregnancy? Outside of reproduction, how else does women's bodily autonomy get manipulated for economic purposes?

“Free the Nipple” by Maggie Rosen

Male, female, and intersex bodies are created from the same cells. Everyone begins with the same anatomy in utero. After time, and depending on chromosomes, the body changes. However, due to our shared origins, and for unknown evolutionary reasons, male bodies have nipples. These nipples serve a different function than most female nipples, which have the biological purpose of giving sustenance to babies and young children. Unlike male nipples, the exposure of female/women’s nipples is heavily regulated in the U.S. One of the most prominent reasons for this is the privileging of the male gaze, which ties into male consumption, rape culture, and the traditional placement of women in private and men in public spheres. Liberal feminists fought for women to be able to exist in traditionally male spaces and have the same liberties that, for years, men have taken for granted. While liberal thinking undoubtedly helped women, it also let women down by trapping them in male dominated spaces without any wiggle room. Radical feminists have a different way of thinking. They do not want permission to do everything men can do. Liberal feminists work within heteronormative patriarchal systems; radical feminists work to tear those systems down and create a new society designed to include women from the onset. Radical feminists argue that, in order to normalize breastfeeding and female nipple exposure, we must first tear down the heteropatriarchal structure that has over-sexualized and capitalized off of female bodies. Using liberal and radical thought as frames of reference, I ask, how does the labor market politicize nipples? And why does breastfeeding, as a form of labor, pull women out of public labor?

“Female Masculinities” by Brooke Love
As lesbian communities and identities developed from the early twentieth century, feminist scholars have increasingly examined the formation and understanding of butch identity. The butch ability to queer gender—to acquire, embody, and utilize masculinity as a means through which to understand and express themselves as people as well as homosexual—has fueled decades of discussion on what it means to be masculine, feminine, man, woman, heterosexual, or homosexual. It is at these intersections that we can begin to understand a butch identity, considering not only her identity as a woman, but her construction through masculinity and her visible identity as a lesbian. There are still feminists today who disparage butch identity as a means by which some lesbian women attempt to participate in patriarchy as the patriarch rather than the oppressed. These accusations make butch-identified women appear like the enemy, favoring femme lesbians as real women while displaying contempt for masculine lesbians who, supposedly, appropriate masculinity in search of privilege. The inherent flaw in this argument, however, is the assumption that all masculinities are identical, that masculinity performed by a lesbian woman is a simple replica of masculinity performed by heterosexual men. There are also a number of flaws in the understanding of butch women as oppressor rather than oppressed.

My experience with masculinity and lesbian identities has led me to see that masculinity is more appropriately understood as the plural – masculinities – which can be experienced differently by different people and different bodies. The notion that all masculinities play the same role in gender relations and are granted access to the same privilege is presumptuous and, ultimately, incorrect. Rather than considering masculinity as a characteristic of people with male anatomy, masculinity and femininity alike should be reconfigured more appropriately to encompass their flexibility and permeability. Butch lesbian masculinity, specifically, should be reimagined so it is not seen as an appropriation of the male identity, but as the means through which masculine lesbians produce their visibility, gender identity, and sexuality. Using a queer theory lens, I ask, how do lesbians experience labor differently? How does female masculinity impact a woman's experience in the labor force, and do
onlookers interpret work done by butch women differently than work done by femme women?

“GaGa Politics” by Tambria Schroeder

Did you know that, because women have the ability to bear children, we lack capacity to think rationally and are too heavily influenced by emotions? Did you know that, because of this ability, we are only fit to exist in the private sphere as mothers? Did you know that we have temporary “periods of inactivity during pregnancy,” and consequently, should grant “sole authority to men” (Okin 146)? According to ancient political philosophers like Aristotle and Rousseau, these are indisputable facts about women’s nature. We could choose to simply ignore these archaic conclusions and move on with our lives, but that would be naïve. Despite critiques that dispute such teachings, we cannot deny the repercussions they have had over time. Political theories that base exclusion and unequal treatment of women in the public sphere on her supposed functionality are widespread and have permeated into how society envisions the proper role of women and their rights. Liberal feminists disagreed with these repressive views and catalyzed the reformation of woman’s role in the public sphere. They helped open education and the sociopolitical sphere to women. Beyond the right to vote, though, we begin to lose touch with how liberal feminism facilitated women’s political liberation. For example, in patriarchal American politics, women’s biological function of bearing children is still being used to exploit women and deny them access to rights and certain leadership roles. Regardless of ways American politics continue to restrict and exclude women, we have never been better placed to start a revolution unlike any we’ve seen before. It’s time to push back at oppressive forces and to challenge socially constructed gender norms. Using queer theory and keeping in mind that we had a female candidate for president, I ask, how have we succeeded in disrupting the lean and challenging gender norms in American politics? How are we failing?

“Global Feminism” by Audrey Lai

THE SENECA FALLS DIALOGUES JOURNAL, V2, FALL 2017 34
The following is transcribed from a manifesto in video format as linked here (https://goo.gl/mLyDTr) and screened at our SFD roundtable. The lyrics of “Who I Am,” by Ruby Ibarra, plays in the background of the video to enhance its manifesto message.

Western feminism overshadows Asian feminism. We read stories. We watch TV and movies. We go to school. How many Western actors, writers, and scholars can you name? How many Asian actors, writers, and scholars can you name? Typically, we watch, read, and learn many things from the Western perspective. This includes feminist theory and this is done on a global scale. Chandra Mohanty, a transnational theorist, argues that the colonizing history of the West created a singular concept of feminist liberation and empowerment. Non-Western women are referred to as “third world women.” These women are often defined and portrayed as poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, and victimized prisoners. The construction of women as third world women can be used to create the contrasting imagery of the liberated Western feminist woman taking on the role of savior. Do these “third world women” actually need a savior? If Western feminisms were not so pervasive, perhaps people wouldn’t default to thinking that women in the developing world need a savior. Brave women from different countries must be given the space to share their own struggles with gender-based violence and how they overcame it in order to change how the world perceives them as South Asian women. I am a bi-racial woman who struggles with a feminist identity. I continue to examine the way feminism incessantly leaves Asian women in the margins. Leveraging global and Black feminist thinking, I ask, what are the problems with only understanding feminism through a Western lens, and, similarly, what problems aren’t presented through this lens?

**Cinquains: Word-making as an Act of Resistance**

Following these manifesto readings, we invited session participants to engage with one another in a word-making exercise designed to create short manifestos that identify issues of labor across geographies of person and place that could be married into a larger, collective declaration. As a prompt for the exercise, we organized roundtable participants into pairs
or small groups of three-five people. Drawing from the questions posed after each manifesto reading, we asked groups to organize their thoughts into cinquains, a poetic form consisting of five lines, in which each line follows a specific pattern in syllables or parts of speech. The cinquain, as a contemporary poetic device, is attributed to poet Adelaide Crapsey,¹ who was raised in Rochester NY only a few short steps away from Susan B. Anthony’s home and the 1848 Convention in Seneca Falls. Crapsey’s origins, both to geography and the cinquain form, hold symbolic ground to the power of place that is upstate NY and the fight for women’s rights. The cinquain patterns that we employed in our roundtable used word groupings or parts of speech and were structured to rest on a closing statement extracted from of the 1848 Declaration of Sentiments, which we use as a textual bridge from one cinquain to the next. The two Cinquain patterns that we suggested to our participants follow:

Pattern One
Line One:   One Word
Line Two:   Two words
Line Three: Three Words
Line Four:  Four Words
Line Five:  One Word

Pattern Two
Line One:   A noun as subject
Line Two:   Two adjectives describing subject
Line Three: Three “ing” words related to subject
Line Four:  Phrase describing feelings about subject
Line Five:  Single word synonym for the noun in line one

Choosing one of these two patterns, groups composed cinquains that considered their experiences with and/or reactions to circumstances of sex education, motherhood, gender identity, bodies and reproduction, political solidarity, and/or tensions between East and West relations as topics

¹ For additional information on Adelaide Crapsey, see University of Rochester Library Bulletin: Adelaide Crapsey, "An Unconscious Imagist" at
http://rbSCP.lib.rochester.edu/4039
couched in feminist theory prompted in our manifesto readings. The dialogue roundtable closed with a recitation of cinquains, performed and recorded by session participants.

Orchestrated into a “2016 Declaration of Sentiments,” this collective enactment of poetic manifestos translates into ways imagery and word-making can serve as acts of resistance to dominant “lean-in” ideologies that reproduce gender inequality practices. We leverage the phrase “lean in” from the SFD conference theme and in critique of Sheryl Sandberg’s lean in business model for gender equality, which asks women to negotiate boardroom and bedroom with men as means to get ahead. As critics argue, Sandberg’s Lean In overlooks the many systematic barriers that prevent women’s career advancement. Echoing many liberal-minded feminists before her, Sandberg’s gender equality lens privileges middle to upper class couples as opposed to queer or single mothers going it alone. Despite women entering the workforce en-masse, societal expectations still demand that women shoulder the lion’s share of domestic responsibilities while navigating a tensioned duality of home and work. We resist this do-less-but-negotiate-more pitch for feminist agency, which is deployed in a heteropatriarchal context. Moreover, we write in opposition to liberal feminist paradigms that merely redistribute the patriarchal pie as means for gender parity. In words and lines, from gender fluidity to liberated nipples to GaGa politics, we seek formation of an entirely new pie that might not be a pie at all.

Our “2016 Declaration,” in its parts and the composite of voices as a whole, inspires dialogue on ways to lean out of Sandberg’s market platform for gender equality. In our “2016 Declaration,” words act to disrupt comfort while tone acts to invigorate unrest. Indeed, if the 1848 Declaration functioned to unsettle, and if it is, as Clinton (1998) asserted, a document about the future, our “2016 Declaration” makes clear that the

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More recently, Sandberg critiques her own Lean In argument: http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2016/05/sheryl-sandberg-admits-its-hard-for-a-single-mom-to-lean-in
struggle for women’s rights lives on, and that diversity in person, place, and experience across this struggle resonates in its message. Elizabeth Cady Stanton said of women’s movements, “we are sowing winter wheat, which the coming spring will see sprout and which others hands than ours will reap (“Elizabeth Cady Stanton as Revealed” 302), conveying a sense of how changing seasons renew opportunities for response. The history of women’s movements illustrates “centuries-old patterns of call and response.” The original 1848 Declaration of Sentiments closes our piece, a reminder of the words that brought us to meet in Seneca Falls then, now, and, as inspired by our “2016 Disrupting the Lean,” for years to follow.

“2016 Declaration of Sentiments”

“Down with the D”
Disruption
Dismantle Norms
Destroy the Patriarchy
Damn your oppressive views
Declare.
We hold these truths to be self-evident;3

“Flipping the Script”
Masculinity
Butch, femme
Different people multiple meanings
Femininity
He has endeavored, in every way that he could, to destroy her confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life;4

“Humanity at work”
Equality

3 Authored by Melissa Brown, Audrey Lai, Brooke Love, Brooke Ophardt, Maggie Rosen, Tambria Schroeder
4 Authored by Veronica Price, Susan Iverson
Fair, humane
Representing, evolving, being
We, as one, deserve justice, for all
Unity
Such has been the sufferance of the women under this government,
and such is now the necessity which constrains them to demand
the equal station to which they are entitled;\textsuperscript{5}

“Agitate, Educate, Organize”
Exploitation
Beaten, Over-Worked
Stealing, Organizing, Fighting
Global solidarity or global devastation
Parasite
He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she
earns;\textsuperscript{6}

“In Praise of Titties” or “Let My Nipples Go”
Breast
Western Breast
Bra-Caged Udders
Uttering to be Free
Open
He has taken from her all right to property;\textsuperscript{7}

“Us”
What
Does it
Mean to say
Western women are saviors
How?

\textsuperscript{5} Authored by Fanny
\textsuperscript{6} Authored by Ritchie
\textsuperscript{7} Authored by Rachel Campbell, Sidnee McDonald, Mona Polacca, Elizabeth Ursic
We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights;⁸

“From Russia with Love”
West
Eastern, Western.
Opening, Accepting, Interacting
East-West, Home is Best
Tolerance
That all men and women were created equal.⁹

⁸ Authored by Brittany Sheldon, Marilyn Tedeschi
⁹ Authored by Svetlana, Tanya, Elena, Sasha visiting from Veliky Novgorod Russia
APPENDIX

DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS (1848)

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one portion of the family of man to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied, but one to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel them to such a course.

We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they were accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their duty to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of the women under this government, and such is now the necessity which constrains them to demand the equal station to which they are entitled.

The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct
object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to elective franchise.

He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice.

He has withhold from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded me both natives and foreigners.

Having deprived her of this first right of a citizen, the elective franchise, thereby leaving her without representation in the halls of legislation, he has oppressed her on all sides.

He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.

He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns.

He has made her, morally, an irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes with impunity, provided they be done in the presence of her husband. In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master - the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement.

He has so framed the laws of divorce, as to what shall be the proper causes, and in case of separation, to whom the guardianship of the children shall be given, as to be wholly regardless of the happiness of women - the law, in all cases, going upon a false supposition of the supremacy of man, and giving all power into his hands.

After depriving her of all rights as a married woman, if single, and the owner of property, he has taxed her to support a government which recognizes her only when her property can be made profitable to it.

He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration. He closes against her all the avenues to wealth and
distinction which he considers most honorable to himself. As a
teacher of theology, medicine, or law, she is not known.
He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education,
all colleges being closed against her.

He allows her in Church, as well as State, but a subordinate
position, claiming Apostolic authority for her exclusion from the
ministry, and, with some exceptions, from any public participation
in the affairs of the Church.

He has created a false public sentiment by giving to the
world a different code of morals for men and women, by which
moral delinquencies, which exclude women from society, are not
only tolerated, but deemed of little account in man.

He has usurped the prerogative of Jehovah himself,
claiming it as his right to assign for her a sphere of action, when
that belongs to her conscience and to her God.

He has endeavored, in every way that he could, to destroy
her confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect, and to
make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life.
Now, in view of this entire disenfranchisement of one-half the
people of this country, their social and religious degradation, - in
view of the unjust laws above mentioned, and because women do
feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of
their most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate
admission to all rights and privileges which belong to them as
citizens of the United States.

In entering upon the great work before us, we anticipate no
small amount of misconception, misrepresentation, and ridicule;
but we shall use every instrumentality within our power to effect
our object. We shall employ agents, circulate tracts, petition the
State and National legislatures, and endeavor to enlist the pulpit
and the press in our behalf. We hope this Convention will be
followed by a series of Conventions embracing every part of the
country.
Firmly relying upon the final triumph of the Right and the True, we do this day affix our signatures to this declaration.\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{Works Cited}


\textsuperscript{10} See Elizabeth Cady Stanton, \textit{A History of Woman Suffrage}, vol. 1 (Rochester, N.Y.: Fowler and Wells, 1889), pp 70-71.


In 1964, the film *Kisses for My President* played for laughs the idea of a female president. Leslie McCloud, portrayed by Polly Bergen, is elected president when all the women of America support her based solely on her gender. The real star of the film is Leslie’s husband, Thad, played by Fred MacMurray, who is thrust into the role of “First Lady.” The film focuses on the havoc wreaked in both domestic and public realms by this breakdown in the “natural” gender order, implying that McCloud’s election represents Thad’s failure to properly contain her, as well as American men’s failure to contain American women as a whole. Order is only restored when Thad manages to impregnate Leslie; pregnancy renders Leslie unable to perform her presidential duties, and she concedes that for the “benefit” of her unborn child she must resign. Thad jokes to Leslie in the final scene: “Do you realize it took 40 million women to get you into the White House...,” with Leslie finishing “...and just one man to get me out.”

In retrospect, this film clearly expresses deep-seated anxieties about shifting gender norms and marital relationships during the sexual revolution. But it also reveals angst over a question that has haunted American society from the time of the suffrage movement: what would happen if American women used their franchise to vote as a bloc? Ever since Victoria Woodhull’s historic 1870 run, Americans have speculated—with a mixture of hopefulness and anxiety—that women would vote as a bloc to elect the first female president. And the dream
persisted, even after a sex scandal lost Woodhull the support of suffragists. Yet, as Arica Coleman has discussed, the threat of the “women’s vote” is a myth—it did not materialize for the first female Congresswoman, Jeannette Rankin, in 1916; not for Vice Presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro, in 1984; and not for Hillary Clinton’s primary or Presidential campaigns, in 2008 and 2016 (Coleman). Indeed, the 2016 election showed that women neither voted as a bloc for a female candidate nor against an expressed misogynist. More that 50 percent of white women voters cast votes for Donald Trump, and the myth of the “women’s vote” explains why this oft-cited statistic is particularly disappointing for those on the left.

The undeniable fact that American women have not voted—and, from all appearances, will not vote—as a bloc to elect a woman to the highest office is an opening for feminist inquiry. This fact suggests that American women do not believe that a female president would necessarily improve their lives or speak to their priorities. On the one hand, this may indicate social progress, an awareness on the part of voters that one woman does not speak for all women, that “woman” is not a monolith.¹ On the other hand, women’s voting patterns may also illuminate the failure of feminism to unite women across race, class, and ideology.²

Still, despite the elusive promise of the “women’s vote,” Hillary Clinton’s 2008 and 2016 campaigns demonstrated that American women are closer to the U.S. presidency than ever before. A 2014 Pew Research Center survey found that the majority of Americans believe women are as capable of political leadership as men and find women indistinguishable from men on key leadership traits such as intelligence.

¹ Naomi Klein expressed this argument following the 2016 election in her New York Times editorial “Trump Defeated Clinton, Not Women.”
² See, for example, LeRhonda Manigault-Bryant’s “Open Letter to White Liberal Feminists” in which she suggests that “white liberal feminists” have failed to “interrogate racism, imperialism, capitalism, and sexism because they benefit from it and are too busy being protected by it” and expresses her “delight” that following Trump’s election “you have received the potential awakening of a lifetime.”
and capacity for innovation, with many viewing women leaders as more compassionate and organized (“Women and Leadership”). Of course, the best indication that public attitudes toward a female president have warmed is Hillary Clinton’s significant victory in the popular vote in the 2016 election, which she won by 2.8 million votes despite an Electoral College loss. In this climate, rhetoric of gender neutrality has become commonplace, as illustrated in the oft-heard maxim: “Voters shouldn’t consider a candidate’s gender.” This rhetoric suggests that gender equality has been achieved, implying that sexism and misogyny are irrelevant to the fact that America has yet to elect a female president.

As real women engage in the close-but-not-quite struggle for the presidency, popular culture representations of female presidents have proliferated. Since 2000, 18 female presidents have appeared in films and television shows (see Table 1). Popular culture provides visualizations of a female presidency in a country that has yet to elect a female president, suggesting a complex interplay between representations and reality. In this article, we articulate a representational shift following Clinton’s 2008 primary run, from earlier representations substantially preoccupied with gender to more recent depictions attempting to set aside “the gender question.” By presenting a woman’s gender as essentially irrelevant to her political leadership, these depictions correlate with what Lauren Berlant has termed America’s “intimate public sphere.” In this conceptual space, what cannot be realized in everyday life is seen as possible, viable, and normalized through popular culture representations. As Berlant succinctly states, “to be American, in this view, is to inhabit a secure space liberated from identities and structures that seem to constrain what a person can do in history” (4).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Actress</th>
<th>President</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Yeardley Smith</td>
<td>President Lisa Simpson</td>
<td>The Simpsons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Sally Champlain</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Perfect Lover</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>Cherry Jones</td>
<td>President Allison Taylor</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Mary McDonnell</td>
<td>President Laura Roslin</td>
<td>Battlestar Gallactica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Geena Davis</td>
<td>President Mackenzie Allen</td>
<td>Commander-in-Chief</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>Patricia Wettig</td>
<td>President Caroline Reynolds</td>
<td>Prison Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Mimi Kuzyk</td>
<td>President Sally Sheridan</td>
<td>XIII: The Conspiracy</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>Stephanie Paul</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Iron Sky</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>Kate Burton</td>
<td>Acting President Sally Langston</td>
<td>Scandal</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Tea Leoni</td>
<td>Acting President Elizabeth McCord</td>
<td>Madam Secretary</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>Alfre Woodard</td>
<td>President Constance Payton</td>
<td>State of Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Penny Johnson Jerald</td>
<td>President Amanda Waller</td>
<td>Justice League: Gods and Monsters</td>
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<td>2015</td>
<td>Lynda Carter</td>
<td>President Olivia Marsdin</td>
<td>Supergirl</td>
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<td>2015</td>
<td>Sharon Stone</td>
<td>Acting President Natalie Maccabee</td>
<td>Agent X</td>
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<td>2016</td>
<td>Sela Ward</td>
<td>President Elizabeth Lanford</td>
<td>Independence Day: Resurgence</td>
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<td>2016</td>
<td>Julia Louise-Dreyfus</td>
<td>Acting President Selina Meyer</td>
<td>Veep</td>
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<td>2016</td>
<td>Andrea Savage</td>
<td>Acting President Laura Montez</td>
<td>Veep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Bellamy Young</td>
<td>President Mellie Grant</td>
<td>Scandal</td>
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This article explores three cultural representations of female presidents produced since 2012 that can illuminate popular understandings of gender and the presidency between the 2008 and 2016 elections: Veep, State of Affairs, and Scandal. We examine how these shows attempt to normalize the notion of a female president and create a more diverse image of American politics. But we also explore each text for how it explains the anomaly of a woman in such a high office. In other words, do the texts genuinely address the changes required to make a successful female presidency possible, or do they simply insert women into the presidency without acknowledging the gendered construction of the office? Do these representations embrace a gender neutrality that, rather than forwarding feminist goals, instead functions, in Berlant’s words, “as a distraction from the discussion of citizenship’s material contexts” (263, note 14)? Ignoring or denying the continuity of gendered politics contributes to the “add women and stir” representational phenomenon, in which representations of women in roles historically gendered masculine serve to distract from the relative stability in how those roles are defined and understood. As Susan Douglas cautions, feminists must be wary of popular culture representations that “overstate women’s gains and accomplishments” and thus, ironically, “render feminism obsolete” (15).

In the wake of the 2016 election, which saw, in Mary Hunt’s words, “a woman candidate [lose] to someone who is manifestly not as able and who has treated women badly” (qtd. in Salgado), Barbara Kingsolver asks that we consider “why so many people just couldn’t see a 69-year-old woman in our nation’s leading role, and why they might choose instead a hero who dispatches opponents with glib cruelty.” Popular culture has allowed us to see women in a leading political role. Thus, our analysis suggests that simply depicting a female president is not enough. Indeed, most of these depictions do not acknowledge the social changes needed to create the conditions that would clear a path to the American presidency, which remains, in Clinton’s words, “that highest, hardest glass ceiling.”
Women have long aspired to the presidency and recognized it as an important symbolic achievement. For example, a 1920 suffrage cartoon depicts the office as the final rung on a ladder depicting women's progress from "Slavery," "House Drudgery," and "Shop Work" to "Equal Suffrage," "Wage Equity," and "Presidency" (see Fig. 1). Since Woodhull's 1872 campaign, fourteen women have run for president: three garnered support at a major party national convention, five were nominated as third-party candidates, and two were eventually chosen as major-party candidates for vice president. 2016 marked the first nomination of a woman for president by a major party.

The political climate of the United States has never been welcoming to women, and this remains true today. In the 115th Congress, there are 21 women in the Senate and 83 women in the House, 38 of whom are women of color (Cohn). Thus, women comprise about 19 percent of Congress overall, about double the share from 20 years ago. In December 2016, the Inter-Parliamentary Union compiled figures that ranked the U.S. 101st out of 193 countries in terms of women's representation, far behind Rwanda, Bolivia, and Cuba, which rank first, second, and third, respectively, and which use gender quotas to ensure a gender balance (“Women in National Parliaments”). Moreover, in the last half-century, 59 countries have had female heads of state, the majority of which were elected during the past 20 years, while the purportedly progressive United States remains a glaring exception (Abrams and Tweeten).

The barriers to female participation in politics are well understood, and countries that have taken steps to ensure equal participation demonstrate strategies to overcome these barriers. Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox list the most significant factors in the persistent “gender gap” in U.S. politics in “Why Are Women Still Not Running for Public Office?”:

Women are less likely than men to be willing to endure the rigors of a political campaign. They are less likely than men
to have the freedom to reconcile work and family obligations with a political career. They are less likely than men to think they are “qualified” to run for office. And they are less likely than men to perceive a fair political environment. (1-2)

They conclude that real structural changes are needed to foster female candidates and help women see politics as a viable path. We propose that such changes begin with transforming gendered understandings of leadership and power as well.

There is a problematic association between leadership, power, and masculinity in the United States. As Douglas explains, Americans perceive

a deep, unyielding contradiction between and discomfort with ‘female’ and ‘power.’ Forty years after the women’s movement, ‘female’ is still equated with being nice, supportive, nurturing, accommodating, and domestic—not compatible with anything that might involve leadership. ‘Power’ is equated with domination, superiority, being tough, even ruthless. These two categories simply are not supposed to go together. (272)

Would-be politicians need to demonstrate both their ability to wield power and their personal authenticity. In a society that has traditionally defined “authentic womanhood” in opposition to public displays of power and leadership, female politicians are “forced to overcome additional authenticity obstacles that male candidates typically have not had to endure” (Parry-Giles 23). One strategy for overcoming these hurdles is the “Iron Lady” persona, which perpetuates “patriarchal constructions of leadership” and rhetorically conceals women’s entrance into politics (Richards 139). Yet, even when female politicians adopt this strategy, the binary view of women leaders as either “nice, warm but incompetent” or “competent but unpleasant” persists (Richards 153). As numerous studies have shown, “women have a narrower band of acceptable behavior in leadership roles, particularly ones that are usually occupied by men;”
the behaviors considered desirable in male leaders, such as assertiveness and ambition, mark women as “too aggressive” and “hostile” (Ross).

The U.S. presidency has its own unique gender connotations as well. Linda Horwitz and Holly Swyers note that “American history is still told as a story of ‘founding fathers,’ and the idea of a patriarch as president has a firm hold in the American imagination;” thus, “the notion of what a president should look like, of what is presidential, is fundamentally masculine” (119). The president is a synecdoche for the nation, a nation that has historically perceived itself in masculine terms. In Dana Nelson’s configuration, “presidentialism” is “the concrete correlative for national manhood” (333). Thus, the election of a female president would have consequences for not only the masculinity of her (presumably male) opponent, but the masculinity of all American men and the nation-state itself. A New York Times headline in November 2016 declared that “Trump Defeated Clinton, Not Women,” but the gendered construction of the American presidency suggests that, had Clinton won, she would have defeated not only Trump but also American manhood writ large. Indeed, as Rebecca Richards argues, “While the body of a white, heterosexual male occupied the Oval Office, the U.S. citizenry could imagine the nation-state as unchanging and eternal... as if each president was a cut out or carbon copy of the presidents who came before him” (15).

When it comes to the gender of the American president, what is at stake is not only the masculinity of the office, but the “appearance of uninterrupted continuity” in American national identity (Richards 15).

