Part I Introduction

Women’s and gender studies is an ever-changing field of academic inquiry that was born out of Women’s Movement organizing within and outside of Western colleges and universities in the late 1960s and 1970s. While women’s organizing on behalf of the vote and other significant social and economic issues has a long history, the challenge to the androcentric or male/masculine-centric knowledge project of academia is more recent. The story surrounding the development of women’s and gender studies is often told through a Western- or Northern-centric lens; but it is incomplete or, even misguided, without acknowledging the diversity of sites outside the West or North that helped shape the field both within and outside of the academy (see e.g. Beoku-Betts 2020; Mikell1996). This chapter presents an overview of shifts in naming, theoretical approaches, and topics covered in contemporary women’s and gender studies. I introduce the Companion and highlight some of the key contributions of the authors as they variously discuss the construction of inequality, reproduction of the gender, as well as individual and collective modes of agency and resistance.

Politics of naming

Women’s studies, as an institutionalized academic formation, began with the recognition of women’s absence in canonical texts, research strategies, interpretation of findings, and many classrooms. With the support of students and women’s movement activists and organizations, women faculty and students in different disciplines created independent studies and courses that were often informally taught on women writers, artists, and philosophers who were little known or appreciated. Since there were few publications available, feminist faculty shared mimeographed essays and other materials that formed the basis of these early courses. In response to student-led organizing, some of these courses were added to the curriculum and became the basis...
for women’s studies programs. Many programs eventually became departments and developed minors, majors, graduate certificates and, more recently, Masters and PhD degrees (see, for example, Berger and Radeloff 2011).

With the move to institutionalize women’s studies in the academy, feminist faculty engaged in often-heated debates about the politics of naming (see, for example, Jackson 2016; LaDuke 2005). As a result of a socially constructed understanding of women and gender, many programs across the US changed their names from women’s studies to women’s and gender studies, or to gender studies (Scott 1986). A large number of programs and departments also added sexuality studies to capture the intersectional understanding of power, experience, and culture. Feminist faculty in some universities and colleges dropped these constructs altogether, opting for “feminist studies” to center the epistemological approach rather than the object of study, as was the decision made at the University of California, Santa Barbara, when it became a department in 2008.

The dependence on cross-listing courses from different departments and the unpaid labor of feminist faculty continued as a feature of these programs long after their initial development. Drawing on feminist praxis and critiques of androcentric approaches in the traditional disciplines, feminist scholars located in these new units also developed new approaches and courses in feminist theories, feminist methodologies, and feminist pedagogies, which are among the central courses that shaped the interdisciplinary field of women’s and gender studies. In time, interdisciplinary courses solely located within women’s studies replaced the reliance on cross-listing.

These new institutional formations provided more organizational stability for curriculum development that hastened the context for important debates, including those over which women’s lives were chronicled and how to attend to the diversity of women’s lives and contributions in the courses (see, for example, Moallem 2002). The moves to incorporate women of color and to internationalize the curriculum were first addressed by the creation of separate courses that marginalized these foci within the curriculum and often contributed to a reductive approach to both themes (see, for example, Lee 2000; Lugones and Spelman 1983; Mani 1998; McDermott 1998; Moghadam 2001; Moallem 2002).

African American, Latina, Native, Asian American, and other feminist scholars and students contested the totalizing construction of women that centered on white, middle-class women’s experiences and marginalized others (see, for example, Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983). Lesbian, bisexual and queer women challenged the presumption of heterosexuality that ran through early feminist work (see, for example, Butler 1994; Weed and Shor 1997). “Third world” feminists or those influenced by postcolonial critiques contested the Western-centric angle of vision within women’s studies (Mohanty 1984; Mohanty, Russo, and Torres 1992; Alexander and Mohanty 1997). Furthermore, as Ashwini Tambe and Millie Thayer (in preparation) note in their edited book, *The Many Destinations of Transnational Feminism*: “Transnational feminism emerged as a critique of imperial modes of practicing feminism, and it was influenced by field-defining scholarship on colonialism, race, and gender/sexuality in the 1990s” (n.p.). Another significant epistemological intervention was offered by indigenous feminists who explain that:

Indigenous gender, sexuality, and feminist studies ... are predicated on the polity of the Indigenous – the unique governance, territory, and culture of Indigenous peoples in
unique and related systems of (non)-human relationships and responsibilities to one another.


