WOMEN IN CULTURE
AN INTERSECTIONAL ANTHOLOGY FOR GENDER AND WOMEN’S STUDIES
SECOND EDITION
WILEY Blackwell
Women in Culture
Women in Culture
An Intersectional Anthology for Gender and Women’s Studies

Second Edition

Edited by
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Every effort has been made to trace the copyright holders but if any have been inadvertently overlooked the publishers will be pleased to make the necessary arrangement at the first opportunity.

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2.2 Evelyn Alsultany, “Los Intersticios: Recasting Moving Selves” from *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical


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What distinguishes this introductory text to Gender and Women's Studies from others currently available is its rich inclusion of the sort of humanities content that was vital to the emergence of the women's movement. Each chapter leads off with an outstanding piece of creative writing. Readings connect with and give voice to the lives of a diverse set of women and expressions of gender worldwide. The texts offer vibrant images, evocative language, and well-articulated ideas. Using these as models, students will find themselves better prepared to express their experience and frame their own arguments in service of the activism that is so central to Gender and Women's Studies. Social issues are addressed throughout, but without stressing quantitative, social science–based approaches. The reintegration of humanities content works to support interdisciplinary studies, which Women's Studies has fostered throughout its history.

The current anthology emerges from a thorough revision of the 1998 textbook, Women in Culture: A Women's Studies Anthology, edited by the late Lucinda Joy Peach. There was much to admire in this work, including its attention to feminist terminology and use of thematic sections, each with an introduction, exercises, and bibliography. These features are retained in the updated work. Discussion questions provided for each chapter encourage creative thought and activism in students, both in and beyond the classroom. Additional resources in the text are a historical timeline inclusive of major feminist writings and a glossary of key terms used in the readings, reflecting both past and present concerns of Women's Studies. In order to make standpoints clear, the names of many feminist thinkers included in our chapter introductions are preceded with identity labels, which are mostly drawn from identities the individuals have embraced themselves. Related to this, good topics for discussion are, first, that certain identities that have been dominant, such as heterosexual, white, or Euro–, are often not embraced in self-identifications; and second, that terms for identities are fluid and subject to change. Instructors will find supplemental materials focused on pedagogical approaches, as well as media
resources, and suggested assignments, by chapter, at the companion website www.wiley.com/go/scott/womeninculture.

Many of the foundational readings contained in the 1998 text were well worth retaining, but much of the feminist conversation has moved on from debates about various waves and theoretical schools of feminism, and Women's Studies has grown to support greater dialogue and diversity. The former edition placed an emphasis upon representations of women in “American culture.” Though its US-based content remains strong and is representative of numerous communities, the new text works for greater intersections among women's cultures worldwide. Finally, for the updated version we found it essential to explore work related to racially diverse, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender)/queer/trans feminisms and masculinities that have continued to emerge in the last two decades.

The thematic chapters that comprise the body of this new text are designed as follows:

Our intention with the initial chapter, titled “Introduction to Feminist Concepts and Issues,” is to define key terms that lay a foundation for all future work in Women's Studies. These include feminism(s); sex and gender; standpoint; social location, privilege, oppression, and resistance; intersectionality; transnational feminisms; interdisciplinarity; and representation.

The second chapter, “Stories of Identity and Community,” includes personal narratives and scholarly essays about identities across differences and commonalities. These readings address the complexity of self-definition for individuals within families and communities, and the negotiation of group identities for shared activisms.

Chapter 3, “Histories of Feminism,” introduces feminist efforts to bring a diverse set of women back into history and historiography. We explore multiple versions of the history of feminism, ranging through time, as told from decentered, postcolonial, and transnational perspectives.

Chapter 4, “Representations of Women and Gender in Arts and Media,” concerns cultural representations of women, both in traditional arts and in popular culture. It historicizes women's struggle for inclusion in artistic canons and display spaces and allows us to see women as creators of alternate self-defined images and genres.

Chapter 5, “Sexualities and Genders,” promotes an understanding of the culturally constructed nature of LGBT and queer sexualities, gender identities, heterosexual privilege, transphobia, and homophobia. It redefines desire and the erotic across sexualities.

We move next to “Body Politics” in Chapter 6. This identifies ideas and expressions that alienate women from our bodies. Furthermore, the readings offer strategies for reclaiming the body and healing the mind/body/spirit split typical of Western thought. Concerns include racialized and gendered bodies, bodies with disabilities, and masculinities.

The seventh chapter, titled “Reproductive and Environmental Justice,” presents women-led and conceptualized movements to sustain the wellbeing of women and the earth, both in the United States and internationally, with particular attention to ways women of color have assumed leadership in these movements.
Chapter 8, “Violence and Resistance,” documents women’s responses to culturally sanctioned, gendered violence and rape, which may range in location from intimate partners’ relationships to widespread contexts of war and colonial occupation.