**Popular Culture Representations of Female Presidents**

Without any real-life counterparts, popular culture representations of female U.S. presidents bear the weight of visualizing a female presidency. Former Vermont governor Madeleine Kunin explains, “We have to visualize a woman president in office before we can have one.” Televisual representations, with the power to reach enormous
audiences, are one likely venue for this work. A cultural “mythmaker” (Horwitz and Swyers 117), television is “the realm in which we allow our monsters to come out and play, our dreams wrought in pictures, our fantasies transformed into plot structures” (Newcomb and Hirsch 564). When it comes to female presidents, television has traditionally helped audiences picture women in this role while simultaneously undermining the possibility of a real female presidency. Particularly in television depictions before 2008, representations of female presidents have socialized audiences to read female presidents as out of place and less capable than men.

As an example, President Mackenzie Allen (Geena Davis) is depicted in *Commander-in-Chief* (2005) as a strong military leader even as she is crucially undermined in several ways. First, her presidency is depicted as fundamentally “illegitimate” since she was not elected, but assumed the role upon the death of her predecessor (Horwitz and Swyers 124). This is a common trope: many of television’s female presidents assume the role in atypical circumstances. Second, Allen struggles to adequately nurture her children while running the country, and she is “held up simultaneously to feminine and feminist standards, and must fulfill both, but with a bias (still) toward the feminine” (Douglas 288). The show does acknowledge and visualize the role of sexism in preventing a woman president from succeeding, but it offers few solutions. Allen’s is a fish-out-of-water story, and *Commander-in-Chief* primarily mines the topic of a female president for drama based on the perceived difficulties a female president would have balancing motherhood and marriage with the presidency. The show ultimately suggests that, though women might make competent presidents, sexist political and social structures would hinder their success if, by some chance, they could attain the office in the first place.

Such problematic representations of female presidents have prompted calls for more gender-neutral images of the presidency—representations that do not make a female president’s gender her defining quality, that depict female presidents as human, first and
foremost (Carlin and Winfrey 340; Horwitz and Swyers 131; Conroy 64). The hope is that these gender-neutral representations might normalize images of women in the office. And televisual female presidents since the 2008 election show movement in this direction: Veep, State of Affairs, and Scandal all treat a female presidency more as an ordinary course of events than an unlikely, far-fetched occurrence. Still, as the following analyses illustrate, the gender neutrality embraced by these shows risks minimizing the very real gender-based obstacles women politicians face, as well as the social and structural changes needed to enable a successful female U.S. presidency. By masking the material contexts of political, especially presidential, power, the post-2008 turn to gender neutrality suggests that feminist political intervention is no longer necessary and that women’s inability to achieve the presidency derives from the failings of individual candidates rather than systemic barriers and embedded sexism.

“Ovaries in the Oval Office”: Veep

When HBO launched the political comedy Veep in spring 2012, critics immediately recognized the emergence of a new image of female politicians and political power. Salamishah Tillet described the show as “sexy, powerful, and fun,” and it does foreground the sexuality of female political figures while also breaking from the tradition of uncritically celebrating female politicians simply for their presence. Focusing on the career of Selina Meyer (Julia Louis-Dreyfus), who occupies the role of vice president and then president, Veep breaks new ground in depicting female politicians as just as ineffective as men. As such, Veep questions the efficacy of simply adding women to politics as an antidote to corrupt and sexist policies and practices. Overall, Veep’s satirical skewering of women’s political ambitions in the post-2008 period threatens to undercut real women’s political participation and accomplishments.

Veep, which concluded its fifth season in 2016, follows the career of Vice President Meyer, who assumes the office of President when her predecessor resigns. Created by Armando Iannucci, Veep is
an adaptation of the British show *In the Thick of It*. Among other awards, the show has been nominated in five consecutive years for the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Comedy Series, winning for its fourth and fifth seasons, and Louis-Dreyfus has won five consecutive Emmy Awards for her performance. Iannucci has insisted that the choice to depict a female politician was pragmatic rather than intentionally feminist: “We don’t want people to think, oh, well this is Joe Biden or this is Dick Cheney or this is Al Gore…. We decided, let’s think forward rather than backward—if we made it a woman we are sort of saying, she’s her own person” (Bennett). Here, the post-2008 turn represents Meyer as independent of female politicians of the real and televisu al past. Furthermore, *Veep*’s comedy showcases the dysfunction of Washington, particularly the inefficacy of the vice-presidential role. Gender is not a singular presence in the form of Meyer but a fluid component of Washington political life. For example, a running joke throughout season one was Meyer repeatedly and hopefully asking whether the president had called her, only to be told again and again that no, he had not. Vice presidents lack power and prestige as a rule, regardless of gender.

*Veep* reflects a form of feminism that Andrea Stuart has described as combining feminist values and rhetoric with anti-feminist aims and representations. “Popular feminism” relies upon feminism primarily as a way to “inoculate” against charges of sexism, creating confusion about what the term really means in contemporary media culture. Feminist critique of programs with these tendencies is challenging because, as Rosalind Gill explain, they “suture” together feminist and anti-feminist ideas (270). Thus, *Veep* depicts Meyer as an active, sexually desiring agent even as she is also subject to gender-based objectification, discrimination, and harassment. An episode about abortion during Meyer’s third season presidential campaign illustrates this point. In the episode, Meyer is forced to articulate her position without the guidance of polling numbers (since the majority of respondents “aren’t sure” how late is too late for an abortion). Meyer’s team urges her to “play the ovaries
card” by situating her answer in the context of her experience as a woman, but she resists, explaining, “I can’t identify myself as a woman. People can’t know that. Men hate that. And women who hate women hate that—which, I believe, is most women.” In this episode, *Veep* gives voice to multiple forms of sexism, including horizontal sexism coming from other women and the more expected male-identified sexism and depicts Meyer’s resistance to this sexism as futile. In fact, the humor derives from Meyer’s capitulation to sexism when she does resort to her gender, prefacing a nonsensical answer about abortion limitations with the undesirable phrase, “As a woman...” Identifying herself as representing a woman’s point of view is ultimately unavoidable, despite Meyer’s best efforts. Judith Williamson calls this type of representation “sexism with an alibi: it appears at once past and present, ‘innocent’ and knowing” (1). And Rosalind Gill notes that, in this context, “[feminist] critique becomes much more difficult—and this, it would seem, is precisely what is intended” (268). Certainly, *Veep*’s reviewers and critics are divided over how to interpret the show’s depiction of gender.3 Despite the fact that *Veep*’s characters express and are subject to explicitly sexist language and stereotypes, commentary tends to focus less on whether the show is sexist and more on whether it might be understood as feminist.

*Veep* takes representations of female presidents in a new direction by offering an example of a woman who struggles, and frequently fails, to traverse the shifting, dangerous landscape of presidential politics. However, Meyer’s failings are no more or less than those of other characters in the show. In this way, *Veep* contributes to normalizing images of women in power and resists falsely idealizing women. Moreover, the show makes visible some of the real obstacles and double standards that women in politics face.

3 Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to list every review and article that has discussed the issue of feminism as related to *Veep*, the following sources represent the diversity of responses that reviewers and critics have had to the show: Bennett, Khilnani, Wessels, and “Ma’am Up.”
However, the show is ultimately a send-up of the status quo of insider gridlock politics, not a call for social or structural change. As Emanuelle Wessels concludes: “Veep reassures viewers that a woman can hold power if she is rendered nonthreatening by ineffectuality and a hyper-feminine aesthetic.” Even in a politically powerful role, Meyer exhibits stereotypically feminine attitudes and behaviors regarding fashion, consumption, and vanity. For scholars of gender and the presidency, the show’s real value may lie in illustrating that merely inserting women into politics, without a concomitant transformation of the political process or structure, is meaningless. Indeed, Veep’s political satire questions the presidency as a meaningful goal for feminism or a means to improve women's lives. As a result, we question the value of Veep’s approach for helping audiences visualize a female president. Though it is important to recognize that female politicians are not inherently superior to men, the popular feminism embraced by Veep representationally undercuts the value of female participation in politics before real women have even achieved equal representation.

“There is a Warrior That Has Emerged in You”: State of Affairs

During 2014, as the third season of Veep found Selina Meyer unexpectedly assuming the presidency upon her predecessor’s resignation, NBC introduced its own female president in State of Affairs, an espionage thriller series developed by Alexi Hawley. State of Affairs is noteworthy both for featuring the first televisual representation of a black female president and for stubbornly ignoring that fact. More than any other representation, State of Affairs aspires to absolute blindness with regard to gender and race, effectively de-gendering the office of president. In contrast to the success of Veep and Scandal, State of Affairs failed to garner an audience of viewers, was canceled after one season, and has largely been overlooked by critics as well. Nevertheless, it deserves critical consideration as a text that follows the logic of gender and race blindness further than any other televisual representation of female presidential leadership. State of Affairs demonstrates the limitations
of imaginatively de-gendering the presidency without acknowledging how a female president would challenge the masculine association of the role.

*State of Affairs* clearly prioritized normalizing images of women and people of color in positions of power. In this rare instance, the show’s black female president has been elected outright. The show stars Katherine Heigl as Charleston Tucker, a high-level CIA operative responsible for providing daily intelligence briefings to President Constance Payton (Alfre Woodard). Each episode finds Tucker, Payton, and their teams navigating the treacherous terrain of international politics with “ripped from the headlines” plots such as the kidnapping of a group of Nigerian school girls by Boko Haram, among others.

President Payton brings a new kind of female president to the small screen. A pantsuits-clad veteran of the Iraq War and former Senator, Payton holds her own with the masculine (even macho) characters who surround her, is consummately rational and tough, and occupies the position of head of household in her family (literally sitting at the head of the table during family dinners). Like other television depictions, the show includes domestic conflict between Payton and her husband, who complains, “There is a warrior that has emerged in you since you took this office, and I don’t know if she’s going away anytime soon.” Still, by this point in the season, Payton is in conflict with nearly every other character as well, so the marital discord does not particularly stand out. In fact, if anything, it highlights Payton’s decisiveness, as she encourages her husband to leave if he can’t be strong enough to support her, an offer she repeats to her male chief of staff. Payton is a woman who does not need men. Unlike most other representations of female presidents, Payton earned the office on her own merits; she did not gain it by virtue of her relationship with a powerful man, and she does not require men to function in the presidential role.

However, if Payton doesn’t need men, it is because she has adopted a masculine persona herself; of the three female presidents
considered here, Payton is the clearest depiction of an “Iron Lady.” In Payton’s presidency, the office itself and presidential power are still masculine. In this way, State of Affairs gives the lie to “de-gendered” representations of the presidency. The presidency is already gendered male; pretending otherwise and inserting a female character into the role doesn’t alter that fact, and thus Payton must assume masculine characteristics. This becomes particularly clear in one of the season’s major plot arcs, the mysterious circumstances surrounding the death of Payton’s son, Aaron, who was killed in an ambush in Afghanistan during a campaign visit. Payton is still grieving a year later, but she is less interested in mourning Aaron’s death than in avenging it. By depicting Payton as a mother who uses the resources of her office to avenge her son’s death, State of Affairs masculinizes even the role of mother, while at the same time suggesting that a woman president might be emotionally motivated in a way that, presumably, a man might not.

Because of the ostensible gender- and color-blindness of the show, it cannot consider real obstacles that women in politics face and offers no strategies for achieving its vision of racial and gender equality. Instead, State of Affairs offers an idealized vision of the U.S. that contrasts with the international locales that form the backdrop for CIA interventions in every episode. In this United States, every job is open to every individual (as long as he or she is willing to adopt strongly masculine qualities), sexual violence does not exist (women actually more commonly assault men than the reverse), and only religion persists as a meaningful identity category (Muslims, whether U.S. citizens or abroad, are consistently depicted as potentially dangerous terrorists). In contrast, whether in Nigeria, Yemen, or Panama, characters in the developing world are resolutely gendered and raced. The U.S. depicted in the show is one in which a person’s success is determined solely by her individual choices and achievements. State of Affairs completely overlooks the systemic obstacles that currently limit the success of women and people of
color and circumvents the widespread social change necessary to produce the diverse political power structure depicted in the show.

“You Have to be Twice as Good as Them”: Scandal

Both Veep and State of Affairs illustrate the difficulty of depicting a female presidency while embracing gender neutrality. In trying to normalize female leaders, whether by giving them human failings or by pretending that gender and race aren’t determining forces in their lives, they minimize the symbolic importance of the presidency for women and the obstacles that have prevented real women from attaining the office. In contrast, Scandal, which debuted on ABC in April 2012, seeks to normalize images of women in positions of power by multiplying these images. As numerous women in Scandal seek the presidency and other political offices, the show acknowledges the challenges that women face and recognizes that these challenges are not distributed equally among women; race and class also impact women’s opportunities. Among post-2008 popular culture representations of female presidential power, Scandal is most successful in seriously considering women’s presidential aspirations and the impossibility of simply inserting women into the role of the president. The show also goes further in recognizing the barriers to political participation that disproportionately impact women of different races.

Scandal, which concluded its sixth season in 2017, follows Olivia Pope (Kerry Washington), a political crisis manager with her own firm, Pope & Associates. In its earlier seasons, Scandal focused on Olivia’s on-again-off-again affair with then-President Fitzgerald Grant III (Fitz), on whose presidential campaign she worked as a media relations consultant. However, the show evolved to focus less on Fitz’s political career and more on his wife, Mellie Grant (Bellamy Young), who divorced Fitz in the season five premiere and launched her own political career. Season six concluded with Mellie’s election as president. As Mellie’s and Fitz’s roles on Scandal have evolved, Olivia, too, has shifted from supporting Fitz’s presidency to propelling Mellie into the presidency.
The triangular relationship between Fitz, Mellie, and Olivia drives the drama of *Scandal* and positions Olivia, a black woman, as the most powerful, behind-the-scenes player in Washington D.C. The fact that Olivia’s power derives as much from her sexuality as from her skills in solving public relations and legal problems for political elites allows the show to, in Nina Cartier’s words, “probe questions of just how far black female sexuality has moved from the stereotypes of ‘unrapeability’ and lasciviousness, if it has indeed moved at all” (154). *Scandal* emphasizes the difficulty that black women face in negotiating sexual politics due to longstanding stereotypes about black female promiscuity. Olivia is at once empowered by her ability to control her own sexuality and exert sexual control over the male President Grant, even as this power is depicted as illegitimate within the traditional Washington power structure. In this way, the show highlights the continuing challenges that black women confront in accessing sexual and political power.

If *Veep* minimizes the value of the presidency for women, *Scandal* keeps the presidency very much in view as a coveted prize. Presidential power is the envy of all the characters in *Scandal*, but arguably its female characters most of all. During the show’s first season, for example, three women in Fitz’s life employed a variety of tactics to access and shape that power: Vice President Sally Langston, First Lady Mellie Grant, and, of course, presidential mistress Olivia Pope. As *Scandal* has progressed, presidential power has shifted steadily from Fitz to these, and other, women. During season two, Vice President Langston assumed the role of acting president when Fitz had a medical emergency. Mellie’s dramatic transformation from a proper southern First Lady to President is particularly noteworthy, as both Mellie and Olivia have transitioned from propping up Fitz’s presidency to fighting for Mellie’s.

Among shows featuring women with presidential aspirations, *Scandal* stands out for emphasizing how gender and racial biases encoded in the presidency hinder women’s access. During her presidential campaign in season six, Mellie struggles to garner public
support for her candidacy and step out of her husband's shadow to create her own public identity. Despite her divorce from Fitz, Mellie is still expected to parrot his positions and policies. During one presidential debate, for example, Mellie is attacked based on a policy that Fitz enacted and must explain to the audience that she is her own woman, not a puppet for her ex-husband. This topic is particularly salient given how candidate Hillary Clinton was consistently pushed to answer for the policies and behaviors of Bill Clinton during his presidency.

For her part, Olivia feels that, due to the combined power of racial and gender bias, she can only participate in politics so long as she remains invisible. Her father reminds her of their “family motto” in the third season premiere: “You have to be twice as good as them to get half of what they have.” Through Olivia, Scandal highlights that the obstacles women face in pursuing political power are not distributed evenly but diverge along the axes of race and class. For example, in a widely celebrated episode from season five, the show highlighted how the media promotes sexist and racist micro-aggressions against black women by using what one character describes as “language so coded that the only person it’s targeting is insulted by it like a dog whistle.” In the episode, the revelation of her affair with Fitz prompts intense media scrutiny of Olivia’s past sexual and professional life; for the first time, she becomes highly visible in the public eye. Media portrayals undermine Olivia’s character, using sexist and racist language so subtle that it goes unnoticed by the general public, such as “articulate,” “well-spoken,” and “ambitious.” Instead of discussing the affair, Olivia’s team of PR operatives goes on the offensive to attack the media’s treatment of her. Additionally, during the episode, Scandal’s creator Shonda Rhimes tweeted out a longer list of coded, “dog whistle” words used to insult black women: “Lucky, sassy, ambitious, well-spoken, well-mannered, articulate, calculating, secretive, urban, hot, arrogant, siren, thug.” As one of Olivia’s representatives explains during the episode: “Words like these mean nothing to the general public which
is why the media... can get away with using them. But when women of color, like Ms. Pope, hear that kind of code language, they know exactly what you’re getting at.” Although Scandal offers a vision of American politics in which women have attained a greater level of participation than in reality, the show also visualizes obstacles that confront women in leadership roles; it does not imaginatively erase the roadblocks that limit black women’s full participation.

Scandal avoids many of the pitfalls of other popular culture representations of female presidents by multiplying the female characters with political power and aspirations. In Scandal’s Washington, a woman running for president and winning is normal—or, at least, not earth-shattering. In addition to Mellie, Senator Josie Marcus, former Vice President Sally Langston, and former Vice President Susan Ross all run for president at various times. By making women seeking the presidency seem commonplace, Scandal can consider the individual strengths and failings of its characters without maligning all women or questioning women’s leadership in general. In this way, the show also illustrates how different positions relative to presidential power produce different potentials for agency. For example, Scandal’s female characters are able to negotiate the perilous issue of “likability” differently depending on their positioning. Since Olivia’s power operates behind the scenes, she is not subject to the same requirement to be likable as the women seeking public office. She can run her PR firm ruthlessly at times because she is not ultimately accountable to the public. In contrast, those (white) women seeking public office balance strength and likability in a variety of ways, whether through clothing hard-nosed ambition in conservative Christianity (as Vice President Langston does) or by recasting personal struggles like an ex-husband’s affair as evidence that she can relate to Americans facing difficulties (in the case of Mellie Grant). Whatever their subject positioning, Scandal is attuned to the different strategies that women use to access and use presidential power.
More than other post-2008 representations of female presidents, *Scandal* resists the temptation to de-gender the presidency to allow a woman to occupy the role. Though it depicts its characters as deeply flawed, and in fact depends upon those flaws to drive the drama, it helps audiences visualize women in the office of president without minimizing the value of this goal for women or the difficulty women face in pursuing it. In addition, *Scandal* depicts the racial and gender biases that prevent black women from participating in politics as fully as white women. In the end, the sexual and political intrigues in which characters regularly find themselves are not the real “scandals” of the show; the true scandal is that the most competent, well-equipped character feels that her race and gender preclude her from ever pursuing the presidency.

**Conclusions: Presidential Politics as Women’s Work**

*Veep*, *State of Affairs*, and *Scandal* each pursue new visions of female presidents that reflect the growing demand for such representations following the 2008 presidential election. While all three texts attempt to normalize images of female presidents and break from earlier representations by treating a female presidency as an ordinary course of events, only *Scandal* normalizes female political power without also minimizing either the significance of gender as a cultural force or the value of the presidency as a feminist goal. *Veep* and *State of Affairs* embrace a problematic gender neutrality, de-gendering the presidency in a way that undermines, rather than supports, substantive change in the political sphere. As scholars of women in politics have found, these imagined female presidents “reflect Western and masculinist leadership styles that privilege personal agency and leaders’ unique abilities above structural factors such as race, class, education, and ethnicity” (Dingo xi). As in rhetorics of women’s work that highlight women’s “personal choices” rather than the structural components that shape those choices, these *deus ex machina* depictions of female presidents distract from the real factors that undergird unequal political representation,
including the systemic barriers to women’s participation discussed by Lawless and Fox and the ideological equation of presidential leadership with masculinity. As Douglas concludes, “this ersatz, ‘can do’ feminism substitutes our own individual efforts, and our own responsibility to succeed, for what used to be a more collective sensibility about pushing for changes that would help all women” (16). The social change necessary for meaningful political change begins with language and follows with institutional changes that strip race-, class-, gender- and sexuality-based barriers.

While *Veep* and *State of Affairs* de-gender the presidency, in a form of wishful thinking, they do not take the next step to re-gender the presidency. They refrain from addressing how a female president, by the fact of her existence and embodiment, would challenge the masculine identification of the presidency and its attending understandings of citizenship and nationhood. Until we can successfully imagine a female president, we will be dogged by what Richards has termed the paradox of the “woman leader” (17). While most (inter)national political leaders who are women will be called something like “woman leader,” “there is never a need to additionally gender the term ‘leader’ when a male holds a leadership position” (16-17). We do not refer to someone as a “man leader” or hypothesize about a “male president.” Those creating and viewing representations of “woman presidents” would do well to consider Richards’ questions: “Does inserting the word ‘woman’ before ‘leader’ mean that this person will lead differently or provide a revolutionary or feminist model of leadership? Does ‘woman leader’ mitigate some of the negative connotations that one might associate with women? Or with leaders?” (17). As long as we retain the language of a “female president,” our terminology reaffirms that the ideology of “president=man” still holds sway.

*Scandal* provides a stronger representation because it does not force a single female character to represent all women’s political aspirations and abilities. This kind of representation has the power to inspire audiences with regard to female political participation,
whereas representations of women adopting masculinist leadership styles or fumbling through the presidency do not. We hope to see Scandal and other popular culture representations of women as presidents that go even further in exploring a model of leadership that embraces the idea that a female body in the role of president would re-gender both leadership and nationhood. We need representations that both normalize women in the role of president and explore how feminist leadership would inevitably change, and enrich, the office. Anything less is a failure of imagination.

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INTRODUCTION

There can be social injustices due to the way one physically appears at work. During the 2016 Seneca Falls Dialogues we discussed the concept of lookism as it relates to the conference topic, “Lean Out: Gender, Economics, and Enterprise.” Lookism is a form of discrimination based on the perception of attractiveness (Jones 886). Addressing lookism has been gaining traction in labor and employment journals, other academic press, and popular culture. Lookism has been defined as “the practice of discrimination on the basis of physical appearance in the workplace” (Ghodrati and Muati.1) or as Etcoff stated, “beauty prejudice” (1). The Washington Post Magazine first used the term, “lookism” in 1978 (Ayto; Pettinger 165), moving away from the more generic term aesthetics, which had been used previously.

Deborah L. Rhode’s 2010 book, The Beauty Bias: The Injustice of Appearance in Life and Law, explores societal demands of being beautiful, how much beauty costs, and responses and pressures to be attractive in society. Rhode addresses gender, age, sexual orientation, and race as she navigates the world of the white beauty standard. This book created a national conversation about and appearance in Western society. Rhode’s book was reviewed by The Economist on May 24, 2010, and ABC national radio in Australia in August of that same year. According to Rhode’s research, unattractive individuals are discriminated against in hiring practices and experience shame and
health issues such as psychological and physical disorders of anorexia, bulimia, depression, or anxiety. These experiences can lead to individuals undergoing risky cosmetic procedures. Rhode argues that appearance bias infringes on individual rights and reinforces beauty stereotypes that are perpetuated by media images and fashion magazines.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the impact of lookism and appearance discrimination primarily towards women who are judged based upon their respective physical appearance, especially in the workforce. In this discussion we focus on dress and how it relates to appearance. Next, we present an overview on ethical aspects on lookism and the workplace. A literature review follows highlighting the financial impacts of lookism including dress and success, appearance management, and the cost of appearance management.

**Beauty, Dress, and Appearance**

According to Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and Joanne B. Eicher,

> Dress is a coded sensory system of non-verbal communication that aids in human interaction in space and time. Dress of an individual is an assemblage of modifications of the body such as coiffed hair, colored skin, pierced ears, and scented breath, as well as an equally long list of garments, jewelry, accessories (1).

Because dress is a non-verbal communication system, it is interpreted just as text. Dress reveals information about the wearer to the “informed” viewer. Thus, individuals can attempt to manage their appearance to communicate information about themselves to others. For example, someone who is dressed in sweatpants and sneakers will be perceived as someone who exercises or is athletic.

Appearance, however, differs from dress. Appearance includes the “features of the undressed body, such as its shape and color as well as expression through gesture and grimace” (Roach-Higgins and Eicher 9). Appearance and grooming maintenance are acquired from a young age. Many children in the United States are taught that the color pink is feminine and blue is masculine. This happens when a newborn is delivered and is dressed in the respective color to communicate biological
gender. Girls are taught to place bows in their hair, bat their eyelashes, and smile wide with pouty lips. As they age, adolescent girls select certain styles of dress, apply make-up and perfume, and grow long hair. The visual aspects of a woman’s appearance will play an important role as she grows older and prepares to enter the professional work force.

Standards of ideal beauty can contribute to lookism. Definitions of ideal beauty include physical features that “delight the senses and please the mind.” Scholars have observed that ideal beauty is defined by culture and that it changes over time. It is closely linked to cultural stereotypes that are learned in society (Mahajan 166). Beauty is prescribed by culture, including factors such as body size, facial features, clothing, and other appearance characteristics. For example, in western culture a very thin body is a considered ideal. With increased globalization, research has found a trend in idealizing the European model type of beauty. Subsequently, behavior is modified to meet shifting cultural beauty norms (Faehmel, Farley, and Ma’at 66). Scholars often identify associations between ideal beauty in western culture and its promotion in media. Advertisements and media prompt unhealthy behavior among women, such as eating disorders and extreme plastic surgery. The drive to be beautiful is not irrational. As Frank J. Cavico, Stephen C. Muffler, and Bahaudin G. Mujtaba noted, beauty in western society is seen as a “prized possession” and is synonymous with success and happiness (791).

LOOKISM, ETHICS, AND WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

Workplace dress for women became important particularly in the 1980s when women dressed in coordinated suits and suit separates that were the norm in corporate culture. The phrases “dress for success” and “the power suit” were prominently featured in numerous style guides and popular literature. At least some of the impetus to wear a suit was driven by the work of John T. Molloy, who wrote two bestselling books designed to educate both women and men on how to “dress for success.” In these books he explained the “rules for successful career attire.” He reinforced the prevailing opinion that the business suit was most “appropriate” for business attire. According to Molloy, wearing the wrong
clothes could mean career failure.

Dressing for success was important for women to communicate messages of competence, power, and status. Researchers found that women wearing business suits were associated with positive occupational attributes such as honesty and integrity and were perceived as working for a reputable organization (Easterling, Leslie, and Jones 211; Kwon 33). Other researchers noted that business apparel was associated with favorable managerial attributes including credibility (Johnson, Crustsinger, and Workman 27), high status, positive managerial traits, and being professional (Rafaeli and Pratt 32). Workman and Johnson found people were not only willing to make inferences about people on the basis of their dress but were also willing to make inferences about the company where people worked (164).