Queer and trans scholars further challenged the binary approach to gender and sexuality that is still evident in certain approaches to women’s and gender studies (Beemyn and Eliason 1996; Currah 2006; Johnson and Henderson 2005; Martínez-San Miguel and Tobias 2016). Feminist scholars working in these new areas who drew on intersectional theories posed significant interventions that fostered the development of new theories, research strategies, and courses that addressed the diversity of people’s lives as shaped by race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, citizenship status, colonial status, ability, and national context (see, for example, Berger and Guidroz 2010; Godfrey and Torres 2016; Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Hancock 2016; Kolawole 1997; Naples, Mauldin, and Dillaway 2019).

Debates over the subject of inquiry in women’s and gender studies surfaced the limited constructions of feminism that centered a White and Euro-centric point of view which had also become dominant in the popular imaginary (see, for example, Motlafi 2015). Critics of this limited construction debated the possibility of reenvisioning, reclaiming feminism or rejecting it outright in favor of more relevant frameworks. Women from non-Western or Southern regions were particularly critical of Western-centric or Northern constructions of feminism. For example, African women from colonial English-speaking countries were drawn to the conceptualization of “womanism” offered by Alice Walker in her 1983 book, In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose, as a framework to express their political activism as a consequence of, among other things, a mistrust of Western definitions of feminism, especially more radical definitions that focused their activism solely on women’s issues and rights (Kolawole 1997). Mary Modupe Kolawole (1997) discusses how Walker’s (1983) “definition of womanism addresses the question of racial focus and specificity and makes this concept more valid to African women than the omnibus definition of feminism” (p. 21). Kolawole further emphasizes that: “A common nexus, therefore, runs through the consciousness of African people in foregrounding collectivism and an integrative struggle” (p. 25).

Walker’s conceptualization of womanism reflected the activism of “race women” like Ida B. Wells Barnett (1895) and Anna Julia Cooper (1895), who were devoted to the survival, dignity, and flourishing of the entire Black race (see, Brewer 2020). Dorothy Randall Tsuruta (2012) notes that “today, African-centered womanists are of the [similar] inclination of the Black race women and men of the first half of the twentieth century” (p. 7). She quotes Nigerian activist scholar Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (1996) who self-defines as an “African womanist”: “Naming ourselves meaningfully as we have always done in our cultures historicizes our circumstances and focalizes politics” (p. 16). The histories of race women and womanists are among the many important traditions that contribute to the vibrancy of women’s and gender studies and demonstrate Black women’s long history of intersectional praxis; namely the recognition of the diversity of women’s experiences along the lines of race, class, and sexuality, along with other dimensions of power (see, for example, Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1989). The ethical and critical practice of reflexivity has also led to the
rich diversity and transformation of epistemologies in the field (Adkins 2003; Naples 2013). As Naples (2013) explains: “The process of reflexivity involves deliberation among participants with the express goal of broadening feedback and reflection to include diverse experiences and analyses” (p. 677). This form of praxis breaks down the false divide between academic feminism and activism. As Ashwini Tambe and Millie Thayer (in preparation) discuss, “in many parts of the world, such as Latin America and South Asia, activism and academia are not as separate from one another as they are in the US” and “in some cases, productive tensions between scholars and activists emerge, pushing each side to articulate its thinking” (n.p.).

Epistemological diversity

For many decades, biological determinist views of gender, sex, and sexuality dominated academic approaches. In 1966, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann published *The Social Construction of Reality* which posited that culture and language played central roles in constructing what counts as reality. The theory of social constructionism spoke to feminist critiques of gender essentialism and the rigid binary of gender roles. The importance of language and culture for constructing hegemonic notions of male and female and masculinity and femininity were also emphasized. A more radical approach to social constructionism was further expressed in philosopher Judith Butler’s theory of performativity that built on J.L. Austin’s (1975[1955]) “speech act” theory. Austin argued that speech is productive and works to bring things into being, rather than served as mere descriptions of a perceived reality. Butler (1990) extended Austin’s approach to include the work of discourse (Foucault 1972) to construct social identities. Butler further argued that gender is performed, rather than an inherent feature of one’s nature. She explains that “what we take to be an ‘internal’ feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts as an extreme, an hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures” (pp. xv–xvi).