Chapter 9, concerning “Healing and Spirituality,” draws on various cultural knowledges to present woman-centered perspectives on spirituality by healers, activists, ritualists, scholars, and creative writers. The readings present feminist critiques of racism, heteropatriarchal religions, and Eurocentric medical and other corporate-driven institutions. It also examines the meaning of life and death, wellness and illness, the relationships between people, land bases, and all living things, and the role of spirituality and healing in relation to social justice.

The final chapter, “Activism for the Future,” shows ways that Women’s Studies encourages activisms both locally and globally, responding to continuing and new issues and challenges, and serving to further social justice.
1
Introduction to Feminist Concepts and Issues

By Anne Donadey

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1.1 My Name
Sandra Cisneros

1.2 The New Pronoun They Invented Suited Everyone Just Fine (illustration)
Jacinta Bunnell and Nat Kusinitz

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1.4 Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference
Audre Lorde


Feminism has many different definitions and facets. A popular definition of feminism is "the radical notion that women are people." The *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* defines it as "1: the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes; 2: organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests." Feminism thus includes both scholarship and activism. African American public intellectual bell hooks takes issue with a narrow definition of feminism that focuses only on seeking equality with men. She importantly asks, to which men do which women seek to be equal, given that not all men are equal? She highlights the extent to which this narrow definition of feminism only focuses on gender issues and therefore applies best to the situation of white, middle-class women. She goes on to redefine feminism more broadly and radically: “Feminism as a movement to end sexist oppression directs our attention to systems of domination and the inter-relatedness of sex, race, and class oppression” ("Feminism" 31). The most complete definition of feminism is probably that of Black lesbian writer-activist Barbara Smith: "Feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free all women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, disabled women, lesbians, old women – as well as white, economically privileged, heterosexual women. Anything less than this vision of total freedom is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement" (25).

**Intersectional Feminism**

Smith’s and hooks’s definitions are intersectional, a term that means that they do not only focus on one issue such as gender but broaden the analysis to encompass other vectors of identity and of human domination such as race and racism, social class and classism, sexual orientation, colonialism and imperialism, disability, national origin, religion, and age. This wide-ranging approach, which has created a paradigm shift in Women’s Studies, Ethnic Studies, and other fields, has come to be known as intersectionality (Crenshaw) but is also variously termed “Black feminist thought” (Collins), “multiracial feminism” (Zinn and Dill), “multicultural feminism” (Shohat), “US Third-World feminism”
Intersectionality can be traced back to African American activist-intellectuals Sojourner Truth and Anna Julia Cooper in the nineteenth century. While others had also made connections between some issues such as gender and class, gender and sexual orientation, race and class, or race and colonialism, the focus on race, class, gender, and sexual orientation as profoundly intertwined and interlocking vectors is an original contribution to scholarship by 1970s and 1980s US feminists of color. They theorized the interrelatedness of race, gender, and imperialism (e.g., Elizabeth “Betita” Martinez in 1972; Mitsuye Yamada in 1981); race, gender, and class (e.g., Angela Davis in 1981); race, gender, class, and sexual orientation (e.g., the Combahee River Collective in 1977; Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa in 1981; Audre Lorde; and Adrienne Rich); colonialism, race, class, and gender (e.g., Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in 1985). Starting around the 1990s, scholars from various countries addressing the intersections among gender, race, and nationalism (e.g., Ella Shohat; Deniz Kandiyoti; Floya Anthias; and Nira Yuval-Davis) and among disability and other vectors such as gender (e.g., Susan Wendell) and gender, race, and class (e.g., Rosemarie Garland Thomson and Jenny Morris) have made important additions to this scholarship. By the year 2000, gender identity had been added as a key factor that LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and intersex) activists urged must be considered in discussions of oppression and identity. This is explored in this chapter and in Chapter 5. A central lesson feminists have learned through debates between single-focus and intersectional approaches is that our standpoint (our worldview, the ways in which we make sense of our life experiences and of the world around us) is influenced by our social location (the time and place in which we live and the information to which we have access, as well as the social categories or groups to which we are perceived as belonging).