Anat Rafaeli, Jane Dutton, Celia V. Harquail, and Stephanie Mackie-Lewis investigated everyday decisions about the dress of female administrative employees and found that individuals can manage their appearances to facilitate performance on a variety of tasks within the workplace (9). Subjects in the study were drawn from a stratified random sample of twenty who were employed at a School of Business in a large Midwestern university. Eleven women held secretarial jobs, six women held administrative positions, and three women held supervisor positions. During in-depth semi-structured interviews, participants were asked to describe and explain the clothing they wore to work, discuss comfortable and uncomfortable feelings associated with their dress at work, what their dress communicated about them, and their experiences at the university that influenced their behavior. Researchers drew three different conclusions. First, “Participants used dress to execute their roles in the workplace” (17). Second, participants used dress to perform various functions at work to illustrate organizational membership and to attend organizational events. Finally, participants used dress to show competence in their respective job-related roles. This meant participants used dress to feel appropriate in their roles and to feel effective during interaction with others. Participants spent a lot of time and effort deciding on what is suitable dress and dress attributes according to their
membership with the university, functional area, and position.

As investigated by Anthony C. Little, extensive research in this area of appearance and occupational success includes the visual characteristics such as height, appearance, clothes, and other traits that play an important part in making personal judgments in the workplace. Rafaeli et al. investigated everyday decisions about the dress of female administrative employees (9). Research strongly suggest that many of these physical attributes and facial appearances may be used as a perceived “fit” for the job being offered which could also be stated as “task congruent selection.” Tallness has positive associations attributed to it such as being healthier and more intelligent, especially for men (Jackson and Ervin 434). Individual attractiveness is often attributed to sociability, and masculine facial traits are attributed to dominance and physical strength. Structural features such as facial attractiveness and height may be a telling sign to employers as health, intelligence, sociable, dominance, and physical strength are assets needed in the work environment (Keating et al. 62). However, wearing perfume or a certain style of dress can be manipulated and thus affect perceived attributions by potential employers.

Christine L. Williams and Catherine Connell investigated attractive sales associates who are employed by national retail to retain certain clientele yet pay low wages. Employees who have careers in the service industry are hired as “aesthetic labor,” which includes one’s demeanor, dress style, speaking voice, and attractiveness. Other aesthetic ideal requirements of hired employees who represent the store’s brand image usually include the middle-class, status, Caucasian, and traditional gender. Employees settle for low wages as they identify with the retail store brand and enjoy employee discounts. However, the authors conclude that aesthetic labor should not be rewarded as many of these employees work for these discounts, thus creating a culture of consumerism for workers. Furthermore, only hiring aesthetic labor intensifies the social inequalities that already exist. Equal opportunity employers that begin to hire on the basis of quality as opposed to appearance could close the gap on job segregation (340).
Louis Tietje and Steven Cresap reviewed theories on beauty and in preferential treatment of attractive people as potentially fair and just (31). Two theories were most prominent, those of Rawls and Nozick. Rawls' Theory of Justice contends that “natural assets are those that are developed by social circumstances;” who your parents are and their appearances are passed genetically through generations. This is not a choice or factor that one can argue with. Nozick argues in his book, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, that utilitarianism is flawed because individuals can develop natural assets, creating an unfair advantage in external factors that play into being attractive and may not be deserved. Some of the resources at the disposal of attractive people may not be available to those individuals who are perceived as less attractive.

In sum, dressing for the day is an important part of daily rituals among professional women. Women are aware that they need to dress appropriately to assure success and credibility and that a bias in the workplace exists, particularly for women. Some components of appearance (e.g., smell) are easier to manipulate than others (e.g., height). Although it is difficult to prove, appearance influences workplace interactions often leading to unfair biases. In an effort to combat these biases, women must make the decision to alter their appearances, which has substantial costs in both actual dollars and emotional and physical health.

**Appearance Management and Economics**

Soohyung Lee conducted a compelling study that recognizes that a beauty premium does exist for attractive employees but argues that the return on investing in beauty is not great. Research shows that people who have above-average attractiveness earn more than their below-average attractiveness counterparts. Taller height results in more wages where the tallest 25% of workers earn 13% more than the shortest 2%. Lee also observed that being overweight leads to a reduction in wages. Lee then speaks about the investment people make in beauty in order to see returns in the form of increased wages. As of 2006, $48 billion was spent on cosmetics in the U.S., which includes skincare, haircare,
makeup, and fragrance. In 2012, the U.S. clothing market was $225 billion which illustrates a substantial increase could close the gap on job segregation. The weight-loss market in 2014 was about $310 billion, which includes food-management programs, weight-control supplements and services to track calorie consumption and fitness. However, the cost-benefit analyses that have been studied show that for most people, the benefits of investing in beauty are not worth the costs (Lee).

The premise is that the beauty premium only applies to people with above-average attractiveness. There is no significant difference in wages between people who are simply attractive, average, or below-average looking. So, if investing in beauty can enhance a person from being attractive to above-average attractiveness, then it is financially worthwhile. Lee’s study points to statistics in South Korea, where strikingly beautiful men and women make 8-9% more than average looking people. However, being beautiful, as opposed to strikingly beautiful, only earned this group of men and women 3% higher wages. The largest cost-benefit gap lies in cosmetic surgery. According to Lee, the average cost of cosmetic surgery is $7000. If a person is below-average looking, there is only a 5% chance that cosmetic surgery will make a woman strikingly beautiful and no chance for a man. The chance to become above average (which is less than strikingly beautiful) is 34% for women and 2% for men. So below-average looking women may earn 3% more after cosmetic surgery while men in this group may earn less than 1% more. Therefore, people who spend large sums of money with the intent to attain looks that are above average might only achieve an average or attractive appearance, which is not enough to reap the benefits of a beauty premium.

Data from the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery reveal surging trends in cosmetic procedures. American spending on surgical and nonsurgical cosmetic procedures is over $12 billion a year (1). Of that amount, over $7 billion is spent on surgical procedures, more than $2.6 billion on injectables such as Botox and lip fillers, and nearly $2 billion on skin rejuvenation. Of all the surgical and nonsurgical procedures, 17.9% are performed on younger Americans aged 19-34,
41.5% on middle-aged Americans aged 35-50, and 29.9% on older Americans between the ages of 51-64. These statistics point to the fact that nearly 90% of Americans undergoing such procedures are working age and almost 60% are in their early to mid-career years. Furthermore, 91% of the cosmetic procedures are performed on women and 9% on men. Since 1997, the number of women undergoing cosmetic procedures increased 471% while the number of men undergoing cosmetic procedures increased 273% (1).

The YWCA presents an economic dilemma where the amount of money women

...spend on cosmetics, beauty, and cosmetic surgery is surging, but at the same time, research shows that women who do not keep up with certain beauty measures suffer in their personal careers and this effects them financially. Between 1997 and 2007 cosmetic surgical and nonsurgical procedures have increased almost 500%. Surveys show that the majority of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 support cosmetic surgery. Cosmetic surgery among minority women has also seen a sharp increase in recent years. These statistics support lookism, as employers tend to discriminate potential employees based on appearances and attractiveness. The YWCA research points out that below average looking employees earned 9% less than their above average looking counterparts. The study also highlights that by simply investing the cost of a monthly manicure-pedicure of $50 into a retirement account annually rather than the beauty treatment, the retirement account would accumulate an additional $10,000 in just ten years (“Beauty at Any Cost: The Consequences of America’s Beauty Obsession”).

In their study, Daniel Hamermesh and Jeff Biddle examine the economics of lookism. The authors assumed that in some occupations, attractiveness increases worker productivity, especially in positions that interact with customers. Productivity in other occupations is not impacted by a worker’s attractiveness, but an attractive person may still choose that field due to other characteristics that enhance that person’s
productivity. Based on this premise, the authors constructed a model equation to see whether a pay difference exists based on looks (1174).

Two surveys were conducted in the U.S. and Canada that provided information on respondents’ looks and labor-market factors. The interviewer met each respondent, aged 18-64, and rated their appearance as either strikingly beautiful, above average for age, average for age, below average for age, or homely. The survey collected information on the respondent’s age, gender, income, education, and industry. Participants who reported severely poor health status were excluded from the study, as physical disabilities should not be used to rate physical appearance. The results of the surveys showed that earnings of above-average looking/handsome men increased 5% while earnings of below average/homely men were reduced by 9%. Above-average looking women earned 4% more while below-average looking women earned 5% less. These results demonstrated that the beauty premium for above/average and strikingly beautiful men and women was not as large as the wage penalty for below-average looking employees (1186).

In their study, Catherine Cox and William Glick analyzed the impact of cosmetic use on resume evaluations. Female volunteers of average attractiveness were photographed wearing interview appropriate clothing. The women were photographed three times – without makeup, with moderate makeup, and with heavy makeup. Business administration students rated the photographs on a scale of 1-7 based on physical attractiveness, femininity, sexiness, and use of makeup. Students then played the role of personnel officers where they received a job description for the candidate (secretary or accountant) along with a resume with a photograph and had to rate the expected performance of each candidate. Results of the study revealed that use of makeup enhanced attractiveness, femininity, and sexiness. Expected performance for women applying for the accountant position was generally equal for all three levels of makeup. However, expected performance for women applying for the secretary job was negatively impacted when heavy makeup was used. Too much makeup created the
perception of low competence (51). This study suggests that existing research of the relationship between beauty and wages might need to be further evaluated and to achieve accurate results, studies may need to stratify samples by job categories.

James Andreoni and Ragan Petrie attempted to explain why beauty premiums and male-female wage gaps exist by conducting economic experiments. Their study was in the form of a public goods game where groups of subjects were given tokens that they can invest in either private or public goods. Four groups of five subjects played the game, which was repeated for 40 rounds and there were a total of 140 participants. Each subject was given 20 tokens. The private good paid $0.02 per token invested by the subject and the public good paid $0.01 per token invested by the entire group. Thus, investing in a private good would only earn the individual subject money while investing in the public good would earn money for the entire group. The game was played on a computer and subjects could see photos of the group members displayed on the computer screen. In one round of the game, only total group contributions were revealed to the subjects. In another round, both the total group contributions as well as individual subject contributions were revealed. The goal of this methodology was to emulate an employment setting where stereotyping based on looks and gender could be observed as well as the impact of such stereotypes on expectations of cooperation and contributions (73-77).

The second part of the experiment involved an independent group of people who were not involved in the game to rate the 140 photos of the subjects based on either physical attractiveness or helpfulness. The raters rated each photo based on a scale of 1-9, either for attractiveness or for helpfulness. The results showed that women were considered to be more attractive and more helpful than men. Photos of the female subjects were given an average rating of 4.87 for attractiveness and 5.12 for helpfulness. Photos of the male subjects were given an average rating of 3.78 for attractiveness and 4.30 for helpfulness. The results were used to distribute the photos into three buckets: attractive, middle-attractive, and unattractive. This information suggested that people deemed to be
attractive were considered to be helpful-looking. Thirty-nine percent of attractive people were rated helpful-looking, 16% of middle-attractive people were rated helpful-looking and 6% of unattractive people were rated helpful-looking (77-79).

The results also showed that people do discriminate based on beauty. When group members did not see individual subject performance/ contributions, attractive people were given the benefit of the doubt and group members contributed more to public goods. This shows that cooperation increased when there were beautiful people in the group, thereby increasing the earnings of attractive people. Nevertheless, when individual subject performance/contributions were revealed, people were less cooperative, or contributed less to public goods. Therefore, although people expect attractive people to be more cooperative, this beauty premium disappears if it is clear that they are not as cooperative, or their performance lags (80-84).

Such expectations lead to stereotypes that are prevalent in employment as explained by a Newsweek national survey. Fifty-seven percent of hiring managers said it would be increasingly difficult for qualified but unattractive candidates to find a job; 61% said a woman would benefit from wearing clothing that shows off the figure; and of the nine most important traits of a candidate, looks were voted as third most important (Bennett). This survey parallels the results of Andreoni and Petrie’s work, finding that hiring managers are persuaded by certain stereotypes associated with attractive people thereby offering them a beauty premium. Once these people are hired and performance can be observed, the premium may disappear.

Given the potential financial impact of investing in appearance and dress, it is important to understand as well the gender pricing of clothes and beauty products. In an effort to assess the gender pricing of goods in New York City, the Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) conducted a study entitled “Beauty at Any Cost: From Cradle to Cane: The Cost of Being a Female Consumer”. The DCA analyzed price differences of 35 comparable product categories with distinct male-oriented and female-oriented versions. The study analyzed almost 800 products of 91 brands
sold in 24 New York City retailers and found that on average women pay 7% more than men for similar products. The DCA was diligent in selecting men’s and women’s versions of a product with similar construction, textile, appearance, construction and branding. As a result, instead of an incremental analysis, the study was able to demonstrate the unavoidable higher price of women’s products when a woman cannot choose among alternatives. For instance, the study did not compare the cost of a generic product to a brand name but instead focused on comparing the costs of women and men’s versions of a product within the same brand.

Of the five industries analyzed, the DCA found that the cost of women’s products was 7% more for toys and accessories, 4% more for children’s clothing, 8% more for adult clothing, 13% more for personal care products and 8% more for senior/home health care products. Of the 794 products analyzed, female-oriented versions were priced higher 42% of the time while male-oriented versions were priced higher 18% of the time. The remaining 40% of instances showed equal pricing. The study analyzed the pricing of products by taking the average cost of individual men’s and women’s products. Price comparisons were made on a unit basis for the full price of the products, disregarding any promotions or discounts. The median prices for each product type were also determined and it was found that the median price was parallel to the average price.

The DCA had conducted an earlier study in 1992 to analyze price bias against women. The study found that, among other points, women paid 25% more for the same haircut as men and 27% more for laundering services. The study prompted New York City Council to pass a law in 1998 enabling the DCA to issue violations to any retail service establishment that engages in price bias for services based on gender. Lack of a similar law regarding gender based price bias for goods inspired the DCA to conduct the recent study in 2015. The DCA notes that while price differences in individual products may be small, the cumulative effect of a gender premium can amount to a heavy financial burden on women. Although the DCA did not calculate the impact of the burden, a 1994 study by the State of California determined that women
paid a premium of $1,351 per year for the same services as men (New York City Department of Consumer Affairs). Invested at a 4% rate of return, $1,351 will yield $16,368 over the course of ten years and $76,095 over 30 years. This is a significant amount of savings, exacerbated by the fact that women earn about 80 cents for every dollar earned by men (Catherine Costello and Ariane Hegewisch).

**Findings and Conclusions**

On October 20, 2016, one-day prior to the start of the Seneca Falls Dialogues, a *New York Times* article entitled, “Is It Time for Wonder Woman to Hang Up Her Bathing Suit?” stated that Wonder Woman was being “named an honorary ambassador for the empowerment of women and girls and for gender equality.” The article details Wonder Woman’s positive attributes, including that she is “self-sufficient and strong and fights for equality and justice.” Wonder Woman was not created out of a male character or sidekick as Batgirl or Catwoman was for their male superhero counterparts. However, the article also touched upon the conversation of “the outfit issue” (Friedman D8). Vanessa Friedman describes Wonder Woman’s strapless, stars and stripes bathing suit, thigh-high boots, and of course, her well-endowed cleavage -- …but why? Has there ever been a discussion about Spiderman, Superman, or Batman in their respective leotard-type outfits and the prominence of their male genitalia? The issue of gender-equality, dress, and beauty runs deep into a national conversation even when discussing DC Entertainment Comic heroines--we mean heroine--Wonder Woman. The United Nations thought it was important to look past the superficial and beyond the clothes. It was determined that Wonder Woman’s actions and what she represents was of much more importance. Thus, it is difficult to separate the clothing from the woman. The heroine seems to be deeply scrutinized due to her dress and beauty much like American women today. After a class discussion on this very topic, students agreed in a consensus stating that it was important to judge Wonder Women by her actions, courage, and good deeds, not her dress. Wonder Woman’s outfit was one of functionality just as her male counter heroes. We also came to...
the conclusion that it probably cost more to dress Wonder Woman in the same way, as her pink razor was more expensive.

Do the ideals of beauty translate into success? If success means improved wages, then from the scope of the literature review and research, we can conclude that dress does relate to success and opportunities, and communicates who one is in society. Researchers from the disciplines of psychology, sociology, gender studies, economics, human ecology, and fashion have performed extensive studies on appearance and appearance discrimination. Dress and appearances are used to convey status and aptitude in the workplace. Hiring managers have an evident bias towards aesthetically pleasing individuals, and research has shown a connection between looks and wages. Although there is still insufficient research stratifying subjects by job category, education level, and location, existing literature clearly indicates a desire to “look good” and invest significant sums of money in managing appearance. There is sufficient evidence to show that women incur greater costs than men to achieve a desired look, partly due to gender pricing and partly because women spend more on beauty products and cosmetic procedures. However, many more men today are equally scrutinized about appearance including, heightism, weightism and other aspects of dress and appearance. Our society seems to be fixated on body image perfection and images due to digital enhanced photography and HD technology.

With the bias of appearance permeating our society, an interesting and important area of research is the legal framework of lookism in the workplace. As look–based discrimination is more difficult to prove than prejudices such as sexism and racism, researching labor laws to find protections against appearance bias would benefit the countless men and women who are financially penalized simply because they do not reflect a certain standard of appearance. The ethical issues highlighted in this article summarize the issues with lookism with regards to legal matters. Having appearance standards can help promote and contribute to a company but can perpetuate sexism, racism, and other appearance related “isms.” At the same time, expecting employees,
particularly females, to maintain these stands can be draining on them both emotionally and financially. The end result is a series of questions on the topic, such as fairness, ethical behavior, and appropriateness. Perhaps it is a balancing act of appearing well within a given context, but not at an unfair cost when compared to others. However, this is much easier said than practiced and continued awareness of this issue is warranted.

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UNDERREPRESENTED: THE LACK OF BLACK DESIGNERS FEATURED IN HARPER’S BAZAAR AND VOGUE

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INTRODUCTION

During the Fall 2012 New York Fashion Week events, only two Black designers showcased collections of the 127 designers (Mullins par. 1). For the purposes of this research, the term “Black designers” encompasses all peoples of the African diaspora as well as those more recently born in Africa. Spring 2015 Fashion Week showcased 25 Black designers (“25 Black Designers” par. 1), a significant increase, which occurred only after designers, editors, bloggers and other social media journalists widely-critiqued the lack of diversity seen on the runways (Williams par. 6). Activists such as Bethann Hardison speak on the fact that models of color are continually being passed up by racist White designers (Wilson, “Fashion Designers” par. 1; Wilson, “For True Diversity” par. 3). Arguably, the issue of underrepresentation extends beyond just Black designers attaining recognition in the fashion industry. With the increase of Black designers represented at the live high-fashion shows and venues, it would be assumed that this would be paralleled in the high-fashion print media, giving new presence in editorials such as Harper’s Bazaar and Vogue. However, there is still minimal to no presence of Black designers in high-fashion magazines. “The text and images presented in the media directly reflect the values and interest of the advertisers, who are usually White men” (Hazell and Clark 6); and this phenomenon is evident in high-fashion magazines.
Historically, Blacks have had to create print media catered to their community because of the lack of coverage they received in mainstream print media. The first Black magazine, entitled *The Colored American Magazine*, was published in May 1900 and ran until November 1909 featuring news, lifestyle articles, and beauty advertisements (“The Colored American”). This discriminatory trend continued with mainstream media which resulted in the creation of two of the most popular Black publications in the United States of America today—*Ebony*, published in 1945, and its sister magazine, *Jet*, published in 1951. More recently, *Arise* magazine of London, first published in 2009, and *Vogue Black* of Italy, first published in 2008, emerged onto the high-fashion print media sector. The issues featured some Black designers and all Black models as a result of the lack of coverage in high-fashion magazines. However, by 2015 both *Arise* and *Vogue Black* ceased publication/development, presumably because “black models don’t sell” product (“Vogue Italia” par. 4).

The lack of notable Black designers in the industry has been claimed as the reason why there is a lack of Black designers being featured on the runways or in high-fashion magazines such as *Harper’s Bazaar* and *Vogue*. Columnists have differing theories as to why the numbers are now lower than ever. “‘There were more high-profile black designers in the 1970s than there are today,’ [stated Bethann Hardison], ‘We are going backwards’” (Friedman 2; Adams par. 1). Institutions of higher learning are said to be to blame, with the Fashion Institute of Technology having 8% of its student population being African American, Parsons the New School for Design at 3.31% and the Pratt Institute at 1.9%. Cost to attend these schools is the main factor. Also, according to Friedman, young African Americans are not choosing to go into fashion because they are not seeing it as a viable career, as a result of the lack of representation of African Americans in the industry. It is a vicious cycle. African Americans in the industry are not being made to feel welcome in prominent organizations such as the Council for Fashion Designers of America, which only has 12 African American members out of the 470
current members (Friedman par. 5; Adams par. 1), representing the fact that inclusion is still not a main priority for the mainstream population in the fashion industry. Another theory that surfaced from the media is that the 1970s and ‘80s were breakthrough eras for Black designers and models, but then the AIDS epidemic took three influential Black designers. Might they lived, more doors would have been opened for Blacks in the fashion industry (Goff par. 17). This theory has less logical reasoning supporting it and is a scapegoat for the real issue in the industry.

The lack of coverage and support that Black designers face as a result of racism and discrimination has a reciprocal effect on their economic standing in the high-end fashion industry. Several Black designers have gained success in the hip-hop/urban/streetwear genre of fashion catered towards the young Black community in the past. Companies that were popular in the 1990s, such as Karl Kani and FUBU, have gained earnings of more than $50 million and $6 billion respectively (Giddings and Ray 5). More recently, brands such as Sean John and Baby Phat have gained earnings of $525 million (Sean John Clothing, Inc History) and $980 million (Phat Fashions LLC). However, in the high-end luxury fashion market, whose main clientele are older, wealthy, and typically a majority White population, Black designers have struggled to make their mark. Most Black designers in this market have annual revenues of under $1 million (Friedman). A lack of presence in high-end fashion magazines may be one of the contributing factors here, with their main readership consisting of the same older, wealthy, and typically majority White population.

There has been lay/popular research focusing on the lack of support Black designers receive in the fashion industry (Adams; Brown; Kearney; Mullins; Williams; Woodberry), but no academic data has been published regarding this topic or the lack of features Black designers have in the high-fashion magazines. Thus, it was important to evaluate the amount and types of coverage that Black designers received in the magazines. The unjust normalcy of the elimination of certain people in
the industry has a major effect on the rich diversity that the industry could have and the economic growth of all people. It is time for academic publications backed by research to uncover this dogma; therefore, I employed the following research questions:

1) How often and within what capacity are Black designers featured in Harper’s Bazaar and Vogue?
2) Has there been an increase in the amount of coverage Black designers received from 2000-2012?
3) Has there been an improvement in the types of features Black designers received from 2000-2012?

Theoretical Framework

A Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens reveals the coverage or lack thereof that Black designers receive. CRT emerged out of the legal systems and has a direct lineage to the Civil Rights activists in the 1960s. CRT developed out of Critical Theory and Marxist philosophy, which fought to make meaning of engrained class struggles and oppression (Tate 196). I used CRT in the current study to aid in the understanding that racism is engrained in the fabric and system of the American society (“What is Critical Race Theory?” par. 2), and is the “normal order of things” in American society (Ladson-Billings 37). I employed CRT to bring to light how race interacts with other identities (gender) and to demonstrate how institutionalized racism restricts individuals not belonging to the dominant culture from access, opportunities and power. In this case, it is the lack of notoriety given to Black designers in top fashion magazines.

I developed The Critical Race Theory Converging Lens inspired by the physics converging lens ray diagram (Fig. 1). This figure shows a single starting entity: social constructs which result in oppressive situations for non-dominant cultures. The double convex CRT converging lens allows the social constructs to be reflected into an axis point—the deconstruction of normalized oppression—that is then dispersed into various rays with the main emphasis on social equality.
The goal of CRT is to deconstruct the phenomenon at hand and to reject the traditions of liberalism and meritocracy. Legal discourse says that the law is neutral and colorblind; however, CRT challenges this legal “truth” by examining liberalism and meritocracy as a vehicle for self-interest, power, and privilege. CRT also recognizes that liberalism and meritocracy are often stories told from those with wealth, power, and privilege (“What is Critical Race Theory?” par. 2). As stated earlier, White men control the media world and their interests and values are always on the forefront (Hazell and Clark 6). In the media, the concept of meritocracy barely, or never, reaches Blacks in high-end fashion unless they are of celebrity status, at which point they are welcomed with open arms. “Critical race theory can thus be understood as a study of ‘hegemony’: how domination can persist without coercion. It can also be understood as a study of collective denial” (Harris 1). The denial is on the part of mainstream society and their belief that racism is no longer an
issue. Fashion journalist Mariana Liao more recently claimed that the fashion runways are becoming more diverse; however, she questioned whether the inclusive way of being would last. Discriminatory traditions are hard to break and the fashion industry is no exception. Will removing the whitewashing of the runways also remove the whitewashing that is happening in print media? Is the industry only being more inclusive because others are putting pressure on designers? Is inclusivity trendy now and designers are following the wave (Hickey par. 3-4)? Only time will tell.

**Methods**

My research focused on the lack of coverage Black designers have in two top fashion magazines: *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*. I acquired periodicals from my own collection, microfilm, and the Vogue Archives. I utilized a qualitative content analysis inspired by Evans et al.’s methodology for contemporary teen magazines—*Sassy*, *Seventeen* and *Young Miss*—to gather the data. I completed the methodology in four parts: (1) magazine selection, (2) list of Black designers developed, (3) content-coding scheme development, and (4) content classification for pattern analysis development. The final sample included 48 issues: 24 issues of *Harper’s Bazaar* (12 from the year 2000 and 12 from 2012) and 24 *Vogue* issues (12 from the year 2000 and 12 from 2012). I chose the years 2000 and 2012 because I wanted to examine if there had been an increase and/or enhancement in Black designer exposure over a decade of time. Just as Evans et al., who selected magazines that were “widely circulated” and had long standing, I selected *Harper’s Bazaar* and *Vogue* because they are top ranking fashion magazines. Both boast a readership of over five million. Originally, the magazine sample was to include the comparable title *Elle* as a third periodical however, I could not gain access to the archives.
I developed the list of Black designers with considerable research because they are not very well known and are often underground with minimal to no exposure by mass media. Designers had to meet certain criteria in order to be added of the list: (1) they must cater to a similar type of customer as the Harper’s Bazaar and Vogue; (2) their work had to be of similar caliber to designers frequently featured in Harper’s Bazaar and Vogue; (3) the designers had to be known for dressing high-profile celebrities such as Rihanna, Beyoncé, and Michelle Obama (all of whom have been featured on the covers of Harper’s Bazaar and Vogue); (4) they had to be working under their own name instead of another designer’s or house’s name. For example, Patrick Robinson with Armani Exchange was listed with contingencies because he is not designing under his own name. A similar example is Oliver Rousteing, creative director at the luxury fashion house Balmain, whose name was often featured in the magazines in association with the company.

Similar to the work of Evans et al, I developed the content-coding scheme development and the content classification for pattern analysis on a charting matrix. The matrix for the current study tracked each

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VOGUE AUDIENCE (According to the Condé Nast Vogue’s media kit)</th>
<th>HARPER’S BAZAAR AUDIENCE (According to Mediamark Research and Intelligence, LLC)</th>
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<tr>
<td>• 87% women readers</td>
<td>• 89.5% women readers</td>
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<td>• Median age 37.9</td>
<td>• Median age 46.2</td>
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<td>• Median household income $68,519</td>
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<td>• Some college education 68%</td>
<td>• Some college education 77.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Employed 65%</td>
<td>• Employed 64%</td>
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Note: Mendelsohn Affluent Reader Profile specified a median income of $150,907 and a net worth of $1,132,421

Table 1. Sample demographics for Vogue and Harper’s Bazaar
designer and their features for each of the 48 issues. During the content coding scheme development, I evaluated placement (beginning, middle and end of the magazine; top, middle, bottom of the page) and size of the feature. Spread layout and placement is critical in magazine development and the most important features get the best locations, such as the top of the page (Nikola par. 4-7).