New epistemological developments in feminist theory and in the wider academy further invigorated the curriculum, research strategies, and interdisciplinary vision. Feminist scholars productively engaged postcolonial (see Bulbeck 1998; Mohanty 2003; Parashar 2016), postmodern (see McNay 1991; Diamond and Quinby 1992; Martin 1992), poststructural (see, for example, Berg 1991), and queer (see Weed and Schor 1997) theoretical insights while generating new intellectual formations in intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989; Collins 2019) and transnational feminist theories that further invigorated the richness of feminist inquiry (Grewal and Kaplan 1994). (For a more extensive coverage of feminist epistemologies and methodologies, see the *Companion to Feminist Studies* (Naples 2020)).

The narrative about the development of women’s and gender studies emphasizes influential publications such as Mary Beard’s *Woman as Force in History* (1946), Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), and Michele Barrett’s *Women’s Oppression Today* (1980). Key texts cited in the move toward a more inclusive approach to women’s studies include This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color edited by Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga (1981); *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* by bell hooks (1981); *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* edited by Askasha (Gloria T.) Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith (1982);

The success of institutionalizing women’s studies within the academia is further narrated through the reference to first courses taught. For example, the Universities of Kent and Bradford in the UK established Women’s and Gender Studies courses in the early 1980s. San Diego State University established its women’s studies program in 1970 and female studies was first organized at Cornell in 1971. In 1972, the University of Buffalo sponsored 45 courses. The program grew in stature to become a Department of Women’s Studies in 1997. To reflect the move towards internationalization of the mission and curriculum, it was renamed the Department of Global Gender Studies in 2005 but was merged under the Transnational Studies Department in 2009. That year they established an MA and PhD program in Global Gender Studies. In 2019, it again became a separate department, this time incorporating sexuality studies (Global Gender and Sexuality Studies, University of Buffalo 2019). All of these accomplishments resulted from the activism of women students and faculty who were engaged, at the time, in diverse women’s movement organizing efforts. However, if we broaden our angle of vision outside the US context, we discover that perhaps the first course in women’s studies was taught much earlier than chronicled in the US story. For example, Madge Dawson is credited as offering the first course in the 1950s in Australia (Sydney Morning Herald 2003). More importantly, there are a number of other origin stores that can and should be told when envisioned through a transnational lens.

The structure of US academia included the bureaucratic context to respond to the political pressure for incorporation of new interdisciplinary programs such as African American, Asian American and Latino/a studies as well as women’s studies programs. However, women’s studies was also developing in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America (see, for example, Bonnin 1996; Beoku-Betts 2020; Dahlerup 2015; Dufour et al. 2010; Illo 2005). International conferences were organized as well. The United Nations (UN) sponsored the first UN World Conference on Women was held in Mexico City in 1975 and delegates met again in Copenhagen (1980), in Nairobi (1985), and in Beijing (1995). The UN subsequently held reviews of women’s status every five years. Academic feminists organized transnationally to sponsor the First International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women held in Haifa, Israel, in 1981. It has been held every three years since that time in different cities in different countries and sponsored by different universities. Marilyn Safir (2018) spearheaded the first Women’s Worlds Congress and points out how significant it was for promoting women’s studies in Israel. She notes that following the Congress, the program in sex differences in society at Hebrew University was established in 1982, and the following year, the first women’s studies program was established at the University of Haifa.

Part II The Diversity of Academic Fields and Institutional Formations

In the opening chapter in this section (Chapter 2), Clara Montague and Ashwini Tambe retell the story of women’s studies to attend to the diversity of origins and investments that have given rise to this important interdisciplinary field. Through case studies on the US, South Korea, and Turkey, they explain that there are at least
three aspects of the US story that caution against using it “as a blueprint for understanding the field in other locations.” These dimensions include: (i) the US emphasis on undergraduate, rather than graduate, education as is the focus in other countries, (ii) feminist engagement with the state, which is underdeveloped in the US when compared to countries like the UK or Australia, and (iii) the “wave metaphor” that conceptualizes changing contours in feminism across historical periods.

