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## **(Re) Examining Race and Gender: An Introduction**

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Nalini Iyer<sup>1</sup> & Maria Bullon-Fernandez<sup>2</sup>

The selection of essays in this section of the journal came out of an international conference<sup>3</sup> called “(Re)Examining Race and Gender” held at Seattle University in March 2005. We, the guest editors of this section, Dr. Maria Bullon-Fernandez and Dr. Nalini Iyer, were also co-chairs of the conference planning initiative.<sup>4</sup>

As literary scholars (in Medieval studies and Postcolonial studies respectively), we are both deeply engaged in feminist scholarship within our disciplines. Scholars like Elizabeth Spelman,<sup>5</sup> bell hooks,<sup>6</sup> Deborah King,<sup>7</sup> Naomi Zack,<sup>8</sup> Uma Narayan,<sup>9</sup> Chandra Mohanty,<sup>10</sup> Gayatri Spivak,<sup>11</sup> Adrien Wing,<sup>12</sup> Jenny Sharpe,<sup>13</sup> and others have led the discussion of the intersections of race and gender in both U.S. feminist and transnational feminist contexts.

Although the pioneering work of these scholars had opened up the discussion of race and gender intersectionality, we question how much of this discussion is still occurring within the boundaries of particular disciplines. We also ask if the terms race and gender are not being overused by scholars who employ the terms “race” and “gender” in the titles of their works and announce a desire to interrogate intersectionality but often produce analyses that privilege one term over the other. We also feel that much of the discussion on race and gender intersectionality focuses on contemporary issues and overlooks historical evolution of these concepts and the intersections of these terms within particular historical periods. Furthermore, as feminist scholars working in a Jesuit institution with the mission of social justice, we come in contact with numerous activists and

non-profit organizations and wonder if academic theorization connects with grass roots politics and social change and also if activists are being influenced by academic theorists.

All of these questions which we have dealt with as scholars and teachers in discussion with our colleagues<sup>14</sup> in a variety of disciplines at Seattle University led to the organization of this conference. The conference, then, had as its goals an interdisciplinary interrogation of the theories of race-gender intersectionality, an inquiry into the historical dimensions of this theorizing, a questioning of how these theories are applied in different fields, and of how activists apply these theories and, in turn, of how activists' experiences reconfigure our theorizations.

We shaped the conference through an international call for papers which netted us many compelling and intriguing papers from scholars in a variety of disciplines. We organized the panels around such topics as "critiques of intersectionality," "race, gender and public policy," and "curriculum and pedagogy." The conference had two keynote speakers. Professor Adrien K. Wing spoke on "Critical Race Feminism: The Way Forward" and she analyzed contemporary politics through the lens of race-gender intersectionality. The other keynoter was Professor Jenny Sharpe who discussed "The Middle Passages of Black Migration." Professor Sharpe analyzed how contemporary writers of the African diaspora engage with the history of slavery and invoke that history to reflect on contemporary experiences of black people. The conference included a film maker and activist from Women of Color Alliance, Sonya Rosario, who screened her documentary "The Historical Impact of the 'S' word from One Generation to the Next." Ms. Rosario also participated in a panel with other activists including Ms. Leticia Camacho, Staff Attorney at Northwest Justice Project, Ms. Angela Powell, Consultant Imago Organizational Design, and Dr. Nada Elia of Radical Arab Women's Activist Network.

The conference brought together fifty speakers from many different institutions, nations, and disciplinary backgrounds, and it resulted not only

in very provocative panel discussions but also in forging connections between academics across disciplines and between academics and activists. We did not want to end all these discussions at the conference, and we invited all participants to submit revised versions of their papers for consideration by the *Seattle Journal of Social Justice*. We received numerous submissions and, with the help of the *SJSJ* editorial staff, we chose these articles as those that best represented distinguished and pioneering work in their disciplines.

The essays published in this special section of *SJSJ* have thus been selected because they represent excellent examples of the kind of intersectional analysis that the conference set out to explore. While they are underpinned by a strong theoretical awareness about the issues raised by the intersections of race and gender, they focus on the actual workings of such intersections in three different realms: the internet, television, and the family. The three essays are groundbreaking because of the specific type of intersectionality they explore.