**Results**

*Research Question 1*

Evaluating the presence or lack thereof that Black designers have in fashion magazines was important because the economic standing of these designers striving to survive in the high-end fashion market is a direct result of being featured or not being featured in fashion magazines. The first research question asked: How often and within what capacity are Black designers featured in *Harper’s Bazaar* and *Vogue*?

**Types of Feature**

The data revealed that, on average, Black designers were featured in six of the 12 issues for a given year, averaging two features of a Black designer per issue. They were featured in a variety of capacities as well. The most coverage that Black designers received was when their name was mentioned with one of their pieces shown (45% of the time). Twenty percent of the time, Black designers were mentioned with piece shown, a small 30-50-word write-up, and an image of the designer. Black designers did not and currently do not advertise in fashion magazines. The exception is designer James Moore, who had the only paid advertisements in *Harper’s Bazaar* of his namesake collections. Designer Oliver Rousteing for Balmain had a paid advertisement; however, it was under the name of the company instead of his name. Similarly, Rachel Roy had the only two-page feature of a Black designer’s work shown in
Vogue. She collaborated on a collection with Macy’s, and the company paid for an advertisement of the new collection.

**Size and Place of Feature**

Out of 48 issues, Black designers were featured in 11 total write-ups. Of those 11 total write-ups, 64% of the time Black designers were given a 1/8 to ¼ page feature. The write-up could also include an image of the designer along with a single garment or an entire outfit shown. Thirty-six percent of the time, Black designers were given a ¼ to ½ page write-up and the placement for these features was usually in the lower sections of the page or in the center sections closest to the binding. These locations are said to be the least important locations in the magazine (Nikola par. 4-7). Harper’s Bazaar and Vogue both featured designers every month in full page or two full page write-ups. Harper’s Bazaar had no full page write-ups on Black designers. Black designer Lawrence Steele was given the only full page write-up out of the 48 issues evaluated. His write-up was featured in Vogue’s July 2000 issue. Vogue’s willingness to feature a Black designer in this capacity could possibly be a result from having had a Black editor, Andre Leon Tally, who was on staff at that time. CRT reveals how institutionalized racist thought causes discrimination in the industry until someone speaks up about the injustices and demands equality.

**Editorials and Celebrities**

Fashion editorials are where the designers and the magazine editors can flex their creative skills. High fashion editorials are the portions of the magazine that are most used for inspirational images for moderate priced, mainstream designers and mass retailers. Editorials are prime real estate in fashion magazines, and in only three instances were Black designers featured in editorial shoots. Lawrence Steele was featured in an editorial in 2000 Vogue and 2000 Harper’s Bazaar. The other instance of a Black designer with an editorial was in 2012 Vogue with work by
Duro Olowu. Otherwise, Black designers’ garments were not used in editorial photo shoots.

Magazines also often featured celebrities wearing designers’ garments. Once a celebrity is seen wearing a designer’s clothing, the attention it produces results in a major economic increase for that designer because other clients begin making orders for the same, or a similar, look. Black designers are not exempt from this phenomenon, and many have gotten their claim to fame by having celebrities wear their fashions. Celebrities are always featured in fashion magazines and have now dominated the cover of the magazine month after month. Having a feature with a celebrity wearing a designer’s garments in a fashion magazine amplifies his/her economic growth potential even more. *Harper’s Bazaar* did not show celebrities wearing Black designers’ garments. In only one instance did *Vogue* show a celebrity wearing a Black designer’s garment and that was in an illustration Lawrence Steele created of a design for Halle Berry. CRT brings to light how the normalcy of racism puts limitations on the level of success Black designers are able to acquire.

**The September and March Issues**

The largest issues of the year for fashion magazines are first, the September issue, and second, the March issue, because they are the times of transition between the selling seasons—Spring/Summer to Fall/Winter or vice versa. Designers and retailers pay higher fees to have their garments advertised and featured in these issues. The September 2000 *Harper’s Bazaar* issue contained 565 pages, and it had no Black designers featured. The September 2000 *Vogue* issue was 689 pages long, and it also had no Black designers featured. The September 2012 *Harper’s Bazaar* was 550 pages, and it featured Black designers in six instances; of those, all were a mention of the designer’s name with a piece shown. The September 2012 issue of *Harper’s Bazaar* also featured a special advertising section paying tribute to some influential designers. Black designer B. Michael was one of those. The September 2012 *Vogue*
boasted 916 pages, and it featured Black designers in only six instances. Of those six features, three were special advertisements including write-ups about designers. In this issue, Vogue also featured a special advertisement for Arise magazine, which showcased a selection of the featured Black designers shown in Arise. The 2000 March Harper's Bazaar issue included a special section that paid tribute to Black designers showing a total of seven Black designers in this one issue.

*Research Question 2*

The second research question asked: Has there been an increase in the amount of coverage Black designers received from 2000-2012? It was hypothesized that as societal ideas overall become more progressive, so would print media. It was found that the number of instances where Black designers were featured did increase from 2000 to 2012. However, the growth is minute in comparison to how many non-Black designers are being featured. On average, a high fashion magazine is comprised of 99% non-Black designers. Less than 1% of the magazine focuses on Black designers. The magazines continue to get larger, and more and more pages are added, which allows for the opportunity to feature more Black designers. However, they are still almost nonexistent. In all Vogue 2000 issues, there were only eight instances where a Black designer was featured. In all Harper's Bazaar 2000 issues, there were only ten instances where a Black designer was featured. Both Vogue and Harper's Bazaar 2012 issues included a total of fifteen instances where a Black designer was featured. See Table 2 and Table 3 for a visual of these numbers.

The tables show that Vogue has been very consistent in how it has spread the features out over the course of 2000 and 2012 showing 1-2 Black designers in most issues throughout both years. However, Table 2 demonstrates that Harper’s Bazaar featured Black designers sparingly in 2000; but in 2012 the features for Black designers were more spread over the entire year.
Table 2. Frequency of Black Designers in Harper's Bazaar and Vogue in the year 2000

Table 3. Frequency of Black designers in Harper's Bazaar and Vogue in the year 2012
Research Question 3

The third research question asked: Has there been an improvement in the types of features Black designers received from 2000-2012? Findings showed that Black designers did not have better placement or an increase in size for their features. The types of features they received remained consistent as well. However, the data revealed an unexpected result in the types of features for Black designers.

Token Black Designers

The concept of being the token is an example of the “interest convergence” that Ladson-Billings described in her CRT-focused work as an insincere attempt to align the oppressed with that of the dominant culture. Just as in many television shows and films, the token Black person allows racist messages to be present in the kinds of roles given to Black actors as well as in the general portrayal of Blacks in the media (“The Token Black Friend” par. 2). The token is a member of an underrepresented group, who is operating on the turf of the dominant group (Laws 51). According to Laws, tokenism is likely to be found wherever a dominant group is under pressure to share privilege, power, or other desirable commodities with an otherwise excluded group. Tokenism is the means by which the dominant group advertises a promise of mobility between the dominant and excluded classes. Tokenism does not allow for other non-token Black designers to be recognized. Being the token designer breaks down barriers for his or her career, but it also allows the dominant population to believe that they have “filled their diversity quota.” Tokenism can paradoxically hinder a designer’s career as well because it involves mobility, which is severely restricted in quantity and quality (Laws 51).

In the 2000 issues of Vogue, Lawrence Steele was the token Black designer being featured with the same legitimacy as all other designers. As detailed earlier, this designer was the only one to have a full page write-up, and he was also one of the only designers to have an editorial shoot with his garments. Lawrence Steele was featured five times in the
2000 issues of Vogue. Jewelry designer Monique Péon was Harper's Bazaar's 2012 token Black designer. She was the only Black designer in this magazine to have a full page photograph of her work shown. Monique Péon was featured a total of seven times in the 2012 issues. However, as compared to her male counterpart, Lawrence Steele, Monique Péon's features were usually small, 1/8 or ¼ page in size. In this case, tokenism and gender discrimination are prevalent in the fashion magazine features. This finding suggests that there is continued need for diversification in high-fashion publications. See Tables 4 and 5 for a visual of the tokenism frequency for Lawrence Steele and Monique Péon. During the content classification, I evaluated the type of feature the designers had in the magazines. While coding the data, I found that the designers were featured in multiple dimensions in the magazines. The types of features were coded on the matrix as such:

- • = mentioned;
- * = mentioned with piece shown;
- ** = mentioned with piece shown and write-up;
- *** = mentioned with piece shown, write-up, image of the designer;
- W = write-up of the designer;
- I = image of the designer; or
- A = paid advertisement from the designer.
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**Table 4.** Tokenism frequency for Lawrence Steele in 2000 Vogue
**Table 5.** Tokenism frequency for Monique Péon for 2012 Harper's Bazaar

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**Harper's Bazaar 2012**

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*THE SENECA FALLS DIALOGUES JOURNAL, V.2, FALL 2017* 108
Gender Discrimination in the Fashion Industry

Black women designers are not only subjected to discrimination because of their race.

Societal barriers are more of an issue for Black women because they are considered a double minority suffering through a “double burden” of being Black and female (St. Jean and Feagin 16). Black women, in many capacities of their career, have been deemed as less competent and less knowledgeable (St. Jean and Feagin 19). The complex discrimination Black women and others who are considered a double or triple minority (ex. a person of color, a female, and low socioeconomic status) have faced are being more critically fleshed out by way of intersectionality theory (Davis 68; Cho, et al. 786). Civil rights activist, critical race, and feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw developed intersectionality theory as an analytical strategy to examine the discriminatory crossovers in social inequality. Recent reports suggest that all female fashion designers are still being discriminated against in the industry with only 14% of the 50 major brands being run by females (Pike par. 3). “Men dominate the fashion industry as designers and CEOs, and also tend to advance more quickly than the women” (Akin-Olugbade par. 2).

The data revealed that Black women designers were featured less in Vogue and Harper’s Bazaar’s 2000 issues. Only 25% of the Black designers featured in the Harper’s Bazaar 2000 issues were women and the Vogue 2000 issues only featured two Black designers, both of whom were men (Lawrence Steele and Sean Combs). As stated earlier, by 2012 the number of Black designers featured increased slightly along with an increase in the number of Black women designers being featured. See Table 6 for a visual break down of Black designer features by gender. Since there were higher numbers of women featured in the 2012 issues, I conducted an evaluation of the types of features women received versus the men. As mentioned earlier, prime real estate for fashion magazines is the editorial shoots, and the only Black designers that were featured
in this capacity were two men. In the Harper’s Bazaar 2012 issues, both men and women were featured in the capacity of being mentioned with a garment of theirs shown. The only Black designer given a more upscale feature in Harper’s Bazaar 2012 was Oliver Roustein of Balmain, a male. In June 2012, just after the first anniversary of being at Balmain, Roustein was featured with a garment as well as a write-up. In the Vogue 2012 issues, there was more diversification in the types of features Black designers received. Carly Cushie was the only Black woman designer featured with an image of herself in the Vogue 2012 issues. Rachel Roy was the only Black woman designer featured with an advertisement of her garments in the Vogue 2012 issues. Only Black men designers were featured with write-ups in the Vogue 2012 issues. CRT explains that race is just a product of a wider social force (Ladson-Billings). Here race and gender play a part in the level of notoriety accessible to Black female designers.

Table 6. Gender breakdown of Black designers in 2000 and 2012 Harper’s Bazaar and Vogue
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As a result of institutionalized racism and discrimination, the elimination and lack of notoriety of Black designers is the normal order in the fashion industry. The data revealed that there was minimal increase of Black exposure in periodicals from the years 2000 to 2012 for both Harper’s Bazaar and Vogue. The data also showed that the magazines were limited in how Black designers were featured; most of the time Black designers were not featured at the same caliber as all other designers. If a write up was done, it was not as lengthy or featured in the same size or in prime locations within the magazine as other designers. Findings demonstrate that Vogue had more diversity in its features of Black designers, possibly because it also had a Black editor on staff. Conversely, Harper’s Bazaar showed Black designers in the same overall capacity throughout the 24 issues reviewed. Special features and advertisements allowed more Black designers to be displayed in these periodicals. The Harper’s Bazaar March 2000 special issue allowed for small write-ups highlighting the work of Black designers.

The intersectionality of being a Black woman designer resulted in greater discrimination. The women of this study received fewer features than their male counterparts. They also received less upscale features, and were generally shown in the same capacity throughout—mentioned with a garment shown. Very few women were given write-ups. In fact, the only write-up featuring Black women designers was in the Harper’s Bazaar March 2000 special issue celebrating Black designers.

Being featured in a high fashion magazine is a boost for the economic growth of the designer. Mainstream periodicals must be willing to make their features more inclusive in order to help enforce a fair economic playing field for all designers in the luxury market. Looking at this social construct from the lens of CRT, the findings suggest that there is a continued need for the Black culture to produce its own periodicals showcasing its own work. Magazines such as the London
based periodical *Arise* are still crucial in promoting the success of Black designers, despite having recently shut down. It is time for a magazine in the United States that is strictly a high-fashion periodical focused on displaying the work of Black designers.

**Implications**

A rendition of this study is suggested in order to evaluate the possible increase in diversity of high-fashion periodicals by 2020. Further research into the rise and fall of Black periodicals *Vogue Black* and *Arise* is also suggested in order to learn from their short-lived legacy. The fashion industry boasts that it is one of the most diverse industries in the world with large racial, ethnic, and sexual minority populations working in the industry. However, as the data showed, this fact is not portrayed in the magazines we read, or on the runway, or in the economic sectors of the fashion industry. As stated by Hazell and Clark, media directly reflects the values and interests of the people who are in charge and, in the case of both *Harper’s Bazaar* and *Vogue*, discriminating White men reign. They continue to be blinded by the normalcy of race and gender discrimination. In order to ignite change, the continued use of critical philosophies such as critical social theory, feminist theory, queer theory, and critical race theory as a framework for the studies focusing on social injustices in the fashion industry is a necessity. 1

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1 An even stronger message could have been made regarding the discrimination Black designers face in high-fashion magazines if the author could have gotten access to the *Elle* archives. This periodical was not available via database or through microfilm at the time the data were collected. In the 2000 and 2012 *Vogue* issues featured on microfilm, on average about 2-4 pages in each issue were missing. These pages may have had pertinent information which may have altered the results of the study. *Harper’s Bazaar* 2000 issues were also retrieved on microfilm. Unfortunately, the images were very dark which made it hard to read the details. Also, on average, about 3-4 pages were missing out of each issue.


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CONSTRUCTING SEXUALITY AND FETISHIZING WOMEN IN AMERICAN HISTORY: DEBUNKING MYTHS IN POPULAR CULTURE FROM POCAHONTAS TO THE COLD WAR

JAMIE WAGMAN, KATLYNN DEE, ALISON TIPTON, & ADRIENNE WHISMAN
SAINT MARY’S COLLEGE

INTRODUCING HISTORY MAJORS TO VISUAL CULTURE

In teaching U.S. history survey courses, as a gender historian with training in visual culture studies, I introduce Saint Mary’s College students to historical narratives by consistently drawing on photographs, drawings, and paintings. We examine drawings of Malinche and paintings of Pocahontas, portraits of Harriet Tubman, and photographs of suffragists, reformers, and second wave activists. We consistently ask how constructions of gender shape national politics, society, and popular culture, along with narratives about labor and family. Turning an image over and over helps us discuss varied interpretations of womanhood and women’s lived experiences. We also examine intersections of gender with citizenship, race, class, and sexuality. Through the use of the visual, my U.S. history courses aim to familiarize students with the process of historical interpretation and to help students gain a deeper understanding of the United States today. We review U.S. historians’ work on visual culture, from Milton Sernett’s study of the visual culture of Harriet Tubman to Linda Gordon and Gary Y. Okihiro’s work analyzing Dororthea Lange's censored images of the internment of Japanese-Americans. The survey courses I teach help
students earn credit for American History in addition to a college-wide course outcome called “women’s voices” that asks that students understand women's contributions historically, and the ways in which the social construction of gender influenced our understanding of knowledge.

Several student-written research papers from U.S. history survey courses used visual culture analysis to come to similar conclusions about the stereotyping of women in history, as they examined various topic matters in gender history – from the visual culture of Pocahontas to the wartime public health posters warning U.S. soldiers about sexually transmitted diseases to the images and propaganda of the Lavender Scare. They selected their topic matter due to availability of online resources on their own research interests. Throughout the course, examining visual culture helped undergraduates gain an understanding of what it means to “do history,” to use primary sources to build historical narratives. Students used visual culture—from posters and book covers to paintings and Disney films—and found that visual culture has constructed damaging representations of women's history: images that fetishize women’s bodies, uphold whiteness and exoticize women of color, and otherize and/or fetishize lesbian women. Women’s bodies have always been battlegrounds, and students’ exposure to visual representations of historical women and their bodies has helped them understand the social constructions of gender, race, and sexual orientation in historical narratives. They are able to discern the ways in which different interest groups have historically projected ideas on women’s bodies, claiming them as sexual or asexual, defining them. Analyzing visual matter—from photographs to crude drawings—has also helped them in their journey in challenging histories and identifying that every piece of historical evidence can lie, withhold, or misrepresent people, places, and events. These realizations have helped students embark on creative and original projects and learn to trust their own analysis more so in their research papers.

This article features three undergraduate history majors’ approaches in U.S. History surveys to analyzing gender, race, and sexuality constructions in visual culture. In her paper, “Societies’
Constructions of Pocahontas: An Investigation into the Underlying Themes of Sexism, Racism, and Societies’ Appropriations of Historical Memory,” student Alison Tipton examines the cultural depictions and interpretations of Pocahontas, arguing that she became a symbol that reinforced white supremacy and colonialism. As she writes, “In order to become what the English considered civilized, Pocahontas had to convert to Christianity and adopt all English mannerisms.” Jumping ahead several centuries, student Katlynn Dee examines Midwestern constructions of prostitution at the turn of the twentieth century in her paper, “Harmful Aid: Prostitution in Urban America during the Turn of the Century.” Dee investigates public health posters from the University of Minnesota’s Social Welfare History Association; the posters, which are accessible online, are also excellent teaching tools for the ways in which visual culture signals cues about gender, sexuality, race, and class, along with the social construction of sexually transmitted diseases. Dee argues that white middle class reformers used their privilege to aid women prostitutes while also harming them, and her inquiry of visual culture supports this claim. Finally, in Adrienne Whisman’s paper, “The Lavender Scare: A Construction of Lesbian Identity as ‘Other,’” she examines visual popular culture representations of women during the Lavender Scare, arguing that popular culture portrayed lesbians as unfeminine and against domesticity to strengthen the traditional role of the family as the center of freedom and national identity.

POCAHONTAS AS A VISUAL SYMBOL OF WHITE SUPREMACY

Exploration into the events of the 1907 Tercentennial Jamestown Exposition in Virginia unearths underlying assumptions and stereotypes in societies’ representations of Pocahontas and Native Americans as a collective group. Anthropologist Frederic W. Gleach offers an in-depth discussion of the representations of Pocahontas along with the Powhatan tribe. He writes, “Pocahontas appears in images from the Jamestown Exposition generally in one of two ways: either an artist’s conception of the rescue incident, with Pocahontas throwing herself over Captain John Smith’s body... or in portrait view in English clothes” (428). Gleach
observes that “while Pocahontas gets credit for saving Captain John
Smith, the Powhatans were otherwise poorly represented in images from
the exposition” (429). Furthermore, Gleach asserts that “with the partial
exception of Pocahontas (who is an individual, at least), the Powhatans
are largely reduced to historical stereotypes of generic Indians, nearly
mythical characters from the past” (429) and that Powhatans “were
allowed only to be entertaining icons from the past” (440). Gleach also
observes that “these depictions of Pocahontas, and those of other Natives,
were all created by and for non-Native people” (428), and the
orchestrators of the exposition intended it to be a celebratory event in
honor of the Jamestown colony and not of the Native American people
(427). This misrepresentation distorts the image of the Powhatans by
diminishing their identity and their unique role in history. The
orchestrators of the Tercentennial Jamestown exposition did not portray
the Powhatan culture as an integral component of the Jamestown
narrative but rather as an afterthought. By choosing to uphold the
narrative of Jamestown and the white colonists, the orchestrators of the
event ensured that the only story that mattered was one of whiteness
and oppression; they ignored Native Americans’ roles in the success of
Jamestown as a colony, and they further relegated Native Americans to
the back pages of history textbooks.

An example of the latter portrayal of Pocahontas that Gleach
describes can be seen on a brass medal from the exposition in which a
rendition of Simon van de Passe’s engraving of Pocahontas is on the front
of the medal (see fig.1); Pocahontas is in distinctly English dress. This
would have been a common image circulating among attendees at the
Tercentennial Jamestown Exposition. The two ways in which the
orchestrators of the exposition represented Pocahontas as a historical
figure only portrayed her in a way linked to white Europeans and their
perceptions of her. The story of Pocahontas and her assimilation into
English culture takes precedence over her identity as a Native American.
Gleach writes, “Clearly the key aspect of her story is her transformation
from savage (but good) girl to civilized and Christian lady–from Indian to
white” (428). Her dress in this engraving signifies this transformation
and cements her perceived role as a mediator. She was heralded as the
link between the two strikingly different cultures, the symbol of peaceful relations; however, there is a concealed yet distinct message within this context. By featuring this particular image to be the face of the medal, the exposition portrayed Pocahontas as a Native American woman who somehow transcended her upbringing and was accepted into white culture; this indicates the supposed inferiority of the Native American culture in which Pocahontas was raised and the superiority of white European culture.

Historians give Pocahontas agency and value her as a historical figure in both art and literature mainly for her work as a mediator between Native Americans and Europeans. As representations of her suggest, people value her in relation to the work she did to help Europeans. Artists demonstrate this in most visual representations of Pocahontas, which often depict the moment she supposedly saved John Smith from death (see fig. 2). In this particular image, Pocahontas lays her torso over the head of John Smith, protecting his body with her own.
By representing Pocahontas in this way, the artist portrays Pocahontas as a mediator between her own Native American culture and white European culture; essentially, this is her key role in history. It is in this way that people construct Pocahontas’s image so that it is colored by European perceptions of her as a historical person. Artists allow this particular moment in history to define Pocahontas’s life and her worth.

In addition, the 1995 Disney film, *Pocahontas* represents Pocahontas inaccurately. One major issue that critics point out about the film is that while John Smith identifies the historical figure Pocahontas as “a childe of tenne yeares old” (38), the Disney film portrays her as a fully grown woman capable of having a relationship with the adult John Smith. The aging of Pocahontas in the film along with her dramatized womanly form directly contradicts the historical John Smith’s description of his encounter with her (38).

A theory on this retelling of Pocahontas’s story can be found within Michael Harris’s book entitled *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation*. Harris describes the racist and stereotypical portrayals of African Americans in art. While Harris applies his arguments specifically to African American women in this section, his arguments

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**Fig.2.** Christian Inger, Smith Rescued by Pocahontas, www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/pocahontas/lege-nf.html.
are relevant to other women of color. Harris writes about “the essentialist stereotyping of non-white women” (126) and white perceptions of their sexuality. He observes that “women of color were associated with nature, uncontrolled passion, and promiscuity” (126). This practice can explain the overly sexualized nature of Pocahontas in the Disney film. Additionally, Harris argues that “using the nonwhite female body as a spectacle...offers a stage to play out white moral superiority because the exotic woman is a sign of the wanton sexual danger that white society has mastered” (134). The filmmakers uphold stereotypes about Native American women and their association with heightened sexuality, perpetuating notions of male dominance as well as white supremacy. Gleach also argues that “Native American Indian women began to be viewed in a dual-faceted manner: either as a strong, powerful, dangerous woman or as a beautiful, exotic, lustful woman. Both facets were merged together into one representation of Native American Indian women through the stereotype of Pocahontas” (190). Within the Disney film, the filmmakers afford Pocahontas agency by portraying her as a strong woman who defied her father and stood her ground for the things she felt strongly about. However, like in the aforementioned painting, this agency comes in the form of Pocahontas’s rescue of John Smith. The filmmakers create this portrayal of Pocahontas in a way that would benefit the story they were trying to tell, but this culminated in a biased representation of her as a historical figure. Rather than creating a movie that celebrated Pocahontas’s identity as a young Native American girl, the filmmakers succumbed to stereotypes about Pocahontas and her culture, a choice that remains harmful to the perceptions of Native American communities.

These points contribute to Harris’s assertion that “the discursive formation about race in American society constructed definitions of race, valuations of the groups involved, and devised a series of verbal and visual representations to reinforce the ‘truth’ of the constructs” (5). The filmmakers’ representation of Pocahontas through this specific lens contributes to a race and gender bias; these images and representations showcase the ideas of sexism and racism within society while maintaining them. Popular visual representations of Pocahontas such as
those discussed perpetuate notions of white supremacy and the hypersexuality of women of color.

By reinforcing stereotypes about Pocahontas and the Powhatan tribe in these images, the producers of them devalue Pocahontas and her culture while re-affirming the morality of white European culture. The biased perceptions of people from societies other than within Native American cultures flourishes, which is a discrepancy in the depiction of a historical figure’s life. As literary scholar Karen Robertson writes, “She is available to us through a grid of texts and representations by European men” (554). Societies’ depictions of Pocahontas taint the perceptions of her and other Native Americans as well; however, as Robertson states, “It would be a mistake to see her as only a trophy of colonization or tragic victim” (580). Authors, artists, and filmmakers should have portrayed Pocahontas in a way that celebrated her gender, her culture, and her legacy without succumbing to the bias of white supremacy and stereotypes about Native Americans, especially Native American women. Further Native American dialogue about Pocahontas as a historical figure would greatly benefit the discussion of her life and her role in the seventeenth century.

One work that could offer a substantial starting point for researchers is Linwood “Little Bear” Custalow and Angela L. Daniel “Silver Star’s” *The True Story of Pocahontas: The Other Side of History*. Custalow and Daniel give evidence that Pocahontas was already married before she was kidnapped by the English and that she had given birth to a son before the English abducted her as a hostage (47). Even today, many do not know about this part of Pocahontas’s story. Virtually no one acknowledges her other descendants because “the Powhatans were left presumably destroyed, a memory of the past” (Gleach 433). This is precisely the reason one point of view in history should not prevail; it takes a variety of interpretations and analyses to get the full picture. This expansion of knowledge on the part of the individual will help bring to light the hidden biases that are upheld, the work that is ignored, and the voices that are silenced through popular visual constructions of history.
Prostitution in Urban America

The depictions of Pocahontas present one of several instances of people choosing to use a historical narrative for their own purposes. The narrative of prostitution during World War II included similar biases regarding the visual constructions of women. Public health poster campaigns created a stigmatized misrepresentation and oversexualization of prostitutes during WWII. More specifically, the visual culture presented in health campaign posters depicted prostitutes as the sole carriers of venereal disease and, consequently, the main target of the health reform. I argue that the posters featured prostitutes in this manner to divert attention away from the male soldiers and to calm the minds of the American people during the venereal disease outbreak. In addition, the women vice reformers targeted prostitutes as a subject of moral concern to reinforce the societal norms that protected middle class white wives from the dangers of contracting venereal disease from their military husbands. The reformers and the government, therefore, contributed to the social construction of prostitutes as dangerously seductive, morally deviant, and disease-ridden threats to society. The following section will use historical scholarship to analyze primary sources regarding the visual construction of prostitution, while also taking into account the contributing racial, social and economic factors.