The first wave was defined around securing the right to vote (Lemay 2019). The second wave referred to the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s that challenged essentialist binary gender roles and fought for equal rights (Naples 2005). The third wave is either defined paradoxically as more individualistic (when focused on the claims of young middle- and upper-middle-class feminists) or more attentive to the intersecting experiences across race, class, ability, and sexuality when compared to second-wave feminists (Reger 2005). However, the wave metaphor does not attend to the multiplicity of organizing efforts including Black women’s fight for abolition and labor rights during the first wave, radical and socialist feminist claims by White middle-class women in the second wave, and intersectional organizing by African American women and Latina activists during both the first and second waves. Furthermore, the wave metaphor does not bring into view the diverse strategies that women use to organize in different cultural and national contexts across different historical periods, as shaped by the differing role of religion, different state governance structures, among other institutional and cultural practices (Naples 2005).

In Chapter 3, William J. Scarborough and Barbara J. Risman acknowledge their “location in a Western nation and its position within global structures of power and discourse” as they provide an overview of the diverse and historical shifts in gender studies in the US and underscore that in contemporary gender studies, scholars recognize “the mechanisms by which gender is always intersecting with other systems of power, privilege, and oppression.” They refer to the intersectional work of Patricia Hill Collins (1990) and Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), which was generated from the lived experiences, everyday struggles, insights and reflections of Black women (see, also, Combahee River Collective 1977). Patricia Hill Collins called these structural and relational dynamics “a matrix of domination.” Scarborough and Risman explain that Collins’s concept draws: “attention to the social organization of oppression that occurs through structural forces (legal systems), disciplinary means (policing and organized regulation), cultural ideologies (stereotypes proliferated in media about oppressed groups), and interpersonal relationships” (see also Collins and Bilge 2016; Collins 2019).

Crenshaw’s (1989) articulation of intersectionality captured Black feminist praxis and experiences long before she conceptualized the term. Crenshaw defines intersectionality as the “‘multidimensionality’ of individuals’ lived experiences (p. 139) and the systems of oppression shaping them” (quoted in Naples, Mauldin, and Dillaway 2019, p. 9). Naples and coauthors note that: “While this theoretical framework and analytic tool developed out of black feminist scholarship, critical race theory, and legal studies, feminist scholars in a wide range of disciplines and interdisciplinary sites have adopted intersectionality to examine the co-construction of race, gender, and class in shaping individual, collective, and structural conditions” (pp. 9–10). Attention to the value of intersectional approaches and analysis is woven throughout the chapters in this Companion to Women’s and Gender Studies.

Scarborough and Risman’s chapter highlights both the development of gender studies as an academic field and the long history of “feminist consciousness” (Lerner...
The changing field of women’s and gender studies evident in works such as *The Book of the City of Ladies*, written around 1405 by French author, Christine de Pizan and Jane Anger’s *Her Protection For Women* (1985 [1589]), which “provided a stinging critique of men’s treatment of women and, more specifically, of the misogynist way many male authors portrayed women”.

Contemporary feminist scholars also offer insightful analyses of the social construction of masculinity with a recognition that rather than one dominant or “hegemonic” construction, masculinity is multiple (Connell 1995). In Chapter 4, Melanie Lee charts and analyzes multiple masculinities to further demonstrate the complexity of the concept as it is constructed in different contexts, with different epistemologies, and manifests in diverse material practices. She also examines masculinities’ transnational, hegemonic manifestations as well as relationships between local and global masculinity patterns, practices, and impacts and argues for inclusive approaches to international conversations about gender inequality in order to move people toward gender equality.

Trans studies further challenge the binary approach to gender that typified early women’s and gender studies. In Chapter 5, Cristina Khan and Kolbe Franklin point to the role of biological determinism and medicalization in shaping early approaches to trans studies. Social constructionist approaches destabilized these determinist approaches. Khan and Kolbe conclude by noting the significance of transfeminism for its intersectional attention “to the tripartite of race, class, and gender … as overlapping and interrelated categories of identity and systems that structure discrimination, power, and relative dis/advantage.” Trans movements have widened recognition of transphobia and racism that increase the vulnerability of trans people in social, cultural and political institutions. However, the “medical industrial complex” (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1969) and the “gender order” (Connell 1995) continue as powerful forces in shaping trans experiences and structuring gendered possibilities. Eric Eckhert (2016) notes in his article, “A Case for the Demedicalization of Queer Bodies” that “the medicalization of queer bodies not only fails to diminish … deep-seated biases from sexuality research and clinical practice, but that it also impedes care providers from addressing the healthcare disparities facing queer patients today” (n.p.). Trans activism contributed to changes in medical treatment and state recognition of trans individuals as well as the establishment of a trans antiviolence movement. Despite the growth in visibility and movement success, in some policy arenas, trans everyday lives continue to be shaped by the politics of medicalization.