Gary Atkins' "My Man Fridae: Re-Producing Asian Masculinity" analyzes challenges to Western notions of Asian masculinity posed by a Singaporean internet site, "Fridae," through which Asian men and women connect with each other. The essay focuses particularly on gay men, its main users. Atkins begins with an analysis of the problematic use of "Orientalism" as a concept and reviews stereotypical Western depictions of the Asian man as passive and weak, in other words, "feminine." He then moves on to considering the ways in which the men who post their messages on "Fridae" reflect or challenge those stereotypes in their self-presentation. Atkins' analysis rightly takes into account gender as performance. The men's self-presentation should not lead us to assume naively some form of authentic self-presentation. The men's self-presentations negotiate between Western stereotypes about men generally and, specifically, about Asian men. Atkins has found that "the pure Orientalist stereotypes of Europeans and Asians were practically nowhere to

be found. In their place were fusions that included some of the old Orientalist elements, with new elements that mixed and destabilized traditional Orientalist concepts of masculinity.”<sup>15</sup> With its focus on a relatively recent phenomenon, internet sites that are used for love and sexual match-ups, and on a population that is rarely studied partly because of their underground status, Atkins’ essay breaks new ground in the field of masculinity, sexuality, and race studies.

In “Who got to Talk About It: Sourcing and Attribution in Broadcast News Coverage of the First 24 hours of the ‘9/11 Tragedy,”” Sonora Jha and Ralph Izard turn their attention to issues of intersectionality in television news. What is unique about this study is that it analyzes the influence of race and gender in reporters’ choices of sources at a critical moment in the history of news coverage in the US, during the twenty-four hours after 9/11, that is, at a moment of crisis during which reporters had to make very quick decisions about whom to interview.

As Jha and Izard note, it would not have been unreasonable to expect that in the face of the challenges posed by such urgent reporting, journalists might have chosen their sources according to different criteria, stated or unstated, than the ones evident in routine news coverage. The authors’ data suggest that their choices, however, do not divert from the norm that governs news coverage during less critical situations: there was an overwhelming preference of white sources over sources from other races and ethnicities, especially if the sources were “authoritative”; there was also a preference for male over female sources, and female sources were most often used stereotypically to suggest emotion rather than rational analysis. Interestingly too, the gender and race of the reporters did not influence their choice of sources. The results of Jha and Izard’s are “indicative of well-entrenched biases engendered by the news production process itself.”<sup>16</sup> Categorizations according to race and gender are so internalized by reporters that even unusual events do not lead to unusual sources.

The final essay, “*Whose Sons and Daughters are Treated Differently? (Re)Examining the Child Gender Literature Through the Lens of Race and Ethnicity*,” by Bridget Hiedemann and Jutta M. Joesch, examines the role of race and gender in child-rearing practices in the U.S. While social studies have been done on the influence of a child’s gender on family-related issues such as fertility, divorce, labor supply, etc., as well as on the way the child itself is treated, few studies have explored how gender intersects with race when families approach such issues. Hiedemann and Joesch show the importance of considering both race and gender when doing such analyses. Their study demonstrates that a family’s behavior toward each gender varies depending on its race and ethnicity. For instance, “[b]lack families exhibit different child care patterns than white families.”<sup>17</sup> It also demonstrates that much more work needs to be done in this area. The data collected so far are limited because sampling is done less frequently among African American, Asian American, Native American, and Hispanic households.

Hiedemann and Joesch emphasize throughout their essay the lack of studies on the intersectionality of race and gender in much current family research. Although less explicitly, the essays by Atkins and by Jha and Izard also point to how much still needs to be done in the area of race and gender intersections. Atkins’ essay explores uncharted territory but also points to other uncharted territories. He leaves several questions open: What about the Asian gay women who participate on Fridae? Are there other similar internet services in other Asian countries, in Africa, or the Middle East? Jha and Izard’s essay do also explore intersectionality but still point toward the need to examine other intersections. For instance, if we map race onto gender when analyzing the sources used by reporters right after 9/11, what are the results? Were Hispanic men more likely to be used as sources than Asian men? Were African American women more likely to be used as sources than African American men?