During WWII, the production of health campaign posters influenced vice reformers who also targeted prostitution. The oversexualized visual representation of prostitutes’ interactions with military men contributed to the vice reformers’ concern with prostitution as a way to alleviate the threat of venereal disease—a threat that affected them personally. In an attempt to understand the rise of the sex industry and the increased visibility of prostitutes throughout the city, middle class reformers categorized prostitution as a moral issue. Historian Lauren Rabinovitz’ research on prostitution in Chicago during the turn of the century claims that some middle-class reformers characterized prostituted as “women adrift” in need of moral saving (6). Rather than focusing on the monetary needs associated with prostitution
and using reform to target economic issues, the middle class reformers focused on trying to save “pure and passive orphans threatened with sexual danger” (Rabinovitz 6). The reformers’ inability to associate economic, and even familial factors, as underlying motivations for prostitution ultimately reinforced the visual culture’s sexualized depiction of prostitutes.

Although vice reformers understood prostitution as an immoral choice and although the visual culture often presented prostitutes as women freely displaying their bodies for sexual pleasure, historian Sharon E. Wood describes a woman’s choice to enter prostitution as “no choice at all,” because poverty often led women into prostitution, not their lack of moral character (101). Prostitution provided poverty stricken women with the opportunity to provide for their families (Wood 44). Despite prostitutes’ attempt to achieve a type of independence by providing a form of income for their families, the posters still scrutinized and objectified the women as dangerous to the men in uniform. In this instance, the danger lay in the fear of venereal disease; however, this stigma extended beyond prostitution and leaned on the societal need to protect the power and control of men at the expense of a woman’s independence. For this reason, the poster campaigns depicted soldiers as approached or sought after by prostitutes. The poster campaigns suggested that women need to present themselves in a sexual way to attain such attention from the male soldiers.

The posters emphasized and exaggerated the sexuality of women, specifically prostitutes, as a way to draw attention away from the sexuality of men. In this way, the posters also glorified the soldiers as men who could do no wrong. For example, Figure 4 sets the scene of two men in uniform at the bar relaxing and drinking a beer. A young woman in a plunging dress hovers over the soldiers. The soldier on the left looks up toward the woman’s chest with a grin. Notice how the prostitute’s curved feature and extensive makeup characterize her as a grown woman, whereas the soldiers’ seated position and facial expressions depict them as young boys naively intrigued by the sexual prowess of the prostitute. To further illustrate the prostitute as a huntress and the soldiers as the prey, the author of the poster plastered the phrase “booby
trap . . . syphilis and gonorrhea” over the image to suggest the sexual and physical entrapment of the soldiers. The provocative image of the woman in this poster presented prostitutes as powerful, yet docile. The bold make-up paired with her emphasized chest, wide hips and small waist sexualized the woman as an object of male affection. This portrayal, coupled with the idea of the prostitute as a seductress with the power to sexually persuade innocent soldiers, leaned on contradictory expectations. Just as the prostitute appeared to embody power and dependence simultaneously, society expected women to be self-sufficient while also relying on the affection and muscles of men.

In addition to the oversexualization and the enforcement of society’s moral standards, prostitutes faced scrutiny through criminalization. The phrases associated with the poster campaigns attacked prostitutes as threats to the moral and physical health of society. For example, a public health poster from 1940 shows three men in uniform behind the phrase “men who know, say no to prostitutes: spreaders of syphilis and gonorrhea” (see fig. 5). Although this poster portrays soldiers, not prostitutes, the bold and bright phrasing targets prostitutes as the center of the venereal disease epidemic. In contrast to the phrasing, the shaded and blurred soldiers portrays the men as innocent bystanders. Historians Anne E. Bowler, Leon S. Chrysanthi and Lilly G. Terry’s collaborative article on Bedford penitentiary from 1902 to 1913 analyzes the domesticated criminalization of prostitutes that continued during WWII. The female inmates at Bedford were convicted of various offenses including prostitution and chastity violations. The reformers and social workers associated with Bedford defined prostitution as all sexual acts including “flirtatiousness, premarital sex, and other forms of behavior that deviated from the Victorian codes of moral sexual propriety” (Bowler 462). The domestication program at Bedford, therefore, sought to adhere to social norms and kept women within the confined spaces that society deemed acceptable for women. The isolation of domestic work after parole condemned women to a life of servitude and privation. The reform movement represented at Bedford returned young women to the very occupation that essentially condemned them to a life of poverty: poverty that led them into
prostitution in the first place (Bowler 476). The reform program’s desire to rescue women by influencing them with the Victorian ideals of female purity failed to consider the economic factors of prostitution (Bowler 474).

In combination with the confinement and forced domestication at Bedford, prostitutes faced extreme measures of incarceration, forced medical examinations, and government imposed familial separations. The wartime regulation and repression of prostitution granted the government the power to interfere in the lives of the working class people in an unprecedented way. Historian Elizabeth Alice Clement’s book on prostitution from 1900 to 1945 explains that the government incarcerated 30,000 women for prostitution related offenses during WWII (114). Furthermore, a prostitute’s involvement with a soldier often resulted in the removal of her children from her custody, and women
infected with venereal disease served longer sentences than prostitutes arrested for similar offenses (Clement 142).

The poster campaigns placed prostitutes at the forefront of the venereal disease outbreak during WWII to protect the patriotic support of the men in uniform. A 1940 advertisement displays the assumed moral deviancy and the imposed criminalization of prostitutes by depicting two women lurking outside an army/navy base with the statement: “Warning: these enemies are still lurking” (see fig. 6). This poster suggests that women hunted for men and presented men as the victims of venereal disease infested prostitutes. The representation of the prostitutes targets seductive women as the focal point of the health reform. The visual culture of the prostitutes throughout the poster campaigns presented women as wanted enemies of the state and shunned creators of an epidemic.

![Image](image_url)

Fig. 6. American Social Health Association, 1940.

The underlying contributions of racial divides present in the criminalization of prostitutes demonstrates a middle-class denial of
racial and economic factors in an attempt to emphasize the immorality of prostitution. The racial divides within the criminalization of prostitution stemmed from an attempt to give a face to prostitution based on arrest records (Clement 78). The majority of prostitution arrests pertained to streetwalkers as opposed to strippers, taxi dancers, or erotic dancers. Due to the racial bias of brothel and club owners who refused to hire black women, black and Latino women made up the majority of streetwalkers and white and Asian women made up the majority of better paid and legal strippers, taxi dancers, and erotic dancers (Clement 85). As a result, most white middle class reformers viewed black women as “inherently less moral” because black and Latino women “were overrepresented in streetwalking, the lowest paid and most dangerous form of sex work” (Clement 6). This situation contributed to the continuation of racialization in the sex industry, and the visual culture contributed to the racialization of the sex industry by solely displaying white women and white soldiers.

The public health campaign posters criminalized prostitution as a “white woman’s issue.” The overrepresentation of white prostitutes rather than minority prostitutes suggested concern with aiding the white upper- and middle-class communities rather than the minority and working class communities. According to the visual culture, prostitution was a white issue, a health danger for the soldiers, a moral problem for the women, and a social problem for the reformers. Although prostitution and venereal disease affected men and women of all races and socioeconomic classes, the government failed to adequately and equally regulate the minority brothels and, therefore, failed to protect minority prostitutes from other dangerous forms of prostitution on the streets. In this way, the government drew a color line in prostitution by dividing the safe and governmentally regulated forms of prostitution that white women relied on from the dangerous streetwalker forms of prostitution left to minority women. The kinds of posters seen here produced images of womanhood that created social, racial, and sexual hierarchies. The visual culture also upheld the binary of the prostitute and the virgin by oversexualizing and criminalizing the prostitutes. Although prostitution faced stigma, it must be viewed beyond the binary of the prostitute and
the virgin, beyond the oversimplifications of the surrounding visual culture and beyond the moral judgments of the vice reformers. Prostitution during WWII presented women with the opportunity to enter the public sphere and, more importantly, to enter the workforce. The posters’ criminalization of prostitution ignored the fact that prostitution provided some women with a sense of independence and freedom and can be understood as part of the process of dismantling patriarchy. The posters’ depiction of the visibility of women in the workforce as detrimental to society exemplified fears of the destruction of the patriarchy and the power of man.

**Building a Binary in Lesbian Visual Culture**

The fight against gender binaries emphasized in visual culture and the dismantlement of the patriarchy continued during the Cold War as the United States targeted lesbian visual culture as another scapegoat. Post-World War II was a time of uncertainty for the world. The atomic bomb had been dropped, a Cold War between the USSR and the United States started, and social turmoil about gender and sexuality invaded American society. The ‘50s featured a time of insecurity for America, and behaviors beyond the norm or not readily understood were considered a threat to America’s ability to lead the world as a pinnacle of democracy. The beginning of the Cold War saw the Red Scare against communist sympathizers and the Lavender Scare, where gay men and women were targeted as otherized “homosexuals.” This phenomenon has been referred to as the Lavender Scare due to the comment made by Senator Everett Dirksen when he promised to remove the so called “lavender lads” from government (Smith 319). The reason given for targeting communists and “homosexuals” was to stabilize American society and democracy in the face of a war against communism. Popular portrayed lesbians as unfeminine and against domesticity and gay men as anti-masculine and morally weak. It was meant to strengthen the traditional role of the family as the center of freedom and national identity.

The Cold War fight against communism propelled conservatives and leaders in America into seeking a united identity through
propaganda and huge government inquiries to root out communists and outsiders. The upset of gender roles during World War II, combined with zoologist Alfred Kinsey’s “infamous” mid-century reports on male and, later, female sexuality, led to an uncertainty within the American consciousness. His reports shook the idea that homosexuality was the result of learned behavior or mental illness by depicting it as an intrinsic identity. He also pointed out that one in three men were likely to have had a same sex relationship and 1 out of 4 women (Walker 2). American society, through popular culture and government reports, looked back to traditional gender roles and the nuclear family as a stabilizing component in an uncertain world. More and more, “patriotism and masculinity were synonymous” (Smith 316). A fractured society would undermine the principles the U.S. was attempting to uphold during the Cold War. “Homosexuals” and nontraditional gender roles undermined the traditional masculine and feminine identities, therefore undermining American patriotism. Cultural Historian Geoffrey Smith states that a “fear of those who did not subscribe to prevailing sexual and gender norms” pervaded America (318). The winning of the Cold War relied upon one united American identity. The government connected homosexuality to communism, arguing that both posed a threat to democracy. The idea that some members of America did not follow traditional ethical codes created a national identity crisis (Bodnar 21). An America divided on moral grounds would only weaken the country in the fight against communism. Anyone who went against the accepted social traditions was a threat to the social stability and the success of America against the USSR. The fear of anything not democratic, traditional, or American caused many to associate gay individuals with communism. Their differences were considered dangerous to the American way of life. A *New York Times* article from 1960 showed the belief that homosexuality and communist leanings were connected. Two government employees defected to the Soviet Union. The article linked the defection with low moral fiber and homosexuality, writing that “the defectors were known to their acquaintances as ‘sex deviates’ (Raymond 9). The fact that the article discussed the defectors' sexuality at all showed the relationship within the public between sexuality and
trustworthiness. The widespread worry that someone’s sexuality could determine their ability to stay loyal caused paranoia and a crackdown on nontraditional expressions of identity.

In much the same way, lesbians were scrutinized and stereotyped through popular depictions during this time. To be a lesbian, one seemed unfeminine and against American values. A 1959 *Pageant Magazine* cover featured the article, “How to Understand the ‘Queer’ People,” invoking a sense of otherness and oddity directed by popular media toward gays and lesbians (see fig.7). The focus on traditional gender roles led to the reification of ideas about what exactly made a woman. She was supposed to be feminine, domestic, and submissive to her husband, something that was “crucial to the survival of American democracy” (Corber 6).

![Pageant Magazine](https://www.oldmagazinearticles.com/1950s-GAYS#.V94d0vmANHw)

Fig.7. Pageant Magazine. July 1959, www.oldmagazinearticles.com/1950s-GAYS#.V94d0vmANHw.

The belief in the threat of lesbianism to American society extended from Butch Femme culture. Although imitative of heteronormative gender roles, Butch-Femme culture removed men from
the equation, giving women more power within the relationship. “Butch” identity was the obvious stereotype of a lesbian. Mainstream, heterosexual society saw this identity as a “harshly hostile figure” who had a “masculine haircut, coarse skin, nasty vocabulary” and wore male clothing (Corber 2). This stereotype isolated the more overtly “traditional” lesbians from American society (4). The greater threat of lesbians came from the “femme” aspect, the women who looked feminine and acted it but were secretly gay (3). They validated the stereotype that lesbians could be anywhere, hiding. Even a hint of a woman’s sexuality as not heterosexual could result in her losing her job (Toops 96). As cultural historian David Johnson points out, the federal government was almost the only place a woman could gain a high-level job; her “ambition to rise to positions of responsibility in male-dominated environments” led to doubt about her femininity and sexuality (155). Because of this, lesbians policed their own behavior and persona, especially within public spheres of dating and work. Lesbians would “project a feminine persona” to “avoid suspicion” especially since men could easily trigger an investigation into a woman’s sexuality if they “resented reporting to a female boss” (Corber 18). The interrogation that ensued was considered by many as “the most demeaning experience” of their lives (Johnson 148). Washington D.C. and many other workplaces were filled with fear since “it happen[ed] to others, it could happen to them” (149). Mere socialization with “known homosexuals” was “sufficient cause for dismissal” (150). Social and political degradation of lesbians led to much harassment and isolation of lesbians from the mainstream (Toops 95). The result was a feeling and reality of Otherness within society.

Lesbians and gay men were subjected to voyeuristic articles like one in Pageant from 1959, with the cover stating “How to Understand the ‘Queer’ People” (Walker 2-8). This article has an eye-catching opening page with “Plain talk about HOMO - SEXUALS” emblazoned on the page and “sexuals” printed in red to draw the eye and create a connection between sex and gay men and women. The article attempts to explain how to interact with gays as well as explain why they are the way they are. Published relatively late in the 1950s, it exemplifies prejudice with phrases such as “those who are maladjusted sexually” and
“deviants” to describe gay men and women. The article attempts to foster understanding but presents gays and lesbians as people who are different and should be pitied and analyzed. The overall tone of the article shows the Lavender Scare’s legacy of othering and critiquing gays and lesbians as un-American and inhuman and therefore not privy to the same rights and privileges as other citizens of the United States.

The isolation caused by being labeled in such a way caused many gays and lesbians to turn to each other and form community. Losing economic security and social standing through job loss, and feeling isolated from society also led to many negative impacts on lesbians. Stress played a detrimental role in the lesbian identity – leading to mental health issues like anxiety and depression (Toops 103). One must recognize the great internalized homophobia and fear that many lesbians struggled with while simultaneously attempting to validate their own existence by forming various communities like the Daughters of Bilitis. Social hatred of lesbians was another barrier to overcome in order to form communities. Communities formed in order to band together against social prejudice but also to prove to the individual that their identity was valid, as many women and lesbians took “drastic measures” in order to hide their identities or rid themselves of the label of “lesbian” (99). In this way, the formation of the early gay rights movement can be understood as a result of both a need to band together and a validation of identity as well as a way to overcome internal and external prejudices and hatred of gays and lesbians. The social climate of the 1950s was not open to acceptance of different identities. Instead, stereotypes and dehumanizing propaganda about gays and lesbians formed America’s perception of these individuals. Popular culture and the rhetoric that stemmed from the Lavender Scare made American gays and lesbians into the dehumanized trope that threatened Cold War America. Because of this and despite this, gays and lesbians were able to overcome their own internalized fears and self-hatreds to form communities that would grow into Gay Lib and start the campaign for LGBTQ rights.

The censor of the U.S. government and harassment of “homosexuals” and “non-conformers” as a result of both Cold War paranoia and prejudice, led to attempts at dismantling America’s
traditional social values. Popular images and ideas found within articles, from news to sensationalized gossip, of both gay men and lesbians helped foster the idea of “homosexuals” as Other and apart from mainstream American society. The fear and paranoia sparked by the Red Scare and the Lavender Scare gave way to factions of society who rebelled against the status quo. The popular ideas of lesbians and gays found within magazines and government rhetoric not only created stereotypes but it also helped spread awareness of the existence of gays and lesbians. The idea of safety through persecution of “security threats” actually undid much of the social values of the day and led to the liberation movements of the 60s. The fear of differences that drove many of the early Cold War decisions led to the upheaval of American society and values. American minorities felt constrained by the scrutinizing effect put upon them by the government and “normal” portion of the United States. By constricting the ability to express individuality, Cold War culture created a build-up of resentment and fostered a desire for something different and freer. Instead of stabilizing and securing the nation, Cold War paranoia destroyed tradition and rebuilt America with rebellion and liberation movements.

Conclusion

All of the images deconstructed in these U.S. history survey papers come to similar conclusions: that popular visual culture images construct dangerous and false images of women century upon century. These images begin to seep into the national collective memory, confirming societal impressions of women as upholding whiteness and colonialism and always and forever walking the impossible line between upright moral purity or hypersexualization. These conclusions have helped history majors at our women’s college make sense of visual culture propaganda and imagery. One of the questions we address in class is why false narratives about women get passed down century upon century, and why women’s bodies and stories are remembered in such damaging ways. This often leads to lively discussions about media, education, and legal history, and ultimately the analysis of visual culture helps students
continue to scrutinize, question and critique narratives and images, mythos and ideas.

**Works Cited**


EMPOWERMENT THROUGH DIALOGUE:
WOMEN’S EXPERIENCE WITH DIVISION OF LABOR AS A LEISURE CONSTRAINT IN FAMILY LIFE

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In 1898, Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote, “The general discontent I felt with woman’s portion as wife, housekeeper, physician, and spiritual guide, the chaotic conditions into which everything fell without her constant supervision, and the wearied, anxious look of the majority of women, impressed me with a strong feeling that some active measures should be taken to remedy the wrongs of society in general, and of women in particular” (qtd. in Bohannon 37). This “wearied, anxious look of the majority of women” that Stanton described is not something confined to her day; it is also an accurate description of many women in society today. Women experience an extraordinary amount of depression, stress, heart disease, and other issues that influence their physical and psychological well-being.

Gender roles and the division of labor in heterosexual families typically result in the majority of daily maintenance tasks falling upon mothers. This is true even in dual-working families (described as the "second shift" by Hochschild). This burden of work on women in family life is also present in family recreation and travel. Mothers are generally responsible for the preparation, caregiving tasks during, and cleanup after family activities. Faced with these constraints, women often do not enjoy family activities as much as men. When considering the high level of heart disease, depression, stress, and other issues that influence women’s physical and psychological well-being, we can see that society
needs to address these concerns. The essay that follows examines the findings of a focus group talking about these topics. While our original study explored the constraints women experience in relation to motherhood and family travel, we came to see that the dialogue facilitated by our focus group provided a way to address the very constraints we were exploring.

**Women’s Physical and Psychological Health**

This study began as a response to the unequal impact of stress on the lives of women. According to a recent report (Regitz-Zagrosek), sex and gender are the most obvious and most important health risk factors for women. Important biological, environmental and behavioral differences contribute to a variety of health-related outcomes. Accordingly, scholars have identified a number of health concerns that are particularly prevalent in women. Regitz-Zagrosek argue that, while it may be difficult to separate the influence of sex and gender, evidence suggests that sex influences health by modifying behavior and that gender differences in behavior can have a modifying effect on biological factors and health. Chandola, et al. describe the “demand overload” (1145) that women often experience. They indicate that the workplace stress that many women experience combined with common household stress results in demand overload which compromises women’s health.

Over the past decade, The American Psychological Association has released an annual report on stress in America. Each year, women have reported higher stress levels than men. This is consistent with Frankenhaeuser’s findings from a 20-year long study of stress in men and women in positions of leadership. This research focused on the demands of balancing work and family responsibilities, the dilemmas faced by a dual-career couple, and women’s difficulty unwinding after the workday ends. This difficulty may actually be a result of what Hochschild termed “the second shift.” She describes the second shift as the housework and childcare responsibilities that continue to fall primarily on a mother even after a full day’s work outside the home.
Speck describes one consequence of such stress, identifying it as a primary cause of coronary heart disease in women.

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in women and men in America (Speck). Each year, more women die of cardiovascular disease than men, and Speck describes how stress is often both a contributor to the disease itself as well as a trigger for a cardiovascular event such as a heart attack or a stroke. Regitz-Zagrosek also addresses the significance of stress as a cause of heart disease in women. Citing a report from the American Heart Association, she indicates that young women are the only population group that is not experiencing a decline in myocardial infarction (heart attack). This elevated risk for young women may have a number of causes, but Regitz-Zagrosek identifies psychological factors as important contributors to women’s cardiovascular events. Stress is a key cause of heart disease in women, and Regitz-Zagrosek points to job stress and social stress as particularly relevant. Additionally, Chandola, et al. concludes that stress at home is a predictor of coronary heart disease in women.

In addition to measures of physical health, mental health factors have also been associated with stress. Depression is one mental health concern prevalent among women. Indeed, Regitz-Zagrosek suggests that depression is largely considered a female disease. Piccinelli and Wilkinson note that “with few exceptions, the prevalence, incidence and morbidity risk of depressive disorders are higher in females than in males, beginning at mid-puberty and persisting through adult life” (486). Griffin, et al. confirm that stress caused by household and family responsibilities is a significant factor in depression in women.

Researchers have identified many significant economic costs of depression. In a forty-year longitudinal study, Smith and Smith found that families who experience depression incur a lifetime cost of $300,000. Scholars have found that the total annual cost of depression in America (as determined by lost productivity and increased medical expenses) is $83 billion. Perhaps more importantly, the human costs of depression can be seen in those who experience it. These costs are recognized in feelings of isolation, an inability to enjoy life, great human sadness,
and—for as many as 42,000 people each year—suicide (Joiner, Kochanek, et al.).

In addition to these physical and psychological issues, women also experience detrimental effects of leisure constraints. Leisure constraints are described as those things that “inhibit or prohibit participation and enjoyment in leisure” (Jackson 62). Crawford and Godbey argue that constraints may also affect a person’s preferences for certain activities. They suggest three types of constraints that people may experience: intrapersonal (e.g. anxiety or lack of skill), interpersonal (e.g. conflict between two participants) and structural (e.g. lack of infrastructure or time).

More recently, scholars have suggested that people may experience constraints that do not fit within the existing taxonomy. When considering the societal pressures that people may experience to behave a certain way or participate in a certain activity, scholars have suggested that societal constraints must also be considered (Arab-Moghaddam, et. al; Samdahl). Many parents, for example, plan and participate in family recreation with a “sense of urgency” and are “purposive” in “consciously and deliberately” planning activities with a clear outcome or goal in mind (Shaw and Dawson, 224). This can be seen in the mother who carefully plans a playdate for children so they might benefit from the social interaction, or in the mother who plans a family vacation with the hope that it will bring the family closer together or simply because “that’s what families do.” These women have been described as reluctant participants (Wright and Goodale) who engage in activities to achieve some societal ideal rather than to experience a sense of fulfillment or personal leisure.

One context in which women experience leisure constraints is during family activities. Describing the experience of women in family recreation, Larson, Gillman and Richardson suggest that a mother’s leisure experience may be more constrained than other family members. Mothers commonly manage the schedule and the time pressures of family activities. They are often constrained by the work and subsequent exhaustion associated with planning and facilitating family recreation
and family travel. Due to these constraints, mothers often find it difficult to enjoy these activities, but, as Shaw and Henderson find, they often do not decrease participation because of the value they place on family recreation. The purpose of our study was to further explore the constraints mothers of young children experience in family travel and what could be done to help them enjoy these activities more. Findings relevant to this question are presented in a separate manuscript. The current paper will focus on the process of empowerment that our participants experienced through the dialogue of our study.

Creating Dialogue through Focus Groups

Focus groups have been used to gather data in a variety of fields over the last century. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis describe how focus groups are useful when exploring “real-world problems and asymmetries in the distribution of economic and social capital” (887). Focus groups are useful when researchers are exploring a phenomenon or problem in which the participants could benefit from discussing the issue together, rather than in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. Feminist scholar-activists, among others, have utilized focus groups to explore and advance various issues and causes (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis). Madriz explains:

Focus groups can be an important element in the advancement of an agenda of social justice for women, because they can serve to expose and validate women’s everyday experiences of subjugation and their individual and collective survival and resistance strategies...Group interviews are particularly suited for uncovering women’s daily experience through collective stories and resistance narratives that are filled with cultural symbols, words, signs, and ideological representations that reflect different dimensions of power and domination that frame women’s quotidian experiences. (836-839)

Kamberelis and Dimitriadis note that focus groups are useful for women to both generate “collective testimonies” and help women “find or produce their own unique and powerful voices” (893). We believed that conducting a focus group would be the most effective way to truly explore
the constraints women were experiencing in family vacation settings, and hoped the participants would brainstorm together or learn from each other as they considered how to address the challenges women experience. As we concluded the focus group, it was clear that there were no immediate solutions to the challenges the women were facing in regards to family vacations. What was striking, however, was how much better the women seemed to feel from just talking about their experiences with one another and seeing that they were not the only ones who felt this way. As we watched the women become empowered to confront their challenges through having this conversation, we could see a perfect example of “the power of the dialogue” as described by Paolo Freire in *Pedagogies of the Oppressed*. We will discuss how the women experienced this empowerment through the focus group as well as the implications this has for us as researchers and activists as we consider how to create dialogue and empower people in oppressed situations.

**Methods**

*Sample*

Five women participated in the focus group for this study. Since focus groups are most effective when they are composed of a relatively homogenous group of individuals (Henderson), we invited to participate heterosexual, married women who have at least two children, one of whom is five years of age or younger. As parents of young children ourselves, we acknowledge that being a mother of young children is a challenging life stage and wanted all of the participants to have this shared life experience. The participants all identified themselves as Caucasian and all reported a household income of $100,000 or more. All of the participants had a Bachelor’s degree, two had Master’s degrees, and one had a Doctoral degree. Working status included participants who work full-time, work part-time from home, and do not participate in paid employment. While this is a relatively small sample, it is adequate for facilitating a rigorous dialogue between participants and ultimately reaching data saturation (Henderson; Merriam). Having a fairly small group created a conversational environment where the participants were
able to feel like they were discussing how they felt with a group of friends, rather than a large group waiting to take their turn to speak.

The focus group for this study was held with a homogenous group of educated, upper middle class, white, heterosexual, married women. The majority of tourism research has focused on this sector of society, and consequently the academic view of family tourism reflects this segment of society. Tourism was historically an upper-class activity and became common for middle-class families during the “golden age of family vacations” in the 1960s (Rugh), but researchers have not explored family vacations for families who have less opportunity and resources or are from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Khoo-Lattimore and Wilson described the importance of moving away from a Western perspective of tourism and exploring the relatively invisible group of travelers from other cultures. Future research must explore the experience of family travel for women and families from more diverse backgrounds. We acknowledge that although this homogenous sample was useful in facilitating a comfortable conversation among participants, the homogeneity also has limitations.