**Part III Science, Health, and Psychology**

The next section focuses on the gender order and the power of androcentric constructions of science, health, and psychology as they construct and reproduce hegemonic understandings of gender, as well as how feminist scholars have interrupted these constructions. In Chapter 6, Sara P. Diaz presents an overview of feminist science and technology studies [FSTS] and explains that:

Western technoscience figures itself as value-free, apolitical, and objective. However, the historical social homogeneity of scientists and engineers has had an impact not only on the science of sex, gender, and sexuality, but on the substance of technoscientific projects.
In Chapter 7 on “Gender Bias in Research,” Meg Upchurch analyzes how androcentric approaches to science mask presumed “gender neutral” research practice and research designs center men as researchers and as research subjects. As in other male-dominated fields, women who enter and remain in the sciences often face sexual harassment or even sexual assault. Unconscious biases seep through the research process at all stages from hiring and promoting male researchers over women to interpretation of findings and extrapolation to both men and women of research results based on men, as has been most recently demonstrated in the diagnoses of heart attacks (Dougherty 2011).

Women’s reproductive lives have long been a target of medicalization and state regulation. In Chapter 8, Anna Kuxhausen offers a comparative analysis of the history of interventions by the state and other social institutions in women’s sexuality, pregnancy, and birthing that shifted birthing practices from under women’s control in the home and community to church, state, and sanctioned medical officials, who were often located far from the local setting. Kuxhausen points out how racist, nationalist, and classist constructions influenced how these social control practices were carried out and experienced. She compares these shifts as they appear in the US, Europe, and Russia. Commonalities include the development of natalist politics that contribute to “racist and classist efforts to control which women had babies and who was allowed to raise them.” Feminists effectively challenged state control and regulation to expand their reproductive rights but “had to accept compromises with the medical establishment that allowed physicians to retain their control over birth control.” For the most part, socialist countries were more progressive than capitalist countries in legalizing abortion, along with policies to support women’s ability to balance work and family. However, as Kuxhausen reports, it is in democratic countries with “a free press that women from marginalized communities have been able to raise awareness about forced contraception and redefine ‘reproductive justice’ to include the right to raise children in healthy environments.”

Intersectional feminist analysis demonstrates that women from different racial, ethnic, class, and national backgrounds experience different modes of surveillance by the state. Intersectionality is a powerful tool for revealing these processes; however, ableism is often ignored in intersectional analysis while gender as a dimension of power and inequality is often invisible in disability studies (Naples, Mauldin, and Dillaway 2019). In Chapter 9, Linda M. Blum describes the origins of disability studies in the 1970s and 1980s that challenged “the medicalizing of varied forms of bodily difference and impairments as abnormal, deformed, or deficient.” Blum explores the extent to which gender shapes the experience of disability and disability activism. The early movement foregrounded struggles against “the able-bodied, able-minded standard by which liberal democracies deemed adult men and women fit for rights and opportunities” and this focus “has been arguably more central to disability activism and scholarship than deconstructing the gender binary itself.” However, as Blum demonstrates, gender is a core dimension that constructs understanding of different bodies and the distinctions between “normative and non-normative bodies” that shapes cultural, medical, and economic processes.