These are the kinds of questions that our conference on “(Re)Examining Race and Gender” hoped to raise. While we wanted to reexamine their intersection from a theoretical point of view, we were interested too in encouraging studies of the actual manifestations of intersectionality from the perspective of various academic disciplines, in part because such studies are less frequent. The range of papers presented at the conference and the specific studies published in this volume suggest that race-gender intersections do need to be reexamined and in some cases even examined for the first time. It is our hope that the questions raised by the essays published here will continue to inspire future work on such intersections.

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<sup>3</sup> We would like to thank the members of the planning committee who helped make this conference a success. They are: Professor Maggie Chon, SU School of Law, Dr. Mark Cohan, Department of Sociology, Dr. Jacquelyn Miller, Department of History, Dr. Bridget Heidemann, Department of Economics, Dr. Jeanette Rodriguez, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, Dr. Olufemi Taiwo, Department of Philosophy, and Ms. Julie Stein, Wismer Center.

<sup>4</sup> The conference was sponsored by several initiatives within Seattle University. At the time of the conference, Nalini Iyer, was the Patricia Wismer Professor of Gender and Diversity Studies, and Maria Bullon-Fernandez was the Pigott-McCone Chair. In addition, Dr. Iyer was director of the Center for Study of Justice in Society, and Dr. Bullon-Fernandez directed the Women Studies Program. This fortuitous combination of endowed chairs and program leadership allowed us to fund this conference and to bring together a planning committee that helped us shape its many dimensions.

<sup>5</sup> ELIZABETH SPELMAN, *INESSENTIAL WOMEN: PROBLEMS OF EXCLUSION IN FEMINIST THOUGHT* (1998).

<sup>6</sup> BELL HOOKS, *FEMINIST THEORY FROM MARGIN TO CENTER* (1999).

<sup>7</sup> Deborah King, *Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology*, *SIGNS* 42 (Autumn 1988).

<sup>8</sup> Naomi Zack *Can Third World Feminism Be Inclusive?: Intersectionality, Its Problems, and New Directions in FEMINIST ENCYCLOPEDIA* (Eva Kittay and Linda Alcoff, eds)(forthcoming).

<sup>9</sup> UMA NARAYAN, *DISLOCATING CULTURES: IDENTITIES, TRADITIONS, AND THIRD WORLD FEMINISM* (1997).

<sup>10</sup> *THIRD WORLD WOMEN AND THE POLITICS OF FEMINISM* (Chandra Talpade Mohanty, et al. eds 1991).

<sup>11</sup> GAYATRI CHAKRAVARTI SPIVAK, *IN OTHER WORLDS: ESSAYS IN CULTURAL POLITICS* (1988).

<sup>12</sup> GLOBAL CRITICAL RACE FEMINISM: AN INTERNATIONAL READER (Adrien K. Wing, ed. 2000).

<sup>13</sup> JENNY SHARPE, ALLEGORIES OF EMPIRE: THE FIGURE OF WOMAN IN THE COLONIAL TEXT (1993).

<sup>14</sup> We organized a summer seminar in 2004 which focused on race-gender intersectionality across the disciplines and invited our colleagues from economics, sociology, history, theology, political science and other disciplines to join us in the discussion of these topics. This reading group enabled us to frame some of our conference questions.

<sup>15</sup> Gary Atkins, *My Man Fridae: Re-Producing Asian Masculinity*, 4 SEATTLE J. FOR SOC. JUST. 61, 74 (2005).

<sup>16</sup> Sonora Jha & Ralph P. Izzard, *Who got to Talk About it: Sourcing and Attribution in Broadcast News Coverage of the First 24 Hours of the '9/11 Tragedy'*, 4 SEATTLE J. FOR SOC. JUST., 97, 112 (2005).

<sup>17</sup> Bridget Hiedemann & Jutta M. Joesch, *Whose Sons and Daughters are Treated Differently? (Re)Examining the Child Gender Literature Through the Lens of Race and Ethnicity*, 4 SEATTLE J. FOR SOC. JUST. 115, 133 (2005).