Procedures

Participants were recruited through a purposeful sample of individuals that fit the qualifications for participation (Gentles, et al.). The focus group was held at a community center in a central community to where the participants live. During the focus group, we offered babysitting for children so that participants’ caregiving responsibilities would not prevent them from being able to participate. We attempted to facilitate an atmosphere in which the women would feel comfortable to speak freely, so we had the participants sit around tables that had been placed in a square shape, and offered refreshments and drinks for during the conversation. One of the members of the research team asked the questions and facilitated the discussion, and another member of the research team set up recording devices (both audio and video) and took notes during the discussion.

The focus group lasted approximately one hour and fifteen minutes. For each question, all participants were encouraged to answer.
Questions that were asked included, “What do you enjoy about family vacations?” and “What is difficult about family vacations?” We also asked, “What could be done to help overcome some of those challenges?” and “What could make family travel easier?” At the end of the focus group, participants completed a demographic questionnaire. The recordings were transcribed afterward. Participants received a $20 gift card to a location of their choice.

Analysis, Validity and Trustworthiness

A qualitative analysis was conducted to analyze the data from the focus group. We analyzed the data using open and axial coding (Corbin and Strauss; Merriam) and made an initial list of topics. Topics were then grouped into categories. We then wrote themes that synthesized the topics within a given category. Quotes were selected from participants that illustrated each theme. A concept map was developed that visually depicted the themes, and an overall theme was produced that synthesized the themes.

Steps were taken to increase the validity and trustworthiness of the findings. Member checks (Maxwell) were conducted with participants after the analysis was completed. Results were emailed to the participants and we asked if they accurately reflected their experiences; all participants indicated that the results accurately represented what they had said in the focus group and their experiences. An audit trail (Lincoln and Guba; Richards and Morse) was kept of all correspondence with participants, audio and visual recordings, transcription information, analysis notes, and member checks.

Results

Although specific topics and themes related to the research question regarding family vacations were generated, the surprising finding from the focus group was the feeling of empowerment for participants through the dialogue. As seen in the concept map below (see Figure 1), participants began the focus group with the pressures of societal norms and the attempt to project a “good mom” image. Through the dialogue,
there was a breakdown of barriers and a freedom to speak that the participants experienced. There followed four resulting outcomes from the dialogue that contributed to the overall empowerment of the participants.

**Figure 1.** Concept Map of Participant Empowerment

*I’m Not the Only One*

During the focus group, participants were asked about aspects of family vacations they enjoyed and did not enjoy. It was interesting to watch participants begin to discuss certain aspects of family vacations they did not enjoy, as if they felt like a “bad mom” for saying some of these things. But as they discussed the stress they felt preparing for vacations and exhaustion of cleaning up afterward, the irritability of being around arguing children on long road trips, and other challenges, they quickly came to see that the other participants had similar experiences. The participants talked about how they had felt like bad moms for not enjoying certain aspects of family vacations, but felt relief to discover that the other participants had similar experiences. One participant summed it up at the end of the focus group when she stated, “This makes me feel like I’m not alone. I always thought I was the weird one, like some kind of weird martyr.” To which another participant eagerly replied, “I know! Me too!”
Although there seemed to be no immediate solution to the challenges of family vacations that came through the discussion (“It will help for my kids to get older”), there was a sense of relief and encouragement as participants were leaving the focus group that they were not the only one who experienced these challenges and felt these emotions. This feeling of shared experience seemed to leave them with a feeling of “I’m not a bad mom if I don’t always enjoy this family time,” because other women, who appeared to be good moms, felt that way too. Once they felt the freedom to openly share their feelings (that they may have considered socially unacceptable, as one of them said “I feel selfish saying this, but…” and another stated, “I feeling guilty saying this...”), they realized other women felt the same way.

Support

Similarly, there was an immense feeling of support among the participants. Throughout the focus group, the participants were constantly validating what the other participants were saying. They seemed hesitant to speak openly at first; one participant prefaced her thoughts by saying, “Oh my gosh, this is so selfish of me, but...” Their hesitancy quickly melted away as they saw the other participants had had similar experiences and emotions. Throughout the discussion, there were constant sounds (and laughter) of agreement. Occasionally other participants even said “Amen!” after someone discussed something about family vacations they did not enjoy. During the discussion, they progressed from simply answering the facilitator’s questions to actually having a conversation with each other, repeating, supporting, and encouraging each other. There were several times during the discussion that the group replied “Yeah! I know what you mean! Me too!” After one participant had discussed something, another responded to her, “I love that you said that!” At the end of the conversation, one of the participants thanked the research team for inviting all of them, and another participant said, “Yes! This felt like therapy!” and they all laughed. Although the participants hadn’t known each other previously, there was a sudden bond and openness that occurred through the
discussion, and a setting of support and encouragement that developed throughout the dialogue.

**Perspective**

During the focus group, the participants discussed challenges related to family vacations, what could be done to deal with those challenges, and benefits of family vacations. After the participants realized that the negative aspects of family vacations were a common experience among all of them and they began to discuss how to address those challenges, one of the participants stated, “It would help for my kids to get older.” After the other participants laughed, another stated, “That would actually be really helpful.” They discussed how parenting and traveling with their older children has become easier, and they seemed to realize that this challenging stage of traveling with young children would not last forever.

As the group discussed the benefits of family travel, one of the participants stated, “It provides me the opportunity to be the mom that I wish I could be every day.” Through discussing the benefits of family vacations as well as the challenges, the participants seemed to come to a point at the end of the focus group where they recognized the challenges of family travel, but viewed those as being “worth it” because of the benefits gained from family vacations. One participant described an experience her daughter had on a family vacation and remembered, “To have that for her...and that is one of the sweetest memories that I have of her childhood. I’d go three thousand miles to have that moment again with her.” The participants left the focus group with an acknowledgement that other women experiences challenges with family travel, those challenges will not last forever, and in the long-run those challenges are worth the benefits received.

**Empowered to Change System**

Some of the challenges related to family travel were due to the division of labor in families and the fact that the bulk of preparation and cleanup for vacations was the responsibility of the mothers. One participant stated, “The planning and preparedness really falls to, at least in our
family, the mom,” to which the rest of the group laughed and agreed. One mother described her exhaustion from preparing for camping trips, and how she responded: “The most challenging part of traveling is the prep work. When we finally did [go camping], afterward we didn’t go camping for so long because I was like, ‘I’m done! That was not a vacation for me!’ Then we started doing it again. I was like, ‘You know what, honey? You’re going to have to help.’ Because I think that’s what makes it so stressful for me. I was stressed out before we left the house.” Although another participant described the challenge she has having her husband help with the preparation work (“As well-intentioned as my husband is, when he says, ‘Can I help?’ it’s just more work to tell him everything that needs to be done so it’s just easier to do it on your own.”), the women acknowledged that having others share the workload of preparation and cleanup could lessen the burden and exhaustion they experience.

In addition to asking for help from other family members, one woman described how she deals with the challenge of being overwhelmed by too much togetherness on vacations: “If I go for a walk or a bike ride on my own in the middle of the day for twenty minutes, it’s not such a big deal...or I can go for a walk on the beach or sit by the pool and he [her husband] can, you know, do some more one-on-one time with them [her children] rather than me needing to. I find that to be very helpful.” As she described taking this time away for herself on family vacations, the other participants seemed surprised (“You can do that?!”), and said they want to try that on their next vacation to help maintain their emotional well-being. With both seeking help to share the workload and taking time for themselves, the participants left the focus group encouraged with ideas of how to make changes in their family systems to be able to enjoy family vacations more.
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The dialogue that occurred during the focus group created an atmosphere in which the participants were empowered in various ways. Freire describes dialogue as being collective reflection or action in which is found great power for the participants. This “power of dialogue” is what Freire believed was so influential in emancipating and empowering people who are oppressed or disadvantaged. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis describe how Freire views dialogue as a means of fellowship and solidarity, which are essential to liberation and emancipation: “We can legitimately say that in the process of oppression, someone oppresses someone else; we cannot legitimately say that in the process of revolution, someone liberates someone else, nor yet that that someone liberates himself, but rather that men in communion liberate each other” (890). The women in our focus group gained a sense of encouragement and empowerment through their dialogue with one another as they shared their experiences and feelings. This sense of empowerment and encouragement, even emancipation from their previously held societal expectations of how they “should” feel is particularly important for women when we consider the emotional and physical challenges that women face (e.g. Piccinelli and Wilkinson; Regitz-Zagrosek).

As the women in the focus group felt the freedom to share their experiences and thoughts, they set aside societal expectations and judgments and were able to discuss how they truly felt, far more than if we had conducted one-on-one interviews. The atmosphere of the focus group was similar to what Lather and Smithies describe in their focus group with women living with HIV/AIDS: “The women attending this meeting were spilling over with excitement and ideas; their talk became a dialogue of issues and feelings and insights. Group process was producing a form and level of collaboration that could not be remotely duplicated in one-on-one interviews” (xix). Radway also discusses the group dynamics that can occur in focus groups and describes the collective energy of the group; this collective energy is the power of the dialogue that Freire indicated is critical to empowering and
emancipating people. The women in our focus group were empowered through the dialogue they had with each other, and this kind of dialogue can be beneficial in a variety of settings to empower people who face a variety of forms of oppression, discrimination, and disadvantage.

Freire promotes the role of conscientização, which refers to “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against oppressive elements of reality” (35). It is the responsibility of those seeking to help empower people in various situations to look for instances where oppression is occurring in a variety of forms and empowerment and emancipation is needed. This “authentic struggle to transform the situation” (Freire 47) can only be done in partnership with those needing the empowerment. Sometimes this requires helping people see the injustices or inequities in their situation for them to view it as a situation that needs to be changed, which can only occur through dialogue. Freire states that, “Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking” (92).

This kind of dialogue that compels people to action is what ignited Elizabeth Cady Stanton to fight for women’s rights. In both her discussions with Lucretia Mott in London during an anti-slavery convention in 1840, and in speaking with her friends in Waterloo, New York in 1848, the dialogue empowered Stanton and her colleagues to advocate for the rights of women. Stanton wrote, “My experience at the World’s Anti-Slavery Convention, all I had read of the legal status of women, and the oppression I saw everywhere, together swept across my soul, intensified now by many personal experiences. It seemed as if all the elements had conspired to impel me to some onward step. I could not see what to do or where to begin—my only thought was a public meeting for protest and discussion” (qtd. in Bohannon 37). Stanton knew that a dialogue on this topic was necessary to create change and begin to emancipate women. She and her colleagues held the Seneca Falls Convention in July of 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York, where they presented their “Declaration of Sentiments.” From this convention, the Women’s Rights Movement was born (Wellman).
Creating dialogue and space for conversation is necessary today in order to address societal injustices and discrimination experienced by many people. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis note the importance of creating safe and supportive spaces for dialogue (specifically focus groups) in mitigating against alienation, enhancing community building, and creating solidarity. As indicated through our results, focus groups can be a powerful forum for women to exchange their thoughts and express feelings. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis stated that, “focus groups afford women much safer and supportive contexts within which they may explore their lived experiences and the consequences of these experiences with other women who will understand what they are saying intellectually, emotionally, and viscerally” (897). They suggested that focus group meetings be held in safe spaces where women feel validated, comfortable, and important. Such settings are necessary so that people feel able to speak freely and engage in a process of social critique and social change.

Although the original intent was to explore women’s experience as mothers in the context of family travel and how to negotiate the constraints they experienced, the dialogue of the focus group itself became the means of empowering the participants. Our own experience at the Seneca Falls Dialogues as we presented this information was a perfect example of the issues we are facing in society and the problem in confronting these problems. Time after time when we have discussed the constraints mothers experience with family travel with women, the women nodded in agreement and expressed relief (as had our participants during the focus group) that they were not the only ones who had felt this way and had negative experiences on family vacations. Some of the women at the Seneca Falls Dialogues we spoke with said they loved hearing that this was a shared experience for women and wished that people could discuss things like this without feeling like a “bad mom.” However, when we speak about these issues with men, they do not seem to understand the problem or why this is an issue. One man in particular at the Seneca Falls Dialogues that spent time discussing this material with us questioned the significance of the study, indicating
this is just a description of parenting roles playing out on vacation. He seemed to not recognize how these “traditional parenting roles” represent an unfair distribution of labor and negatively impact one parent’s experience more than another. These reactions at the Seneca Falls Dialogues mirror reactions we have had in dozens of similar conversations, and further demonstrate the need to facilitate such discussions.

As we facilitate dialogue we can help change the systems that are oppressing women. We can and we must face societal issues and seek to empower people through mitigating against alienation, enhancing community building, and creating solidarity. We as researchers and activists must accept the responsibility to facilitate dialogue and create social change.

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THE NEW NORMAL: WGS PROGRAMS AND PROFESSIONALLY-DRIVEN STUDENTS

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INTRODUCTION

In today’s uncertain economic climate, students are understandably anxious about the cost of higher education. Fearing lasting debt, they are tending more toward programs that appear to lead directly to economic benefits, either by reducing the time until graduation or by raising their expected earnings afterwards. Cost considerations are particularly acute for students who rely extensively on financial aid to pay for their classes, and who may move in and out of student status for economic reasons on their way to a certificate or degree. Today’s students “are rationing their time and money” according to the Chronicle of Higher Education quoting Jerome S. Parker, president of Dallas County Community College (Hoover). For students like these, every course may be weighed in terms of either number of requirements a course can fulfill or the value of immediately marketable skills. Women and Gender Studies (WGS), like the Humanities in general, has seen an increase in the number of professionally-driven students who are taking these classes mainly as electives to meet graduation requirements.

The authors of this paper have direct experience developing and sustaining WGS with professionally-driven students at Mesa Community College, in Phoenix, Arizona. During our presentation and discussion at the 2016 Seneca Falls Dialogues, it became clear that our experiences were not an anomaly, as other universities, colleges, and community colleges were facing similar trends among their students as well as impacts on their programs. The thesis of this article is that Women and Gender Studies (WGS) provides important and practical
knowledge for professionally-driven students; that the rise in number of professionally-driven students offers an opportunity for sustaining and even growing WGS programs and their impact in light of this trend; and that this trend of increasing numbers of professionally-driven students in WGS classes has implications for teaching WGS.

**Benefits of WGS for Professionally-driven Students**

We see the value of WGS for professionally-driven students in three areas: identity, interrogation of power, and community-building. First, coursework for professionally-driven students is usually focused on learning a new body of knowledge and skills to prepare them to perform a role in an existing profession such as nursing, computer science, or business. In these classes, the pedagogy is mostly didactic. Also, the learning environment promotes sameness as students learn what is expected of them in their new profession. In contrast, WGS encourages an exploration of personal identity in a thoughtful and critical manner. As bell hooks asserts in her book, *Teaching to Transgress*, education is “the practice of freedom,” in which “our work is not merely to share information but to share the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students“ (13). This exploration of identity is important as it is a natural stage of development for 18 – 22 year olds. Even non-traditional students pursuing a professional degree are returning to the classroom for a transformation of their lives, which includes a shift in their own self-perception. Understanding what is unique about oneself can also lead to accepting the uniqueness of others. Peter McLaren notes, “Feminist pedagogy is committed to a nuanced understanding of identity that acknowledges...the differences between and among the students” (43). WGS classrooms, with a focus on intersectionality and diversity, support what Pena, et al. refer to as “equity-mindedness” (48), an outlook that promotes fairness while acknowledging differences in identities, histories and lived experiences. For professionally-driven students this perspective is invaluable, for they will be entering new careers in an ever-diversifying society.

Second, because professionally-driven students focus on job
opportunities in established professions, courses in their majors often reinforce existing structures and cultural norms. It would be unusual for these professional skill-based classes to critique the systems and hierarchies the students are preparing to enter. In contrast, foundational teaching in WGS courses is to invite students to interrogate power through the lens of gender, along with developing an understanding of intersectionalities of oppressions. These theories go beyond the mere negation of power. In her discussion of power and intersectionality, Susanne Knudsen states, “Power is not only a matter of suppression. Rather power may be defined as productive and positive. Closely related to power is the commitment to knowledge and truth” (67). This last point is particularly relevant for professionally-driven students, who will of necessity be entering established power structures and seeking their own agency within them.

We have seen that exposing professionally-driven students to feminist issues and theories can shape their professional studies and lives. For example, one of Ursic’s students became interested in supporting women-owned businesses in India and the U.S. in her field of fashion merchandising and design as a result of taking a WGS class. She designed a business proposal for developing long-fiber cotton that would benefit women in both countries. Such a tangible and immediate effect demonstrates the potential for WGS to reach well beyond academics into societal activism and change.

Third, the major courses for professionally-driven students tend to focus on the development of skills in the individual. In contrast, WGS creates a classroom environment where all students listen to and learn from each other. When class members feel themselves to be a community co-creating knowledge, it encourages respectful dialogue and mutual support. Creating time and ways for students to get to know each other and create community within the classroom is helpful, as it fosters relationships that promote a willingness to listen to and support each other (Reflexive).

Moreover, community is foundational for a feminist value system, which emphasizes a more egalitarian approach to the creation of
knowledge. Innovative techniques for creating and utilizing community in WGS classroom experience is critical, especially for professionally-driven students. Modeling less hierarchy and more collaboration and dialogue in the classroom can help students to see hierarchy and patriarchy in other classes and work environments. While didactic and hierarchical forms of teaching and learning might be appropriate for professional courses where specialized skill-building is a focus, eventually professionally-driven students will have to learn how to work collaboratively with a diversity of peers, subordinates, superiors, and clients.

Creating community with a diversity of student backgrounds, including the presence of professionally-driven students, can also be a gift for WGS class discussions because the students themselves generate the range of opinions and views regarding gender, sexuality, and truth claims that allows the professor to frame discussions with relevant feminist theories. Even today there are students who are surprised at Judith Butler’s theory of gender performance, let alone E. Patrick Johnson’s quare theory, and its critique of queer theory using “racialized sexual knowledge” (3). Equally important, when some students claim truth based on other sources, such as the inerrancy of the Bible, their statements offer a way to introduce alternative approaches to reading patriarchal texts and defining truth using a feminist lens. The use of alternate epistemologies also demonstrates that the WGS class can do more than just teach; it can model ways to put teaching into practice that professionally-driven students can introduce into their careers when given the chance.

**WGS and Implications for Institutions**

This shift in student interest in professional degrees also has implications for our educational institutions. The following discussion, which combines our own institutional experiences with those of participants at the Seneca Falls Dialogues, reveals the general shifts and realignments of WGS over the past forty years. We begin with our own experience.
Mesa Community College, where we teach, is the largest of ten colleges in the Maricopa Community College District (MCCCD), one of the largest community college districts in the nation. MCCCD has a combined enrollment of over a quarter million students (Maricopa Community Colleges: Demographics). Paralleling national trends, MCCCD faculty in the 1970s began to include women’s issues within their disciplines. In the 1980s, planning began to create a women’s studies department, with the intention that the courses would be taught by full-time tenured women’s studies faculty. The 1990s brought institutional approval for a WST prefix in order to create courses exclusively focused on women’s studies. A women’s studies program was created, comprised of cross-listed courses from various disciplines, as well as new WST-only courses (Course Search). Qualifications to teach the new WST courses require a masters in WST.

While the WST prefix has remained, the larger vision of a WST department with dedicated full-time tenured faculty has never been accomplished. In the new millennium, development of WST at Mesa Community College has stalled, and participants at the Seneca Falls Dialogues reported a similar loss of WST momentum at their institutions. Even WST programs with department status have had their funding cut, their faculty reduced, and a moratorium or reduction in tenured faculty lines.

At MCC we have seen that when an academic program does not achieve its structural goals, secondary problems arise. In our case, no full-time faculty has been hired with a WST graduate degree because there was no departmental position for it. As a consequence, our core WST classes are all taught by adjuncts and there is no institutionally recognized position for WST advocacy. At the Seneca Falls Dialogues similar situations emerged, such as promises of tenure that failed to materialize, and faculty being required to take on administration of WST programs with no additional compensation.

To address the stagnation at MCC, we have refocused our efforts with a new programmatic vision for WST and we see professionally-driven students as a key to this change. Instead of seeking departmental
status, our focus has shifted to raising the profile of WST at the institution in multiple ways. The first has been to update the name and scope of the program, following a trend in the discipline, from Women’s Studies (WST) to Women and Gender studies (WGS).

The second has been to expand the number of approved cross-listed WGS courses. It had been over twenty years since cross-listing was the focus of the program, and many relevant courses had been developed in other departments during that time, especially around themes of sexuality. When we initiated contact, we found these other departments were happy to expand their reach. Expanding the offering of WGS cross-listed courses has raised the profile of WGS among administration, expanded our network of WGS faculty allies, and increased interest in WGS among professionally-driven students.

A third approach has been to encourage faculty to include feminist theory in non-crosslisted courses. In an Introduction to Mythology course, Sheffield added feminist theories to the curriculum, encouraging their use in analyzing myths and their effects on cultural belief systems and social structures. In one class, a trans-female who had been performing as a male asked to perform as a goddess in a presentation, leading to a full-class discussion of performativity, embodiment, and assigned gender roles, something that may not have occurred had feminist theories not been prominent in the course.

A fourth effort has been to rethink the initiatives and programs offered through the MCC WGS committee. While the committee continues to focus its efforts on Domestic Violence Month and Women’s History Month, we have been intent on using these platforms to raise awareness among our colleagues in STEM and other professional fields. For example, we chose to focus on Women in STEM for Women’s History Month in 2016. This decision gave us the opportunity to contact the chairs of these departments and request that they include an agenda item for their department meetings to generate names of women in their field for us to highlight during the month. The result has been an increased awareness and appreciation of WGS by STEM departments.

Finally, we have adjusted the requirements for teaching the
WGS-only courses to allow faculty from related fields whose graduate work focused on gender to teach the WGS core courses. This action may not be applicable to all institutions, but we have realized that without at least some full-time tenured faculty teaching the core WGS courses, the program could easily disappear. This solution has also allowed us to embed WGS institutionally and reach a broader spectrum of students. A similar solution was offered by another participant at the Seneca Falls Dialogues, who found herself developing WGS modules for professional graduate degree programs such as business and law, where WGS theory has practical applications and legal ramifications.

**Implications for WGS Teaching**

There are implications for WGS faculty to consider in the teaching and course structure as more professionally-driven students take their classes. First, because these students are already committed to another career path, the professionally-driven student will more often take one or two WGS courses rather than a complete WGS program or major. This trend suggests that most classes will include students taking a WGS course for the first time as an elective. As our Seneca Falls Dialogues session revealed, even at upper division and graduate levels, faculty will often find some students needing an introduction to the discipline. Building time at the beginning of the course for foundational WGS readings and lecture content will help all students in the class to participate and succeed as a cohort.

Second, a balance must be struck between the emphasis on theory and activism within a WGS course that includes professionally-driven students. While the discussion at the Seneca Falls Dialogues mirrored the ongoing debate regarding activism versus theory, further exploration showed the need for both grounded application as well as theoretical framing when teaching WGS. For students, who are seeking both new ways to view themselves and the world and new ways to integrate these revelatory insights into their lives, both theory and activism are essential. When teaching theory, it is important to remember that students who view their education in more utilitarian ways want to
know how a theory connects with their lives. In large part, we see this as a fruitful challenge for teaching because WGS theory in a vacuum may not necessarily inspire the societal change it points to. Theory becomes relevant and exciting for students when they can connect it to their own individual freedom, agency, voice, and identity, and apply new theoretical tools for social analysis and critique.

Additionally, activism continues to evolve both inside and outside of organizations, and therefore, teaching that inspires activism needs to evolve as well. As WGS research has shown, feminist coalitions are finding ways to protest within patriarchal organizations (Katzenstein). Teaching a WGS class can help students reflect and identify where they see a best fit for their particular skills and talents to work on the causes they care about. It is particularly important to educate professionally-driven students to become aware of intersectional identities in the workplace so that they are prepared to address these issues when they arise in their careers. This awareness is the foundation of activism, which can make the workplace more equitable for all and can be a potential gift for the larger economy and society. In addition, understanding how gender and sexual identities continue to evolve and how employers are responding to changing social norms and legal requirements is essential for students to understand as they embark on their careers today.

**Conclusion**

The realities surrounding today’s students and their educational choices suggest that the focus on professionally-driven majors will continue. We are pleased to see WGS faculty being proactive in rethinking their programs in light of this trend as well as innovative new course offerings and partnerships on their campuses. Our experience advocating for WGS at a large urban community college has shown us the value of WGS for professionally-driven students. Our Seneca Falls Dialogues confirmed this trend for four-year and graduate programs as well. Students at all levels of higher education are not only seeking ways to change the economic realities of their lives, but they are also exploring their sense of
purpose and identity at the same time. Instead of seeing professionally-driven students as ancillary to a WGS program, we see an opportunity to have broader impact across the student body. WGS courses can bring students together from a variety of backgrounds and interests, and WGS classes can provide a cohort of support, creating change on campus and in the wider community.

The curriculum and student services challenges that MCCCD and MCC have faced in the new millennium regarding Women and Gender Studies are not unique to our institution. As we have seen from our session at the Seneca Falls Dialogues, other institutions of higher learning are also facing challenges in anchoring WGS faculty and in sustaining resources and support on their campuses. Nor are the concerns currently facing WGS unique to this field. All academic disciplines must continually adapt to remain relevant to current trends and needs, both from outside and inside their institutions.

While we expect that there will always be students who pursue PhDs in WGS to become the next generation of academic and prophetic voices in the field, we recognize that serving the ever-increasing population of professionally-driven students is a different but equally important role for WGS faculty and programs. WGS offers students the education to analyze and reconceptualize the world around them and to find their voice for contributing to positive change in the world. Quite simply, when students connect their personal agency and passion with their career choices, they enter the workforce with greater confidence, focus, and purpose. WGS education for professionally-driven students is essential to students’ becoming transformational leaders that shape a better world for today and tomorrow.

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INTERSECTIONALITY AND FEMINIST PEDAGOGY: 
LESSONS FROM TEACHING ABOUT RACISM AND ECONOMIC INEQUITY

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INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2014, in the aftermath of the Michael Brown shooting in Ferguson, MO, and in the subsequent rise of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, we came together at our small liberal arts college to discuss what we could do to create change on our campus, where race relations mirror some of the troubling larger cultural trends, not of overt violence, but of silence, micro-aggressions, and a lack of productive dialogue about race. Each of us teaches race issues in the classroom, and has noted that attempting to move students beyond what Gloria Yamato refers to as unaware/unintentional racism has been challenging. Yamato explains this form of racism as a lack of awareness of white privilege: “With the best of intentions, the best of educations, and the greatest generosity of heart, whites, operating on the misinformation fed to them from day one, will behave in ways that are racist, will perpetuate racism by being ‘nice’ the way we’re taught to be nice” (Yamato 100).