Women and gender have also been marginalized in much of the early work in the field of psychology. In Chapter 10, Thekla Morgenroth and Avelie Stuart emphasize that, as in other academic fields, gender imbalance was challenged by women’s activism
in the field. Feminist psychologists also encouraged the recognition of the significance of gender in shaping life experiences. Initial work concentrated on the investigation of gender differences and similarities in behaviors, traits, and cognitive abilities through quantitative research designs. Interpretations of findings from these studies tended to essentialize and overemphasize the differences until meta-analyses conducted by feminist scholars demonstrated that “gender differences were either close to zero or small and therefore likely not very meaningful” with the exception of, among others, “sexual behavior and attitudes as well as physical aggression” (Hyde 2005). Morgenroth and Stuart describe the importance of social constructionist and intersectional approaches that draw on diverse quantitative and qualitative research strategies. They discuss the various societal factors that contribute to the creation of gender differences and how they are reproduced “in language and social interaction.” While contemporary psychological approaches challenge the gender binary, they continue to center Western, white, middle-class framing of psychological processes. These processes are shaped by cultural constructions of gender that are foundational to socialization practices and cultural production, which is the focus of the following section.

Part IV Culture

In their contribution to the Companion to Women’s and Gender Studies (Chapter 11), Pamela Bettis and coauthors focus on “Gender Ideology, Socialization, and Culture” in Nigeria, South Korea, and the United States. They demonstrate that “there is not one universal gender ideology or one universal gender socialization process.” However, there are some significant dimensions that can be found in all three contexts including women’s disproportionate poverty rate and the continued dominance of patriarchal social relations. In Chapter 12, Caryn D. Riswold attends to the way in which gender studies scholarship and feminist activism contest the patriarchal traditions of different religions that led some of these institutions to open up religious leadership positions so women could serve as priests and rabbis, among other roles. They also contributed to the revision of “images of and language for the divine, religions’ histories, interpretation and authority of sacred texts, belief and doctrine” and pointed out the varying role of religion in shaping gender relations and religious ideology.

The media is a key institution in the construction and reconstruction of gender. In Chapter 13, Audrey S. Gadzekpo and Marquita S. Smith review different theoretical perspectives on “Gender and Media” with a focus on film, advertising, the news, and online media. They discuss the ways media promote inequalities as well as how activists use media, especially online sites, to challenge these representations. In Chapter 14, Andrew J. Young and Dustin Kidd examine the role of women in producing popular culture including their contributions to television, film, music, and literature; and point out the persistent gendered inequalities that exist in these industries and cultural arenas. Young and Kidd also examine the significance of “the gendered nature of … the processes by which some cultural objects are celebrated and sacralized above others” that valorize or reward men’s activities and experiences over women’s, and constructions and performance of masculinity over femininity.

The concluding chapter in this section (Chapter 15) focuses on the ways that hegemonic constructions of masculinity, power inequities, and patriarchal practices
contribute to the intertwined social problems of “Gender-Based Violence and Rape Culture.” As in many of the previous chapters, author Brian N. Sweeney emphasizes the importance of an intersectional approach that is “enriched by an awareness of how distinct axes of power and privilege interlock to reproduce broader relations of inequality, oppression, exploitation, dehumanization, and victimization.” Sweeney’s intersectional approach includes attention to homophobic and transphobic violence. He also incorporates attention to women’s and girls’ increased vulnerability during times of crisis, displacement, forced migration, and war. As he notes, feminist analysis of spousal rape, rape as a tool of war, and rape myths influenced social policy and legal changes in many countries. Feminist activism led to inclusion of antiviolence and human rights policies adopted by the United Nations. The following section sheds further light on the global trends in gender inequality and implementation of policies to counteract these trends.

**Part V Politics, Economics, and the Environment**

In their opening chapter in this section (Chapter 16), Yan Ling Anne Wong and Maria Charles address the persistence of inequality between men and women in the labor market. They consider the individual, structural, and cultural explanations for the continued gender division of labor and inequities in pay and occupational advancement as they interact with race, class, nativity, and other dimensions of social stratification. In Chapter 17, Donna Bobbitt-Zeher discusses the activism and successful passage of gender discrimination policies and analyzes their effectiveness in challenging gender inequality in the workplace, schools, and other social institutions. She also considers related policies established at the United Nations. She reports the finding of the World Bank Group (2015) that:

> lower legal gender equality is associated with fewer girls attending secondary school relative to boys, fewer women working or running businesses, and a wider gender wage gap. Where laws do not provide protection from domestic violence, women are likely to have shorter life spans. But where governments support childcare, women are more likely to receive wages. (p. 2).