The readings in this introductory section illustrate some of the main issues discussed above. Chicana creative writer Sandra Cisneros’s chapter, “My Name,” from her acclaimed novel *The House on Mango Street*, first published in 1984, opens the anthology. The character of young Esperanza shares her standpoint with readers with respect to the difficulties of having multiple identities in a world that fragments you because it expects you to be only one thing. Bilingual and bicultural, Esperanza struggles to find her place. Her first name, Spanish for hope, is also related to the verb *esperar*, to wait. This double meaning reflects her sense of double belonging – being between Anglo and Latino cultures – and her hope for a better future for women. Her sense of connection to the strong woman in her lineage after whom she was named makes her reflect on the dual meaning of her name – both hope and waiting, a metaphor for the need to be able to fit in your lineage and cultures without letting them completely determine your identity or your place in society. Her attentiveness to various levels of linguistic meaning reflects her awareness of the different value associated with Anglo and Latino cultures in the United States – her “silver”-sounding name in Spanish sounds like “tin,” a much less valued metal, in English.

In her book *The Politics of Reality* (1983), from which a portion of the chapter on “Oppression” is excerpted here, white lesbian feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye provides a critical definition of oppression as “a system of interrelated barriers and forces which
reduce, immobilize and mold people who belong to a certain group, and effect their
subordination to another group" (33). Oppression is a system that unfairly targets certain
people based on their perceived group membership (for example their perceived race,
gender, social class, or sexual orientation), rather than judging them on their individual
characteristics (7–8). It includes specific unpaid or poorly paid functions that members of
the oppressed group are expected to provide to members of the dominant group. Frye
gives the example of women being expected to provide service work of a personal,
sexual, and emotional nature for men (9). She highlights the fact that oppression is made
to appear natural so oppressed people internalize it through socialization (33–34).
Internalized oppression leads people who are the target of one form of oppression to
believe the negative messages against their groups and sometimes to end up acting
against their own self-interests. Conversely, internalized domination leads members of a
dominant group to believe that they are naturally entitled to a superior status and to the
advantages derived from that status. It thus serves to hide the existence of dominant
group privilege (see Adams, Bell, and Griffin).

Afro-Caribbean lesbian writer Audre Lorde’s essay “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women
Redefining Difference’ (1984) develops central concepts for wide-ranging feminist social
justice projects: the dangers of a world view that arranges perceived group differences
into hierarchical binary oppositions such as male/female, white/black, mind/body, self/
other, or culture/nature; the ways in which various forms of oppression are structured
similarly to create a norm that is seen as superior (the “mythical norm”); the need to
recognize each other’s oppression and resistance (“the edge of each other’s battles”); the
need to learn from histories of oppression and resistance so we do not have to reinvent
the wheel generation after generation; and the need for intersectional activist approaches
so that an inclusive feminist agenda does not solely focus on gender issues but includes
a commitment to fighting for racial and economic justice and against heterosexism (the
primacy of heterosexuality) and ageism (privileging adults versus older people and
children). In beautifully evocative language, Lorde invites us to imagine “patterns for
relating across our human differences as equals,” a project that is as central to a socially
just future today as it was in the early 1980s when she first articulated it. For instance,
pretending to be color-blind and to not “see” differences (especially racial ones) only
leads us to conceptualize equality in terms of sameness and to feel guilty over noticing
differences, thus resulting in avoidance of the topic and immobilization rather than
social justice activism. The ideology of color-blindness implies that difference is bad and
that it is therefore impolite to notice or dialogue about differences. More problematically,
it encourages the denial of racism (Frankenberg) and of the existence of power differ-
ences between groups, makes racism a taboo topic, and signals that people of color
are expected to act white and assimilate (Sue). Instead, Lorde invites us to explore
differences and create new ways of working together as equals through differences.

Because feminists active in the movement have tended to be the ones with more
access to financial resources, time, and education, the leadership of the movement has
historically tended to be primarily white, middle/upper-class, and heterosexual. Debates
over whether feminism should focus on gender issues narrowly defined or should adopt
a broader, intersectional focus have to do in great part with who sets the agenda and
what issues are primary in their lives. As a result, issues of importance to women of color, working-class women, women with disabilities, indigenous women, and lesbians or queer people have historically not been fully included in feminist agendas. While many feminists of color focused on redefining feminism more broadly, as explained above, some selected a different term altogether to reflect their intersectional approaches in reaction against mainstream feminism’s inability to fully include race issues in the 1970s and early 1980s. In her book *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983), African American novelist Alice Walker famously coined the adjective “womanist” and created a definition of the term that mimics the standard format of a dictionary definition. Her definition is purposefully grounded in African American vernacular language, history, and culture and progressively broadens to include lesbian existence, female solidarity, and men, culminating in a holistic and spiritual view of feminism based on love. It is to be noted that while many critics refer to Walker’s concept as womanism, Walker herself only coined the adjective womanist—presumably seeking to create an intersectional approach that many could identify with rather than trying to impose a new doctrine or movement.