To help address racism, we created the Fisher Race Initiatives (FRI)—a series of interactive workshops where faculty would provide a brief lecture on a race issue based on their discipline, followed by individual round table discussions that culminated in a large group report back at the end. Our goals were to promote dialogue on race, to increase awareness of white privilege, and to expose participants to
factual information on race. When we presented our FRI experience to the Seneca Falls Dialogues at a conference, we were met in part with some of the same resistance that we face in the classroom. Some audience members expressed a desire to not differentiate into identity groups and strongly expressed that they believed there would be no “solution” to racism if we were so identity based. They argued that there was no need to differentiate between politics of white feminists, feminists of color, liberal feminists, socialist feminists, radical feminists—that such divisions took away from what feminists could achieve together. Indeed, as one faculty member participant clearly expressed: “Why can’t we all just get along?”

Such reactions in the classroom, at the Dialogues, and in our everyday lives in the current political climate have underscored for us some critical and intertwining lessons at the heart of this paper, the core of which is the need for intersectionality. The experience of preparing and presenting the Fisher Race Initiatives dialogues was enriching for the authors professionally, as we came to this project from very different fields: one with a joint appointment in Women and Gender Studies and English, another from Sociology, and a third from Biology. As a result of our experiences preparing for and presenting about the Fisher Race Dialogues, we recognized that our cross-disciplinary collaboration had broader implications for intersectional third-wave feminist pedagogy.

With Rochester as a specific case study, we have worked together across disciplines over multiple semesters on race inequity and argue that approaching race intersectionally and across disciplines creates a stronger model of feminist pedagogy. We argue that an intersectional lens is needed to fully understand the causes of poverty in the Rochester region, but also that it is essential for teachers in white spaces to examine issues of race and class that critically inform white privilege. Our collaborative work provides lessons about teaching and learning about intersectionality; in order to understand the economic status of women of color in Rochester and elsewhere, it is necessary to understand the historical, rhetorical, and sociological phenomena that engender and promulgate racism and economic inequity.
I. Race and Poverty in Rochester

One initial aim of the Fisher Race Initiative was to explore how and why the same factors that motivated the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement were present in Rochester, Monroe County, and the Finger Lakes region of New York State. The pattern in this geographic area—an impoverished population primarily made up of people of color in densely populated, aging urban areas experiencing high crime rates and aggressive policing and surrounded by higher income, whiter suburbs—is prevalent throughout the United States. The Rochester Area Community Foundation compiles data on community indicators of poverty via its research arm, ACT. Their annual report in 2016 dramatically illustrates this demographic and economic pattern, as reported in tables 1 and 2.

Table 1
Poverty Rate in the city of Rochester, NY, and surrounding communities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poverty Rate</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rochester City</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban Monroe County</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surrounding Finger Lakes County</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Rochester Area Community Foundation (18)

Table 2
Poverty rates (percentages) by race in the Finger Lakes, New York State, and the United States.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>All races</th>
<th>Whites</th>
<th>African Americans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finger Lakes Region</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY State excluding New York City (“Upstate”)</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY State</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Rochester Area Community Foundation (13)

The ubiquity of this demographic pattern across the U.S. contributes to a perception that it is somehow “natural.” To address this
perception, the biologist in our group examined the issue of innate differences among human racial groups in the Fisher Race Initiatives dialogues. It is definitively the case that race is not biologically meaningful, but in our experience, it is essential to address this common misperception up front. Once the issue of systemic biological difference was rejected, dialogue participants needed to examine what makes race “real”—the reality of race is that it is a social construction.

The English and Women and Gender Studies Professor asked participants to look at the scientific racism of the 19th century eugenics movement via “morphological and aesthetic trees of the human race”—images of trees whose branches were labeled with categories of human races. Rhetorically, the trees were used as markers of difference and inferiority so that at a glance, viewers could understand the racial hierarchy and know who was least worthy of legal or social consideration. Created by Europeans, human history was imaged as progressive, with the European on top as the pinnacle of progress, beauty, and development, and the African and aboriginal peoples at the nadir as the less evolved and least attractive. In the workshop, students discussed how race was constructed—and the rhetorical purpose of creating difference so that some races would “naturally” serve others and deserve to be impoverished or otherwise disenfranchised. Giving students a historical framework to understand the origin of racial categorization and hierarchies is critically important in avoiding victim-blaming, which so often happens to impoverished minority communities.

**Historical Factors Contributing to Economic Inequality in Monroe County: Redlining and Institutional Racism**

After developing a better understanding about the socially constructed nature of race, FRI dialogue participants were encouraged to think about factors that have created racial and economic inequity in modern Monroe County. One important contributor was the discriminatory nature of the federal government’s official housing policies in the middle 20th century, details of which we provided to participants.
Established in 1934, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) revolutionized home ownership by creating the current financial mortgage system whereby a home buyer can purchase a home by putting down 10 percent or 20 percent of the cost and financing the rest through a bank or lending institution. This made homeownership possible to millions of Americans who previously could not have afforded to buy a home outright (Smith). Mortgages underwritten by the FHA had to conform to The Underwriting Handbook, which, among other things, specified the types and qualities of properties considered worthy of mortgage approval. A key part of the handbook were the “residential security maps,” created by the Home Owners’ Loan Coalition (HOLC) for 239 cities between 1935 and 1940. The security maps delineated four color categories for neighborhoods—from green for those considered safest for mortgage lending—to blue, yellow, and finally red for those neighborhoods considered poor financial risks and not suitable for lending at easy credit terms. HOLC maps were purportedly used to indicate the security level for real estate investments; however, property assessments were made based on racist assumptions. The primary determinant of financial risk was the racial and ethnic composition of the neighborhood where the property existed. “Communities that were all white, suburban and far away from minority areas received the highest rating, coded green on maps. Communities that were all minority or in the process of changing, got the lowest rating and the color red. They were ‘redlined'” (Smith).

When we examined the HOLC maps for our region, it was clear that a similar pattern was true in the city of Rochester. The area encompassed by the HOLC had an African-American population of less than 1 percent in 1934—still, 69% of the mapped area was colored yellow or red, as a result of higher levels of immigrant populations (Nelson et al.). For example, redlined area “D7” on the Rochester map was composed of 20% foreign families, Italian and Polish in nationality. The map description makes clear that it was neither the property nor the location that was the reason for redlining: “This area is far better than a slum district. There is nothing particularly the matter with it ... it has
simply deteriorated into a relatively poor man’s neighborhood.” The writers make clear that the neighborhood’s chief drawback is its inhabitants. In fact, the description continues with an overall positive assessment: “The houses are set back a little from shaded streets. The lots are a bit narrow and not very well maintained. But it is convenient and there are some light manufacturing plants affording employment. Transportation is good. Stores … churches and schools are handy. There are all city facilities. The land is flat” (Nelson et al.). HOLC maps segregated communities across the United States for generations by enshrining the principle that white neighborhoods were safer to invest in (Denton 65). Between 1934 and 1962, the federal government underwrote 120 billion dollars in new housing using the guidance of The Underwriting Handbook. Less than 2% of these mortgages went to non-whites under the principle that permitting black families to move in would cause neighborhood housing values to decline—simply because they were black (Smith). In Rochester, as European immigrants assimilated as “whites” and moved to the suburbs during the mid-twentieth century, they were replaced in city neighborhoods by African-Americans moving in from the southern United States. While the government could have mandated a nondiscrimination policy or at least allowed local lenders to make autonomous decisions, they instead created a federal policy that institutionalized racism in Rochester and across the United States:

From its inception, FHA set itself up as the protector of the all-white neighborhood. It sent its agents into the field to keep Negroes and other minorities from buying houses in white neighborhoods. It exerted pressure against builders who dared to build for minorities, and against lenders willing to lend on mortgages. This official agency not only kept Negroes in their place but pointed at Chinese, Mexicans, American Indians, and other minorities as well. (Abrams 230)

Presenting this information within a historical frame at FRI enabled participants to better understand the systemic nature of institutionalized racism in the housing market. Thus when we moved to
current issues of racial inequity in Rochester, students were better able to understand how the housing market privileged white citizens as public policy and discriminated against citizens of color. This framework made students less likely to blame people of color for their impoverished condition.

By 2010, the “D7” neighborhood had an African-American population of 25 percent. In fact, in aggregate, the redlined areas on the 1934 map correspond to what Rochester city planners today refer to as “the crescent,” a ring of neighborhoods surrounding downtown that are high poverty and inhabited primarily by people of color. FHA policy thus ensured that white citizens accrued wealth in the form of their homes, while black and other citizens of color were denied access to home ownership. The maps may have been delineated in red, yellow, blue, and green, but they spoke most vividly in black and white.

In 1968, President Johnson signed the Fair Housing Act that removed racial language from the federal housing policy, officially ending legal discrimination. However, the massive project of suburbanization that occurred in the 1950s and 60s cast the die for continued segregation. Modern residential segregation helps explain why discriminatory lending practices continue even today. Under the leadership of Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, New York State led an investigation of Five Star Bank for discriminatory lending practices, including redlining. In 2015, the Attorney General’s office released its findings, including that Five Star had actively practiced redlining for at least seven years. Five Star Bank had “excluded all predominantly minority neighborhoods in the Rochester area from [its] mortgage lending business [and] deemed loans secured by property outside of the bank’s lending area to be ‘undesirable’” (“A.G. Schneiderman Secures” par. 1). The Bank had also required a minimum mortgage amount so high that many of the bank’s mortgage products were unavailable in predominantly minority neighborhoods. Just as the HOLC had done for the FHA in the late 1930’s, Five Star created a map defining its lending area to include most of the surroundings of the city of Rochester, but to exclude Rochester
itself and all of the predominantly minority neighborhoods in and around Rochester from at least 2009.

Even 47 years after the passage of the Fair Housing Act, evidence of racial discrimination in access to the mechanisms of wealth creation is still with us. Foregrounding the racial analysis within a historical context is pedagogically useful because it allows students to see the long-standing implications of living within a racist system. One of the benefits of privilege is to presume that people exist on a level playing field, and some of our white students are guilty of this assumption. Some were shocked to discover that such lending practices still continue in an America they believed offered equality to all.

For some of the students of color in the workshops, the specific history of 19th century racist housing practices may be unknown, but the current practices of racism in Rochester are often familiar. One black student approached one of us after the workshop to ask if she could take extra materials to share with her family whom she stated had been denied a loan from Five Star Bank. The profound economic impact of the institutionalized racist housing policy in the mid-twentieth century on the continued cycle of poverty and divestment of wealth in black and immigrant communities cannot be understated. It provides valuable lessons on our campus on contemporary privilege and inequality from an interdisciplinary lens.

**Sociological Factors that Maintain Segregation and Economic Inequity: Myrdal’s Vicious Circle**

In addition to our biological and historical approaches in FRI, we also employed a sociological framework, one that took a holistic perspective in explaining what appears to be a never-ending cycle of racial inequity. In An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy, which was originally published in 1944, Myrdal proposed that there was a “vicious circle” that prevented blacks from full inclusion and incorporation in the U.S. In his highly influential work, Myrdal suggested that the effects of white prejudice and discrimination led to lower standards of living for blacks (vis-à-vis employment
discrimination, residential segregation, and other effects of Jim Crow laws), which also affected their supposed manners and morals. In turn, these adaptive behavioral patterns reinforced white prejudice, creating a perpetual cycle of poverty, prejudice, and discrimination for blacks.

Despite being published prior to major Civil Rights legislation in the 1960s, an era that many white undergraduate students often assume fixed all of the race problems in the U.S., Myrdal’s work continued to inform the writings of social theorists interested in understanding race, poverty and justice in the U.S. Among these theorists is David James, who asserted in 1994 that the racial ghetto, a result of past overt racism and discrimination supported by the state, continues to be a “race-making situation.” Referencing Elijah Anderson’s book *Streetwise*, James suggested that an emergent “street” culture had become an integral part of Myrdal’s “vicious circle” as an adaptive behavioral pattern which also contributes to white fear of black criminality.

In our FRI dialogues, the Sociology professor shared his expertise on racial inequality in the justice system. Segregation in cities, as we’ve described with Rochester above, results in lower standards of living which in turn contributes to higher rates of crime—or rather detection of street level crime—in black urban neighborhoods. Street crimes include both violent and nonviolent crimes. Some examples of violent crimes include homicide, aggravated assault, robbery, forcible rape and generally any type of offense involving the use or threat of force (e.g., domestic violence). Nonviolent crimes generally include property, drug and public order offenses. Although these are often ambiguously referred to altogether as street crimes because many tend to occur in an observable public space, the category of street crime is intended to make it distinct from white-collar crime, which often occurs behind closed doors. The division between street crime and white-collar crime reflects the social class stratification of crime itself, as white-collar crime is almost exclusively committed by middle and upper class professionals who have more opportunities to commit these types of crimes.
Still, Americans tend to be concerned almost exclusively with street crimes. Because blacks are more likely to be poor, they are also disproportionately represented in street crimes. As Shaun Gabbidon and Helen Greene detail in their book *Race and Crime*, blacks and other racial minorities are overrepresented in crime statistics. After reviewing the extensive research in the area of study that Gabbidon and Greene describe in their book, one should not be surprised that blacks and Latinos make up nearly 60% of the prison population while representing only about 29% of the U.S. population (see Sakala). Indeed, although Gabbidon and Greene do not explicitly state this, the organization of their book as well as the research they cite offer an alternative explanation for the “criminal justice funnel.” The idea of the criminal justice funnel is often taught in criminal justice courses to explain that, due to limited resources and other factors, only certain crimes actually make their way through the judicial process—from arrest to adjudication to trial to sentencing and ultimately to corrections. Their book details how nonwhites, especially African Americans, are disadvantaged throughout the entire process.

As documented by Gabbidon and Greene, at every stage of the “justice” system, nonwhites seem to have a higher likelihood to progress through the justice system while whites seem to have a higher likelihood to become excluded from it. At the level of policing, nonwhites are more likely to become included due to biased practices ranging from racial profiling to hot-spot or community policing. Throughout the process with the courts, whites are more likely to become excluded as they are more likely to be able to post bail, and posting bail increases the likelihood of a successful defense. Nonwhites are also more likely to be excluded from a jury, and thus, implicit biases against nonwhites are more likely to lead to the successful prosecution of nonwhites rather than whites. Moreover, while research indicates that public defenders are just as effective as private attorneys in defending their clients, private attorneys tend to be able to get their clients lighter sentences; white offenders—due to class divisions as we described above—are more likely to be able to hire their own private attorney. Likewise, stereotypically “black” crimes, such as
possession of crack, will garner lengthier sentences than crimes not associated with poor blacks (e.g., possession of cocaine).

The vicious circle model provided us and our FRI dialogue participants an explanation for persistent black poverty and high crime rates in urban areas that allowed us to move on from ideas of “natural” or “deserved” that sometimes infect discussions of racial inequity on campus. It also provided a hypothesis that we could begin to test given the current day conditions in Rochester and Monroe County.

The Vicious Circle at Work in Rochester

In Monroe County, municipal and school district boundaries helped to create and continue to maintain deep racial and economic segregation, aided by the principles of the vicious circle. EdBuild, a non-profit organization that advocates for more equitable public school funding processes, analyzed differences in child poverty rates across the over 33,000 school district boundaries in the United States and reported on the 50 most segregating borders (11). Three of the 50 borders were between the Rochester City School District (RCSD) and neighboring suburban districts: Penfield, Brighton, and West Irondequoit. (For our comparison in Table 3 we used data from the US Census to compare demographic and economic data of the approximate boundaries of RCSD with those of the Penfield and Brighton school districts. West Irondequoit was excluded from this analysis because the school district boundary encompasses just half of the census boundary for the suburb.) In truth, this analysis under-represents economic segregation in Monroe County, as several wealthy suburban school districts in the county do not share an immediate border with RCSD.

It is clear from the data in table 3 that the city of Rochester is significantly blacker and poorer than the adjacent suburbs. Inequality extends beyond segregation and income to differences in total wealth as measured by home value; the median value for a home in the city is less than half that in these neighboring communities.
Table 3
Economic and demographic characteristics of the city of Rochester, NY, compared to adjacent suburbs of Penfield and Brighton, NY.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rochester</th>
<th>Penfield</th>
<th>Brighton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% White population (2010)</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>92.6</td>
<td>79.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% African American population (2010)</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median household income</td>
<td>$30,969</td>
<td>$78,469</td>
<td>$66,149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median home value</td>
<td>$76,200</td>
<td>$179,800</td>
<td>$170,300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: US Census

The racial and economic segregation illustrated by tables 1 – 3 are a direct result of government policies in the past (e.g. redlining) that impoverished African Americans and that continue to feed segregation and impoverishment via the vicious circle. The circle is further exacerbated by the impact of segregation on families and thus on the academic success and prospects for their children. Table 4 summarizes data from the ACT Rochester report illustrating that those who are the poorest in the city are families with young children, especially those headed by single women. The poverty rates of all families with children in the city greatly exceed rates for similar families in the surrounding communities.

Table 4
Poverty rate (percent) of families with different characteristics in the city of Rochester compared to the Finger Lakes Region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All families</th>
<th>Families with children under 18</th>
<th>Families of married couples</th>
<th>Female-headed families</th>
<th>Female-headed families with children under 18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rochester City</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>59.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finger Lakes Region</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Rochester Area Community Foundation (15)
The disproportionate impact of segregation on the lives of women and their young children is evident in school district rankings. Buffalo Business First ranked all 431 Upstate New York school districts with enrollments greater than 200 students using a formula based on test results from 2011 through 2014. Of the schools in our highly segregating list, Penfield was 7th in the rankings, Brighton 8th, and West Irondequoit 23rd. The Rochester City School District was 431st; the lowest possible ranking. Because families with children take the academic rankings of school districts into account when choosing housing, those with the means to generally seek to live in the highest ranked districts. These decisions result in a further decline in housing values in the city as family homes there attract fewer potential buyers. The net results of seemingly non-racially motivated individual decisions further entrench the racial segregation of the region, resulting in poor African Americans becoming concentrated in the city of Rochester and city homeowners becoming further impoverished and unable to move elsewhere as the values of their homes decline.

White families in Monroe County do not choose to live in the suburbs only because of differences in school quality; they also choose the suburbs because of perceived differences in personal safety. Upon examining arrest rates as a part of the justice system, we are able to see that there are great disparities in the greater Rochester area. In a report by Meaghan McDermott for the Democrat & Chronicle, an illustrative table shows that the arrest rate of blacks in Rochester for 2012 was approximately 65%, which is about 25% higher than the black population in Rochester.

In Gates, the black community represents about 10 percent of the town's population. But in 2011 and 2012, more than 40 percent of all arrests police made there were of black people, according to statistics provided by the town's Police Department to the FBI. Within Monroe County, the average disparity rate means blacks are arrested at a rate about six times higher than people of other races. The highest rate was in Irondequoit, where blacks
are nearly 8 times more likely to be arrested than non-blacks. (McDermott pars. 1-5)

These local statistics may only represent a tip of the iceberg in racial disparities in the local justice system. Recent research by the New York Times, for example, suggests that there are glaring racial disparities in New York State prisons favoring whites including excessive use of force, harassment, periods of solitary confinement, and the rate of success in parole board hearings. Perhaps also very chilling is the fact that such official statistics of crime, end up reinforcing stereotypes, which brings us back to how racist ideologies affect institutional practices within Myrdal’s vicious circle.

In Rochester, we have seen that historical white prejudice resulted in residential segregation. Residential segregation then produced unequal outcomes, such as in education, disproportionately creating lower standards of living for blacks. As expressed by rates of street crime, this lower standard of living leads to oppositional cultures among poor blacks. These oppositional cultures then reinforce white prejudice, which is used to rationalize continued institutional discrimination, such as in the criminal justice system (see Shaun Gabbidon and Helen Greene). White prejudice and discrimination are then used to maintain residential segregation, continuing the perpetual cycle that Myrdal originally coined as the “vicious circle.”

Finally, we note that segregation, concentrated black poverty, inequity in education, and extraordinarily high levels of incarceration among black men all affect black women disproportionately. To echo the #BlackLivesMatter movement, the reason why race and poverty need to matter for feminists is because black women’s lives matter.

II. The Importance of Intersectionality in Feminist Pedagogy

Teaching about race and equity at our small private liberal arts college poses some significant challenges. As Peggy McIntosh pointed out in her groundbreaking essay “White Privilege and Male Privilege,” students have been trained to conceive of racism as specific bad acts that prejudiced whites do to people of color, rather than thinking of the corollary aspect of racism: white privilege, and how it benefits whites
and perpetuates racism. White students regularly express unaware/unintentional racism—that is, they don’t conceive of themselves as racist, don’t intend to be racist, and generally react defensively when they are implicated in racism. This occurs in large part because, as McIntosh asserts about her education, many white people have “no training in seeing [themself] as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture” (79). For many white students, the desire to see sameness also erases the lived experience of discrimination and harassment faced by students of color. At the same time, students of color have approached us with issues of racism on campus. It is clear that there is a very real need to create a climate of greater equity.

We understand that addressing racism is everyone’s responsibility in order to create a stronger, more unified campus and to better prepare students for entering the larger culture. To do so effectively, we see the value of organizing our teaching around third wave feminist principles. The third wave originated from the exclusion of women of color and the recognition by Collins and other black feminists of the necessity of including their voices and addressing the issues of black feminists who had been silenced during the second wave. As a black woman, Collins also recognized that black nationalists were ignoring issues that mattered to her as a woman. And further, she expressed that as a black lesbian woman, other black women were just as likely to oppress her based on her sexual orientation. Audre Lorde, too, recognized that one’s identity could not be parcelled out, and she added to this understanding the critical recognition that difference is constructed in order to justify the mistreatment of those labeled “different”:

Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people. As members of such an economy, we have all been programmed to respond to the human difference between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or
destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals. As a result, those differences have been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion. (Lorde 704)

Our experience exploring the historical and sociological bases for racial segregation and economic inequality in Monroe County illustrates the power of interdisciplinary collaboration and suggests a way forward: cross-disciplinary intersectional approaches in teaching challenging subjects. This pedagogical method provides a multitude of benefits for both students and faculty. One of the greatest advantages for faculty of intersectional collaborative teaching and workshopping on issues of race and justice across disciplines is the sense of community engagement that develops in the discovery of peers who are similarly committed to issues of equality. Rather than being siloed within a particular field, which can sometimes occur on campus, working across disciplines and across schools helps increase ally-ship and diminish the potential for isolation, a particular vulnerability on a small campus. Our own collaboration grew from FRI, to shared teaching materials, to conferences, to organizing other collaborative ventures on campus and expanding to include more faculty. In the current political climate, as we are writing this paper, conflicts are erupting across the U.S. in the wake of the 2016 presidential election, and faculty from across the campus have collaborated in interdisciplinary “teach-ins” that have some of the same qualities as the FRI dialogues.

Interdisciplinarity has benefits for students, too, who see a level of engagement from faculty across a wide variety of fields, disrupting the notion that studying race is the sole purview of those in racial, ethnic, gender studies or similar disciplines. Students are also less likely to disconnect or distance themselves from issues of equity when they are integrated into the curriculum across campus, rather than simply in the courses where they might expect and thus many may seek to avoid. The interdisciplinary and intersectional approach allows students to gain insights on the topics of racism and inequity from multiple fields and
integrate knowledge across disciplines so that they have a broader conceptual framework on which to draw for their own analyses.

The Fisher Race Initiative at St. John Fisher College has become reinvigorated with student activism; we have witnessed an unprecedented level of engagement in coalition building across many categories of difference. Leadership from the Black Student Union, Feminist Alliance, and the Gay Straight Alliance met with us privately to share their concerns about race and diversity issues, and through our experiences of interdisciplinarity and intersectional pedagogy, we encouraged them to meet together to strengthen their understanding of one another and lessen their sense of isolation on campus. Ultimately, the students created a coalition called the Unity Council comprised of members from the campus’s diversity clubs with the goal of promoting conversation and understanding about people from diverse backgrounds.

It is critically important that as students of color and those from diverse backgrounds come together to find strength in coalition building, members of the campus with privilege do the work it takes to understand why those coalitions are so necessary, and work to dismantle privilege and decenter whiteness as the normative experience. Moving privileged students and faculty beyond the false equality of the colorblind experience, of “I don’t see color,” is central in creating a more equitable campus that is responsive to the realities of the world in which we live: one where race matters, where black lives matter. “If the problem of the twentieth century was, in W. E. B. Du Bois’s famous words, ‘the problem of the color line,’ then the problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of colorblindness, the refusal to acknowledge the causes and consequences of enduring racial stratification” (Murakawa 7). Approaching race intersectionally and across disciplines provides more opportunities for those causes and consequences to be acknowledged and makes it more difficult to deny inequality and perpetuate unaware/unintentional racism. This pedagogical approach fosters an environment where privilege is challenged, which strengthens us as teachers and as colleagues as we work with students to create a more socially just campus.
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“GENDER (AS CONSTANT) LABOR”: A CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING DIALOGUE ON TRANSFEMINIST SCHOLARSHIP AND ORGANIZING

MELISSA AUTUMN WHITE, WITH MADDY DEVEREAUX, JASON KWONG, CLARE MCCORMICK, JUDITH SCHREIR, & VINCENT CREER
HOBART AND WILLIAM SMITH COLLEGES

INTRODUCTION

On a rainy October Friday in 2016, I accompanied a group of undergraduate students from Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York to nearby Seneca Falls to join the biennial Dialogues conference, “Lean Out: Gender, Economics, and Enterprise.” We were excited to take the work we had been doing the previous Spring in an upper-division course called “Trans* Studies”\(^1\) outside the walls of the classroom, and we felt that joining the Dialogues would provide us with an ideal opportunity to think with students, faculty and activists about gender itself as a form of constant labor through a distinctively transfeminist lens. Our aim was two-fold: first, to meet with others working on similar questions in university and activist contexts, and second, to bring a multi-vocal discussion around transfeminism to Seneca Falls, the site of the Declaration of Sentiments

\(^1\) We use trans* in this paper to signify the broadest rubric for both gender non-conforming people (who may or may not self-identify as “trans”) and gender “passing” cis-normative people who have had a history of discontinuity between their embodied existence and the sex/gender to which they were assigned at birth.
in 1848. We felt it was important both to honor the fraught history of feminist movements that have made contemporary work in the field of Gender, Women’s and Sexuality Studies possible, and we also thought it was crucial to provide a transfeminist perspective on gender labor in a historic site so strongly associated with “first-wave” feminism. After all, students were well aware of the vicious and ideological rejection of trans lives and embodiments by some lesbian and radical feminists in the late 1970s, and we felt compelled to intervene in the generational constructs (or “wave” models of feminism) that continue to position trans and queer feminist work as a representational diversion from the more central questions of material feminism.

Ours was one of the opening sessions, and, relatively speaking, poorly attended. We had approximately as many “audience” participants as contributors to the Dialogue, and we had a tremendously difficult time hearing ourselves think as, ironically enough, on the other side of a curtain partitioning the gymnasium space we were in, a much larger concurrent Dialogue was engaged in a recitation of the Declaration of Sentiments. The ongoing tensions and contestations within the history of feminist thought and in contemporary feminist activism could not have been more viscerally felt by all those who participated in our Dialogue on transfeminism and gender labor. We had hoped to move the fertile discussions that emerged through our Spring seminar beyond the walls of the classroom to engage with the many students, activists and faculty that had gathered at this historic site of the women’s movement in the United States. Further, we had hoped to consider what it might mean—and what it might entail—to find the common ground shared by contemporary queer, trans, and feminist activists around questions of subjectivity and identity formation in relation to political, economic, and cultural struggles that affect the material realities of people’s everyday lives. And we found our voices almost drowned out by the Declaration of Sentiments.