Unfortunately, there are numerous occupations that remain untouched by these legal protections. Care work is one of these areas of labor that often operates outside of government regulation. When formalized, care work remains underpaid and often includes highly exploitative working conditions.

In Chapter 18, Rosalba Todaro and Irma Arriagada analyze the global care chains that contour women’s international migrant labor and local community hierarchies of care. They note that the term “global care chains” was introduced by Arlie Hochschild (2001) to describe how people in different locations across the world are linked through the “care tasks in the homes of migrants who were hired and the care situation within their own homes and families.” These relations are unequal ones and further trap women in low-paid positions with increased risk for exploitation (Pérez Orozco 2007).

Exploitation is another theme that runs through feminist critiques of androcentric constructions of the environment, which contribute to the treatment of natural resources with little concern for the long-term impact. In Chapter 19, “Gender and
Environmental Studies” Mary Buchanan, Phoebe Godfrey, and Emily Kaufman offer an historical perspective on the concern for human actions that have a negative impact on the environment. They trace the origins of the interdisciplinary field of environmental studies to debates over conservation and preservation of natural spaces in the early twentieth century. Citing ecofeminist Susan Mann (2011), Buchanan, Godfrey, and Kaufman point out that much of the history and even contemporary environmental studies “is heavily weighted toward the dominant social groups – largely White, middle-class American men – with less attention paid to ‘women working on the margins’ both nationally and around the world.”

Buchanan, Godfrey, and Kaufman point out that during the 1970s feminists challenged the male-dominated field of environmental studies and articulated an approach called ecofeminism that “sought to liberate women and nature and to instigate new pathways based on equity and sustainability.” However, despite its theoretical diversity, feminist ecological approaches were often subsumed under one approach that tended to rely on an essentialist view of gender that naturalized women’s affinity for nature and the natural environment, and a failure to acknowledge the diversity of women’s experiences and complex relationships with nature. As the authors note, this was particularly apparent in ecofeminist “emphasis on celebrating the perceived privileged connections between women/indigenous peoples and nature.” Buchanan and coauthors argue for the use of an intersectional lens to break down the false divide between humans and nature believed to exist by some Western cultures. Throughout the chapter, they emphasize the significance of social activism informed by intersectional praxis for placing the environment on the agenda for social policy and collective action. Collective action is more necessary than ever to challenge the social, economic, and political inequalities, including gender, that have fueled global climate change and which must be directly addressed if a sustainable future is to ever be achieved.

Part VI Social Movements

The final section of this Companion offers an overview of gender and social activism and the most significant social movements that have shaped and continue to reshape Women’s and Gender Studies. In Chapter 20, “Gender and Collective Action,” Jennifer E. Cossyleon and Kyle R. Woolley demonstrate how collective action is a gendered and gendering process that shapes motivations for action, strategies, tactics, and movement outcomes. They also point to the importance of studying grassroots movements led by women of color who are often made invisible in academic literature and representations of movement activism. By turning attention to women’s grassroots activism, feminist scholars have transformed what counts as politics. They also emphasize how women’s strategies tend to be more focused on collectivist, across–issue and across–movement or intersectional strategies than those highlighted in the dominant sociological and political science literature on social movements (Naples 1998).

Women’s activism occurs in a variety of sites including in local communities and at the regional and transnational levels of organizing (Naples and Desai 2002). This is further demonstrated in Chapter 21 on “Women’s Movements” by Almudena Cabezas González and Marisa Revilla-Blanco. Cabezas and Revilla-Blanco center women’s social movement activism in non-Western countries. The authors
emphasize the importance of an intersectional analytic framework to reveal the stratified axes of oppression that create hierarchies evident within and across different women’s movements. They highlight the significance of a transnational feminist approach that includes attention to “multisituated networks and alliances in contemporary social action” (Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Mohanty 2003).