Feminists of color have disagreed with some white radical feminists and lesbian separatist feminists who called for women to separate from men as a solution to sexist oppression and male domination. While feminists such as hooks, Lorde, Walker, Martinez, and others have taken men from their own cultural backgrounds to task for engaging in sexist oppression, they also insist that these men are their allies in the fight against racism and white supremacy. As early as 1972, Martinez insisted that Latinas “have the right to expect that our most enlightened men will join in the fight against sexism; it should not be our battle alone” (33). Lorde also powerfully reminds white feminists that female cross-racial solidarity is not a given but something that must be achieved through recognition of the different issues with which various women struggle: “Some problems we share as women, some we do not. You fear your children will grow up to join the patriarchy and testify against you, we fear our children will be dragged from a car and shot down in the street, and you will turn your backs upon the reasons they are dying.”

In “Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity” (1994), white sociologist Michael S. Kimmel picks up on Lorde’s concept of the mythical norm. The gender-based mythical norm is often referred to as “hegemonic masculinity” (a term coined by R. W. Connell and various collaborators), which Kimmel defines as the masculinity of those who have power in society. As Lorde described hierarchical binary oppositions, Kimmel shows that hegemonic masculinity defines itself in opposition to anything feminine and teaches men that the only emotion appropriate for them to display is aggression (Frye similarly refers to anger, *Politics* 14), which leads to violence (see Chapter 8). Since men are not supposed to be feminine, they are encouraged to look down upon women, distance themselves from men who are perceived as being gay, and attack the masculinity of men who have less power in the culture, such as men of color. Kimmel shows how homophobia, sexism, and racism can be wielded by men to defend their own sense of masculinity. Lorde’s insight that the “mythical norm” is set up in such a way that very few people can feel that they are a part of it and Frye’s distinction between oppression and suffering can help explain what
Kimmel describes as a major “paradox in men’s lives, a paradox in which men [as a group] have virtually all the power and yet do not feel [individually] powerful,” thus leading yet again to frustration and anger.

In an essay that is widely available online, white anti-racist feminist activist Peggy McIntosh makes a similar point with respect to white people and race, claiming that “whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege.” Internalized domination serves to hide the existence of dominant group privilege. McIntosh points out that it is easier for people in general to see the ways in which we are oppressed than it is to recognize ways in which we are privileged. Privilege is the flip side of oppression, and she challenges white readers to become more aware of the ways in which whiteness functions as a mythical norm granting whites “unearned privileges.” A dominant upbringing systematically trains white people to become blind to white privilege or to see it as a natural entitlement, and McIntosh provides many daily examples of how white privilege functions for individuals in society. By focusing on men and white people, Kimmel and McIntosh demonstrate that analyses of oppression can yield important insights into the role that privilege and internalized domination play in the maintenance of structures of oppression, as well as open up avenues for self-awareness and social change through alliance politics.

**Redefinitions of Gender**

As scholars have widened the purview of feminism from a single-minded focus on gender to intersectional approaches, they have also refined and redefined what we mean by gender and women in significant ways. Whereas the generic definitions of sex and gender are that sex refers to the biological sexual characteristics with which one is born and gender to social constructions of sex, feminists such as anthropologist of sexuality Gayle Rubin have complicated our understandings of the relationship between the two terms. For Rubin, the “sex/gender system” is “the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity” (159). This definition acknowledges that sex and gender cannot be easily pulled apart along the lines of nature versus culture but that they constantly interface with one another. This redefinition is important because women’s oppression is often justified with reference to female biology (the ideas that women bear children and are supposedly more emotional and naturally inclined to raise children and to work out of love – that is, for free). White postmodernist feminist and queer studies scholar Judith Butler reverses the biological justifications for women’s secondary status by claiming that since we can only conceive of sexual difference through our cultural understandings of it as male and female, “perhaps this construct called ‘sex’ is as culturally constructed as gender” and sex turns out “to have been gender all along” (7, 8). In “Abandon Your Tedious Search: The Rulebook Has Been Found!” (1994), white transgender intellectual, activist, and performance artist Kate Bornstein participates in this debate by deconstructing the “rules of gender,” our society’s expectation of rigid distinctions between males and females. Through the use of analysis, personal examples, and humor, she demonstrates that these supposedly natural
rules are in fact constructions that contribute to marginalizing gender-nonconforming people. The binary opposition between male and female obscures the existence of people who do not fit into either category: intersex people (who are born with some male and female physical sexual characteristics) and transgender people (people whose gender identity – that is, their personal and psychological sense of being male or female or on a continuum – is at odds with their sex assigned at birth, or people whose gender identity does not fit easily into the male/female, heterosexual/homosexual binary). Sometimes the terms trans*, transgender, and queer are used interchangeably. For transgender persons, being referred to as one's gender of choice – signified by correct and preferred name and pronouns – is a major issue in the struggle for respectful recognition. Feminists have long fought for gender-inclusive language (e.g., firefighter instead of fireman, mail carrier for mailman, or staffing the desk instead of manning the desk). Transgender activists have coined gender-neutral pronouns such as “ze” and “hir” (Bornstein, *My Gender Workbook*); others use they/them/their to refer to one person. Children’s coloring book authors Jacinta Bunnell and Nat Kusinitz’s thoughtful cartoon “The New Pronoun They Invented Suited Everyone Just Fine” (2010) illustrates this issue and encourages us to be creative in modifying language to reflect more inclusive ways of perceiving identities for future generations. Chapter 5, on sexualities and genders, develops these issues at greater length.