This paper then aims to keep open the space that our Dialogue intended to create, and provides an archive of the students’ “consciousness raising” dialogue on transfeminist scholarship and
organizing on that rainy October day. The paper opens with a discussion of the seminar course, “Trans*Studies,” in which these conversations first began, and then provides a transcript of the students’ presentations. In conclusion, we invite continued dialogue around the points of continuity and contestation among various strands of feminist thought and activism.

**Transfeminism & Trans* Studies 302**

Despite the importance of transfeminist epistemologies for cutting edge published scholarship in the field of Gender, Women’s and Sexuality Studies, there remains much to be done within undergraduate programs and departments themselves to introduce students to this rich body of thought and engaged activism. With this in mind, the starting place of our contribution to the Seneca Falls Dialogues conference of 2016 was a 300-level course entitled “Trans*Studies,” an advanced seminar developed and taught by the author in the LGBT Studies program at Hobart and William Smith Colleges (HWS) in the Spring of 2016.\(^2\) Working against mainstream, often celebratory, and ahistorical representations of famous – and glamorous – trans people (e.g. Laverne Cox, Caitlyn Jenner), the course provided students with a partial genealogy of what could be described as a distinctively transfeminist approach to knowledge production and activism. “Transfeminism,” a term coined by Emi Koyama in 2001, centers the experiences of multiply-marginalized trans women “who view their liberation to be intrinsically linked to the liberation of all women and beyond” (Koyama 2001). A transfeminist approach, put most broadly, begins from the vantage point of those whose lives are intersectionally minoritized by ruling regimes of power, including heteronormativity, gender normativity, colonialism, patriarchy, racism, and systematic economic disenfranchisement.

\(^2\) LGBT Studies began as LGB Studies at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in 2002, and is largely acknowledged as the first stand-alone program in the country. LGBT Studies is now celebrating its 15\(^{th}\) year at HWS as a program distinct from the Women’s Studies program, which has a 45-history at Hobart and William Smith.
Despite the current cultural fascination with transgendered embodiment and experience in the United States, the story of how we arrived at this moment remains largely submerged. What histories, relationships and struggles have rendered this current moment possible? If, as the June 2014 issue of *Time* magazine suggested, the rising visibility of trans struggles in the US mark a “new civil rights frontier”, then how did we get here? Further, what remains to be done?

To begin to answer these questions, students in LGBT 302: Trans* Studies at HWS were offered the opportunity to trace a partial genealogy of the emergence of transfeminist thought and intervention. We began with the debates over “authentic womanhood” and the “real” subject of feminism between radical lesbian feminists Janice Raymond (1979) and Sheila Jeffrey’s (2014), and trans scholars Sandy Stone (1987), Susan Stryker (1994), and Emi Koyama (2006). Alongside these texts, and over the first four weeks of the course, students read Leslie Feinberg’s groundbreaking novel, *Stone Butch Blues* (1993), which functions not only as a profoundly affective archive of what Feinberg describes living as a “he-she” in the pre-Stonewall 1950s and 60s, but also provides a rich history of post-war working class gendered and raced relations in the borderlands (geographically) of Buffalo, New York. These texts, introduced in the first few weeks of the course, led us into a discussion of the “FTM/Butch” border wars (Halberstam 1998, Hale 1998) published in critical response to the cultural appropriations, within the LGBTQ community, of the 1993 murder of Brandon Teena, spectacularized by the 1998 Hollywood film *Boys Don’t Cry* (dir. Kimberley Pierce). With this genealogical backdrop as partial scaffolding in place, students went on to read debates marking the emergence of the scholarly field now known as “Trans Studies,” (Stryker et al. 2008; Enke, 2012), and then moved into an examination of a series of case studies of contemporary transfeminist activist work, including: indigeneity/2-
Spirit/settler colonialism; sex work; shelters; and prison abolition. In the final stages of the class, students were invited to critically consider the instantiation of “Trans Studies” as the most recent interdisciplinary field of institutionalized difference-based knowledge production within the academy, whilst pursuing independent research projects drawing on the critical modes developed through the course literature.

Following the conclusion of the course in Spring of 2016, a number of the students abridged their final projects into a multi-vocal, consciousness-raising intervention staged at the Seneca Falls Dialogues. Trans*Studies provided an intellectual space within which we agreed to read texts in common as a means of collectively building a dynamic and respectful learning community that students were invited to recognize as an achievement rather than a given, not least because each student came into the course with a distinct history of academic training, activist engagement, and working knowledge of issues affecting gender and sexual minorities. Rather than taking the resulting unevenness of the students’ creative work as “problematic” or something to be “corrected,” then, we decided to embrace the differences in our learning trajectories, writing styles, and approaches to engaging with transfeminist scholarship as a multi-vocal strength, one that would allow us to, we hoped, spark spirited Dialogue with participants who we imagined would also be at different starting places in terms of transfeminist scholarship and activism, both intellectually and politically. An archive of our dialogue follows below.

**AN ARCHIVE OF OUR DIALOGUE: “GENDER LABOR: NEW DIRECTIONS IN TRANS*FEMINIST THOUGHT”**

This section of the paper provides an archive of the otherwise ephemeral Dialogue that we contributed to the Seneca Falls conference of 2016, “Lean Out: Gender, Economics, and Enterprise.” The red-thread running throughout each undergraduate student author’s intervention is the concept of “gender labor” (Ward 2010), or the performative work (Butler 1990) that gendered embodiment carries out in both the representational and material world. Building from each student’s
independently conceived research projects—which variously explored the representation of trans people in mainstream and social media (reality TV, talk shows, the Academy Awards, and Reddit.com); the ideological and material roles of trans* and queer subjects in struggles for racial justice, access to education, and pedagogy—the various strands of the Dialogue that follows take gender itself as a form of constant laboring that simultaneously conforms to and disrupts normative regimes of power, demonstrating the interconnections between materiality and signification practices. Readers will note that the various provocations that motivated our overarching Dialogue (below) reflect the learning trajectories (both intellectual and political) of the student authors; the uniqueness of each author’s voice has been maintained as distinct to highlight the challenges and possibilities of collaborative learning across institutional, embodied, and lived differences.

**Gender Labor: What does it take to pass?**

*Maddy Devereaux*

Embodiment can be defined as a tangible or visible form of an idea, quality, or feeling deeply related to subjectivity, or sense of self. Within certain constraints, an individual has the ability to embody any specific ideas, qualities, or feelings while constructing themselves as an intelligible subject vis-a-vis the social. Thus, the way that an individual constructs their body can reveal very much about the way that they would like to be identified. Of course the labor of constructing oneself as an intelligible subject is always informed by systems of power that align themselves along the axes of race, class, sexuality and gender comportment.

Often, an individual will present a certain embodiment for the purpose of how others will perceive them. There are a variety of factors that can motivate an individual to achieve a specific embodiment. This can be as simple as driving a fancy car and wearing expensive jewelry to make a statement of class, or as complex as the trans body that embodies a certain gender identity to “pass” in the eye of the public. Passing is the idea of an individual having the ability to identify with a certain group (for example, along the lines of race, class, and gender identification) but
also has the ability to identify with another group. In the case of the trans body, an individual may have been assigned female at birth, but later in life the individual may “choose” to identify as male. This individual may have presented themselves as female to the eye of the public (or been “read” that way), but later in life the individual may attempt to present themselves as male in the eye of the public. If the individual can construct their embodiment and present themselves to the eye of the public the way that they would like to be identified, then the individual has successfully passed.

Constructing an embodiment to identify as a certain gender does not come without gender labor. I define gender labor as the act of playing the role, and following the rules that correspond with gender norms in society’s heteronormative binary system. Essentially, gender labor entails the constant labor of portraying masculinity or femininity in an intelligible way. Masculinity and femininity are socially constructed in a way that allows them to be portrayed through certain performances and appearances that correspond to the gender binary system. In their simplest form, and in relation to heteronormative expectations, masculinity is portrayed through dominance, aggression, and strength, while femininity is portrayed through elegance and beauty. Taking Jane Ward’s concept of “gender labor” in my own direction, I would argue that gender labor can be the subconscious act of the assigned male driving the car instead of the assigned female, or the assigned female preparing dinner instead of the assigned male. In our patriarchial society, the traits of masculinity are much broader and bolder than the refined and detailed traits of femininity.

In the case of the trans body, gender labor is used to achieve a recognizable (within the heteronormative two-sex/gender system) form of embodiment. For example, a trans woman’s ability to pass is confined by the extent to which she embodies femininity “successfully.” The trans woman is the epitome of the extent of gender labor that it can take to pass. You can argue that it is harder to transition from a male to a female than it is to transition from a female to a male. While the female to male is likely to pass with just hormonal treatments, the male to
female must take more extreme measures to successfully pass because of the way that masculinity signifies. For example, a female to male can wear clothes to embody the physical figure of a male, whereas it is more difficult for the male to female trans person to embody the pear-shaped figure that signifies “female.” Moreover, it is much easier for the female to male to cut hair than it is for the male to female to grow hair. Not only is it harder for the male to female to successfully pass, it is also harder for the male to female to obtain access to gender confirmation surgery. Gender confirmation surgeries are not accessible for many trans individuals because of the cost along with other constraints, but for the male to female trans person, there is a more extensive list of requirements than that of the female to male trans person.

What are the consequences of embodying a certain identity? What does it take to pass and what is the purpose of passing? For some trans individuals, passing is a way to survive. Passing another day is the equivalent of surviving another day. Failing to pass could result in discrimination, oppression and even violence. This is when the stakes of passing begin to rise and the gender dysphoria can become dangerous. Embodiment becomes unconditional to prevent the failure to pass. But when embodiment becomes unconditional, how far will the trans body go to achieve a desired identity? Is it worth constructing oneself to the extent of becoming objectified in order to fulfill the requirements of a heteronormative society?

Trans* Media Representation
Jason Kwong

The Puritanical history of the United States seems to be long gone with the days of witch burnings and scarlet letters, but remnants of this religious past still linger in the ways we conceptualize the binary gender system in our current cultural climate in the US, the ways we derive entertainment from shaming the sinner, and transphobic thought and rhetoric in reality television in the early 21st century. Jill Jones (2009) succinctly summarizes this idea in her article “Hags and Whores: American Sin and Shaming from Salem to Springer,” when she writes,

In order to lead a truly pious life, one needed to seek out sin in
one's self and in others. The job of leaders, of parents, of husbands, of churchgoers, was to find the inevitable faults in the people of the community or household, and correct them. Scrutiny was the first step toward control, and was the absolute duty of every Puritan (Jones, 2009: 148).

As she continues:

In the end, Americans still disapprove of sin, but they love the spectacle of it. Perhaps the popularity of The Jerry Springer Show derives directly from the sinners' lack of remorse. It gives us the freedom to enjoy their punishment without guilt (Jones, 2009: 153).

Arguably, the focus of people’s scrutiny has shifted from the supernatural being of the witch or the everyday sinner to the seemingly “unnatural” body of the transgender or gender non-conforming individual. By pointing out these perceived flaws and sins in others, viewers are participating in a shaming ritual that dates back centuries as a way to be entertained and to fortify their own position as a “correct subject.”

Shows like The Jerry Springer Show and Maury created, beginning in 1991, a media platform where the audience is invited to judge, condemn, and scrutinize the individuals who appeared on these reality shows and who were often times trans* or gender nonconforming, all while in the safety of their own homes. Some official episode titles of Springer include “Transexual Takedown” and “Tranny Tricks a Blind Man.” With titles like these, it is easy to see how daytime reality TV shows like Springer or Maury have actively participated in reinforcing a transphobic narrative, exerting a major influence on the everyday, passive daytime TV viewer. Cary O'Dell posted an article in 2013 on the website “Pop Matters” that presents data about the average daytime TV viewer that implied that such viewers were overall less educated than the public and tended to be more conservative in values. This dialectical relationship with the viewer and the producer lead to the continual production of these kinds of reality shows.

However, over the last 25 years, issues of trans* representation in
reality TV and media in general has arguably become less transphobic and more “true to life.” As Liz Halloran of the Human Rights Campaign writes, “…knowing a transgender person translates powerfully into positive impressions…”⁴ The platform of reality TV allows for people who may not personally know a trans person to get a general impression on what being trans* can “look like.” Although shows such as *I am Cait* or *I am Jazz* aim to depict a more trans positive depiction of trans* individuals, these heavily edited shows certainly do not provide an adequate representation of *all* trans people - particularly when we consider the racial, class, and gender-conforming representations of transness portrayed in these programs. Nevertheless, I would suggest that shows like these can serve as a stepping stone to understanding trans people and issues for the average American.

Today, many trans* and gender nonconforming individuals have taken to YouTube as a new media platform to create their own representations of self. Similar to the ways that reality television mirrors and models acceptable attitudes and ideas, YouTubers have been becoming the stars of their own respective channels and communities and doing the same towards their own audiences. The aim for many of these trans* YouTubers is to educate and to portray an honest account of the trans experience, taking the labor of trans* representation into their own hands.

When thinking about trans* representation in the media, I think it is crucial to consider the following questions: Are social media sites like YouTube the new way which we will judge and shame others from the safety of our screens? What are the pros and cons of social media, where people are free to represent themselves however they choose to? How much influence does reality television hold now when compared to the early 1990s, when *Springer* and *Maury* were first aired? In other words, how far have we come over the last 25 years in terms of

tele/visual representations of trans* lives and embodiment? What kinds of classed, gendered, and racialized normativities are reproduced and/or interrupted by such representations?

Online Presence and Passing: Trans-Specific Web Communities
Clare McCormick

I found myself considering the Internet’s amazing ultra-connectivity while contemplating research topics for our Trans* Studies class. We had recently spent time discussing the life and legacy of Brandon Teena after watching Boys Don’t Cry, and issues of trans individuals living in isolation (in rural areas, or in communities that are largely non-trans), their lack of support systems, and the impossible politics of passing for survival were on my mind. The Internet seemed to hold the answers to these problems: it’s a seemingly ubiquitous force in the United States, and in much of the world, and it holds unique, transcendent powers that allow trans individuals to connect with and support each other in their efforts to navigate a transphobic society, regardless of community members’ geographical distance from each other.

I was able to locate an online community that operates under these premises hosted on the website Reddit, a collaborative forum and message-board platform that bills itself as “The Front Page of the Internet.” The website itself is a collection of many different communities, referred to as “subreddits.” Anyone can make their own subreddit, and it can be based around any theme or topic: makeup, dogs, sports, individual’s hometowns or cities, and so on. Four years ago, an individual created a subreddit called “r/transpassing.” Its premise was basic: trans-identified users would submit photos of themselves (“selfies”), and caption the images with information about themselves, such as their age, pronouns, if they were taking hormones, and if so, how long they’ve been on them. The purpose of each post was to determine the answer to a question that many trans individuals ask themselves on a daily basis: do I pass? In response, other users would offer constructive criticism.

R/transpassing, and other similar spaces on the Internet, offer trans people the ability to virtually perform what scholar Jane Ward
refers to as “gender labor.” Through online interaction and engagement with each other, Reddit users actively help each other produce, modify, and affirm their respective gender identities, offering the support, encouragement, and advice that many don’t have access to in their real world, day-to-day lives. The importance of self-image is especially relevant in our country’s current climate: radically-conservative influences have largely formed a sociopolitical rejection of overt transness; bodies that fall outside of the “charmed circle” of appearances are subject to many types and scales of violence.

The art of taking selfies and posting them in public forums is, at its base, a form of self-preservation: a selfie is a snapshot of who we are; or, at least, who we want other people to think we are. Modern social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat are filled with images of our peers’ faces. We subconsciously internalize them, aligning our own images next to them, surreptitiously checking for similarities and anomalies: as scholar Fleur Gabriel puts it, “Social media demand that young people actively and deliberately think about and negotiate their own visibility -- the image they project, the identity they want to have” (Gabriel 2013: 105). R/transpassing is direct in its intent and the actions of its members: there is no obfuscation of filters or tricky angles in the photos that are submitted. In fact, this is a requirement, as established by the community’s self-imposed rules: “The only acceptable edit is color correction for accuracy. We strictly encourage honest photos for honest feedback and/or CC (constructive criticism)” (R/transpassing). The rules call for responses to be of a truthful and helpful nature: “Feedback regarding passing should be both constructive and accurate. Both sugarcoating things and tearing people down defeat the point of the subreddit” (R/transpassing).

However, while the subreddit’s premise holds promise, and its intent is to build up supportive community practices, it has its own legitimate flaws as well. There is an overwhelming whiteness to the community: all of its top-rated submissions are photos of people that are white-passing. The most popular photos are those that align themselves with conventional, heteronormative beauty ideals; photos of individuals
who do not subscribe to these standards have little to zero upvotes or comments, and the comments that are there tend to have a more negative, harsher tone. A further drawback is that the Internet’s anonymous nature allows for anyone to participate in these conversations: there’s no way to know exactly who is engaging with your photo.

Ultimately, my takeaway from observing this community’s engagement with each other was that, while online spaces for trans people to connect with each other are important and should be preserved, they are not immune to real-world issues of inclusivity and conformity. Some questions to consider: Trans spaces on the Internet seem small and scattered; how could they become more broadly accessible? How might communities work towards embracing alternative types of beauty? And what external forces prevent them from already doing so? How do we determine the line between constructive or supportive critique, and the policing of trans bodies?

Oscars and Olympics So Binary?!
Judith Schreier

Almost every human interaction relies on some kind of categorization. Every human being is expected to fit into a specific set of neat, little boxes. Such boxes and categories are for example students vs. professor, or male and female, actor and actress, male athlete or female athlete, or cis and trans*. Not fitting into those boxes comes with problems and actually often leads to exclusion. People who do not fit the categories are seldom represented in popular culture and media. How can we bust those boxes? Why are there still no self-identified trans actors and actresses recognized at the Academy Awards, even though producing movies about trans* lives is somehow considered to be “in vogue”? How can Olympic athletes who do not neatly fit the categories of the Olympic Committee—such as the 800-meter Olympic champion Caster Semenya—cause an international turmoil?

At the Oscar ceremony at the beginning of this year, the movie The Danish Girl (2015) was nominated four times. The Danish Girl is a movie about Lili Elbe, the first trans woman to undergo gender
confirming surgery during the 1920s and 1930s. Eddie Redmayne is the actor who portrays Lili Elbe’s life on screen and he received the nomination *Best Actor* for this. The movie and Redmayne’s nomination received a tremendous amount of backlash due to the fact the trans* woman Lili Elbe is portrayed by a non-trans actor. In contrast, the lesbian love story *Carol* (2015), based on Patricia Highsmith’s 1952 novel, *The Price of Salt*, was another film that was nominated for several Oscars in 2016; but it did not receive the same level of criticism. Instead it received a great amount of praise, even though the actresses’ sexuality does not necessarily align with the sexuality of their characters. Seemingly, the category of sexuality is not as fixed and static as the category of gender, which raises questions about the labor that gender performs as a signifier of self and identity.

Winning an Oscar remains to be a big deal for the American, and even international, film industry. The Academy Awards ceremony at the end of each February comes with very strict sets of norms and rules, and of course, limited categories. The most important categories, *Best Actor* and *Best Actress*, are strictly divided by gender. As a result, actors and actresses who do not fit into either of them, have almost no chance of actually winning an Oscar, no matter how good their performance was. Thus, due to the prestige of the Oscars, moviemakers only cast people who have the potential to win the award.

It becomes apparent that the actors that portray queer characters have to fit the norms in terms of gender, race, beauty, thinness, abled-bodiness, and other categories at the Oscar ceremony in order to win. It was no problem to nominate the actresses of *Carol*, since their gender is one of the categories at the Oscars. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that Eddie Redmayne was cast to play Lili Elbe and not a trans* woman.

Similarities can be drawn to the issues surrounding the Olympics of 2016 in Rio de Janeiro. The fact that Caster Semenya, an Olympic sprinter, who can be categorized as intersex, does not fit the neat categories of male or female athlete caused an enormous outrage. There is no “intersex category” at the Olympics. Subsequently, Semenya has to compete in the male or female category, which is considered to be unfair.
by the mainstream media towards the other female athletes, or cannot compete at all. The case of Semenya opens up a discussion around so-called “biological advantage” and gender conformity and ultimately the tension between the analytic categories “gender” and “sex.”

Over the summer, the leading sports brand Nike released a campaign which features trans* athlete Chris Mosier. He could not compete at the Olympics because duathlon is not an Olympic discipline, but he is now a member of the U.S. national men’s team. Before that he competed as part of the women’s team. It is huge step for the sports world that Mosier was able to switch between the teams. Yet again he had to make an either-or decision between the two teams. There is no room for non-binary athletes. Is Nike’s commercial campaign with trans* athlete Chris Mosier genuinely helpful for transgender children? Or does it simply reflect an attempt by Nike to be perceived as open-minded and “contemporary”?

In relation to that, how has Caitlyn Jenner’s transition influenced her image as a (former) Olympic athlete? To what extent is she able to be a role model?

All in all, most institutions in our society are structured by binary categories and breaking out of them remains to be extremely difficult and sometimes impossible. Strict and inflexible categories hinder the representation of several groups of people, in particular minorities and oppressed groups such as the trans community.

What needs to be done to empower trans* kids to dream of futures as actors and actresses and Olympic athletes? What is the role of colleges and schools to make theatre and acting classes and sports be welcoming for everyone? How is it possible to open up the categories at influential institutions, such as the Academy Awards and the Olympics, in the long term? How can we make room for non-binaries?
Too often racial justice and LGBT rights movements are severed from one another, causing queer people of color to constantly compartmentalize their identities. Take me for example. I am a black, gay, genderqueer activist and college student. Whenever I walk into my college’s black student Union meetings, I feel obliged to have my blackness come first and my queerness come second. This feeling is only reinforced when members argue that talking about queerness, gender justice, etc. “distracts” us from the “real” work at hand or that focusing on those issues will make our movement less palatable. Similarly, whenever I walk into Pride meetings, I feel obliged to put my queerness first and my blackness second. With Pride Alliances (and other similar factions across college campuses in the US), most of the members are white, so they too feel like talking about the intersections of queerness and blackness is distracting or irrelevant.

As recent examples show, my experience does not exist apart from larger social realities. In an age where “intersectionality” is a household name in almost all social justice communities, we still face un-intersectional politics. For example, we are still having debates about the lack of intersectionality within white feminism. The murders of black women, queer people, and trans people by police brutality are still getting routinely erased in the #BlackLivesMatter movement even though the movement was founded by queer women of color. Queer students at historically black universities still report high rates of homophobia, sexism, femiphobia, and sexual assault. The disabled community still reports discrimination and erasure from just about all modern social movements. Women of color who identify as fat are still excluded from the predominately white fat studies and body positive movements. Many queer and feminist movements still condemn kink communities, arguing they reproduce gendered power structures.

Weigman states that the problem with identity studies is that it requires you to speak as the subject, limiting your possibility of speaking about things you may not identify, as well as requiring you to be the
expert about your identity (Weigman 2012: 8). Identity politics dichotomize categories, obscuring and even erasing the radical potential of queer politics.

The question that remains is how. How do we move away from identity politics and towards a process of movement building that is truly inclusive, one that actually builds a more effective base of solidarity? Cohen suggests we must turn to the process of movement-building rooted in our shared marginal relationship to dominant power which normalizes, legitimizes, and privileges (Cohen 1997: 448); This movement-building practice is also known as coalition building. Coalitions are at the heart of Weigman’s and Cohen’s suggestions for change.

However, I would like to problematize one element of coalition building: gender labor. “Gender labor” is a term coined by Jane Ward, describing the effort (emotional, physical, and sexual or otherwise) in performing one’s gender to others, validating other’s gender, and of co-producing someone’s “gender irony, transgression, or exceptionality” (Ward 2010: 237). In my experience, whenever I step into coalitional spaces, the labor of expressing difficult politics is always placed on the most marginalized—women of color, trans women of color, low-income people of color, etc. For example, I participated in a local grassroots movement in Geneva, NY called “Tools for Social Change.” This organizing group, composed of members of the Geneva community of various racial, gender, age, ability, and socioeconomic backgrounds (e.g. professors, students at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, working class families in Geneva, city council members, etc.), aims to improve the racial climate of Geneva by giving voice to the most marginalized members of the city (in this case low-income people of color). Their tactics include strategic goal planning and implementation, casual-style discussions, fishbowl discussions, and lobbying. What I found in attending these meetings is that the most marginalized members of the meeting are placed in the position of articulating their lived experience, over and over, to a wide range of privileged bodies: ones who are “empathetic” yet still mess up a lot, ones who think they know more than
they actually do, ones who navigate with a white savior complex (an idea of helping “poor people of color” for the sake of boosting their own self-perception as “good” people, instead of changing the lives of the most marginalized), etc.

This constant articulation of one’s lived experience to an audience full of receptive, faux receptive, and even unreceptive coalition members, is a daunting form of gender labor. To simply exist and create better means for oneself through the privileges of others requires the marginalized subject to expend constant and often times more amounts of gender labor than their privileged counterparts. That is one major problem I find in coalitional spaces. My central question, then, is how do we create a structure of organizing that moves away from identity politics and towards effective solidarity without obliging marginalized subjects to expend excess amounts of gender labor, if any at all?

**Conclusion**

Each of the contributions to our Dialogue on “Gender Labor” and transfeminist scholarship and organizing closed with a series of provocative questions. These questions were intended to open space for achieving dialogue amongst attending participants. While our collectively crafted Dialogue, offered in the first session of the conference, was sparsely attended, we nevertheless enjoyed a spirited and dynamic discussion with the audience participants who listened hard to hear us (literally) and amongst the contributors to the formal Dialogue ourselves. Thinking with our diverse participants, we (unsurprisingly) came to the collective conclusion that gender as a form of constant labor is most visible and most viscerally experienced by those whose bodies do not neatly align within the binary regimes of normative signification (i.e. male/man, female/woman) under heteropatriarchy and other normative regimes of power, such as white supremacy, settler colonialism, and ableism. Drawing from the specifically transfeminist approach to questions of racial, gender, and economic justice that motivated our Dialogue, we collectively aimed to meet our interlocutors where they were, and to open space for ethical and political reflections on what’s at
stake in a rapprochement between feminist, trans, and queer activism in local, national, and representational contexts.

After convening our Dialogue at Seneca Falls, in a gymnasium environment in which we could barely hear ourselves think whilst a concurrent opening panel that drew a much larger group of attendees recited the 1848 Declaration of Sentiments, we left feeling more convinced than ever that the questions each student author ended their brief provocations with need to become central to all feminist organizing spaces – intellectual and activist alike. The embodied experience of being nearly drowned out by the shoring up of a particular moment of feminist history as that which ought to be revered and remembered at the expense of competing histories and genealogies of contemporary feminist interventions ultimately drove home, to students, the central argument of LGBT 302: Trans*Studies. That is, transfeminist provocations and lines of thought are continually at risk of being marginalized, trivialized, or written out of history – even in feminist spaces! If we have indeed arrived at a “transgender tipping point” as *Time* magazine declared in 2014, how can we best avoid the ghosting or drowning out of the contentious histories and relationships that have brought us to this moment? How do we make the labor that gender constantly performs more materially central to feminist analyses of oppression, social transformation, and belonging? And, relatedly, or more directly, how might we better distribute the labor of making a critical analysis of gender (as constant) labor more central to feminist work within and beyond the academy?

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