**Postcolonial and Transnational Feminisms**

As feminists from various locations have developed intersectional definitions of oppression and feminism, they have also focused on strategies of resistance to oppression and on the importance of women’s agency (the awareness that women are not just oppressed and victimized but that they also find ways, both large and small, of setting their own course and making their own decisions even in contexts in which they have very limited options). Even in situations of oppression that are marked by what Frye calls the double bind – the absence of viable choices – it is important to recognize that people still manage to exert some amount of agency and should not only be seen as disempowered victims. For instance, Cisneros ends her chapter with her protagonist selecting a new, mysterious name full of promise for herself. Walker highlights a history of African American women’s organized resistance to slavery, referencing Harriet Tubman’s participation in the Underground Railroad.

Feminists focusing on the lives of women in colonized parts of the world have similarly insisted on the importance of acknowledging the agency and resistance of women to three specific forms of oppression. The first form of oppression is created by colonialism and imperialism, which rely on a discourse of Third World women as victims of their own cultures and religions to justify military intervention, conquest, and the exploitation of natural resources and human labor in the colonies. The second one comes from masculinist (male-dominated) nationalist resistance to colonialism that equates liberation from colonial domination with regaining manhood (which entails keeping women in secondary positions – see hooks, “Reflections”). The third difficulty originates
with Western feminists who, when they only focus on gender issues, ignore the detrimental impact that their own colonizing governments have had on women from colonized countries and may end up reinforcing colonial oppression under the guise of so-called feminist sisterhood. In "Feminists Theorize Colonial/Postcolonial" (2006), Indian postcolonial feminist scholar Rosemary Marangoly George clarifies the central contribution of postcolonial feminist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to the field. Spivak explained that between the colonialist discourse of “white men saving brown women from brown men” and the male “nativist” (nationalist) argument that local women who conform to oppressive cultural or religious practices are doing so entirely of their own free will, there is almost no space for local women to express their concerns in ways that will actually be heard on their own merits as opposed to being coopted, reframed, and manipulated by either side. The problems are compounded when Western feminists exhibit colonialist attitudes and start acting as “white women saving brown women from brown men.” In that difficult context, postcolonial/Third World/transnational feminists are often attacked and dismissed in their own countries as being Westernized and inauthentic representatives of their cultures by a masculinist leadership that does not want to question male privilege (see also Narayan). In the West, their critiques of Western colonial practices and discourses often go unheard, and their complex feminist positions are simplified and used to justify a colonialist critique of their cultures or religions as being backwards and in need of Western salvation. With the renewed Islamophobia in the West after the destruction of the World Trade Center towers in New York City on September 11, 2001, and the state of permanent warfare in which the West has been engaged ever since, creating new waves of refugee populations from the Middle East, these patterns have gained renewed centrality and call for careful analysis on the part of scholars and citizens alike.

Finally, Spivak distinguishes between two meanings of the term “representation”: it can refer to political representation (gaining the right to vote, having politicians who speak for their various constituent groups) and visual or textual representation (the ways that various groups are portrayed in society through stereotypes, as well as counter-narratives and resistance to stereotypes). Women’s Studies is an interdisciplinary field (it includes scholars trained in various fields, from English and Comparative Literary Studies to the Social Sciences and History, and increasingly includes researchers in the Natural Sciences). It focuses on analyzing, critiquing, and bettering women’s status in society and promoting activism for social justice. In general, humanities scholars will tend to focus on issues of cultural/visual/textual representations and social science scholars on political representation and access. Both aspects of representation are important for all social justice projects and will be addressed in various chapters in the volume.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways do Cisneros’s and Walker’s essays demonstrate an intersectional approach? What vectors of identity are most salient for each? How are these vectors presented as interrelated?