The scholarship on women’s movements captures progressive mobilizations as it is distinguished from right-wing women’s movements. Daniela Mansbach and Alisa Von Hagel focus on the latter in Chapter 22. Right-wing women’s movements have a long history and have contributed to White supremacist, nationalist, and patriarchal goals. As Mansbach and Von Hagel point out, Right-wing women’s movements have also been criticized by many feminists as acting against the interests of women as well as being shaped by influential men. Here, it is important to note that how one defines women’s issues can vary widely. For many conservative women, feminist goals of gender equality, access to abortion, and supporting sexual freedom and sexual diversity pose challenges to traditional gender roles and, they argue, diminish the value of women’s essential and valued position in the home. However, some women participating in right-wing mobilizations do see their engagement as feminist activism. For example, this is evident among some women participating in the Pro-Life movement in the US (see for example, https://www.feministsforlife.org/). Furthermore, women’s motivations for social activism are often similar to those described by women engaged in left-wing or progressive organizing. Many women in both the progressive and conservative ends of the movement view it as an extension of their role of mothers and their desire to protect their communities or families.

Men’s movements are also politically diverse mobilizations that include both conservative and radical strands. As Cliff Leek & Markus Gerke explain in Chapter 23, such self-defined movements first arose as a backlash or response to feminist critiques of traditional gender roles and, paradoxically, as an extension of feminist insights about the social construction of gender. The activists in the progressive men’s movement agree about the price that men pay for trying to achieve a hegemonic (or dominant) form of masculinity and acknowledge the power imbalance among men based on class, race, and sexuality. Feminist men within this end of the movement recognized how hegemonic masculinity contributes to violence against women and, consequently, created antiviolence groups to support women’s organizing in this arena to educate men on the issue. Leek and Gerke explain that on the more conservative end of the continuum “the antifeminist men’s rights movement rejects analyses of gendered power dynamics, denies institutional power and privilege of men and instead centers the concept of the male ‘gender role’ in order to argue that men as a group suffer to the same or even greater degree as women because of their gender, or to frame men as the victims of a gender order that allegedly benefits women.”

The challenge to the hegemonic “gender order” (Connell 1995) is the central thread that ties Trans Movements to the feminist critique of the gender binary. Salvador Vidal-Ortiz reviews the diverse trans movements in the Americas, with attention to racial and class diversity of mobilizations, the range of political strategies adopted, and the role of artists and activist scholars. Trans activists have been participating in LGBTQI politics for some time, but have never been fully integrated or central in defining issues and strategies. Contemporary trans movements address a wide range of issues including identity validation, access to housing and health
care, criminalization of trans people, and prevention of violence in prisons. As in other social movements discussed in this section, strategies adopted by trans activists take different forms in different locales.

In Chapter 24, Vidal-Ortiz highlights both the persistence of gender inequality and violence across different time frames and diverse contexts, the significance of local community forms of resistance, and the broader mobilizations found in transnational feminist praxis. In considering trans movements, he opens his chapter with the quote “to put the body on the line,” from Barbara Sutton’s book *Bodies in Crisis*. Sutton (2010) explains that the phrase is drawn from the Argentinian struggles, as she describes:

> The unfulfilled promises of electoral democracy, the connections with a past of brutal military dictatorship, the impoverishment of the population, the corruption of politicians and powerful economic groups, and the neoliberal economic model, all came under the critical scrutiny of ordinary people. They voiced discontent in the streets, put their bodies on the line in protest, and actively engaged in embodied practices of care and solidarity in their neighborhoods, communities and social movements. (p. 3)

Sutton applies the phrase specifically to her analysis of cisgender women’s fight against the myriad of violences they experienced in neoliberal Argentina. It also reflects the form of activism found in antiviolence and reproductive justice movements more broadly (see Margaret Campe and Claire Renzetti 2020 on “Gender, Sexuality, and Violence”; Michele Eggers-Barison and Chrystal Hayes 2020 on “Reproductive Justice”).

Insights from feminist praxis are evident in a wide array of local and transnational movements and forums from Occupy to the World Social Forum (Naples 2013) and include “providing models that emphasize ‘decentralized, respectful dialogue and cooperation that helped inform other social movements seeking to bridge national and other differences’” (Smith et al. 2008, pp. 18–19, quoted in Naples 2013, p. 673). Women activists have also been at the forefront of many mobilizations for social justice. For example, in an interview with Georgetown University professor of history, Marcia Chatelain, reporter Asoka Kaavya points out that:

> “Black Lives Matter” was created by three black women, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, after George Zimmerman’s acquittal for Trayvon Martin’s death. Women have been organizing marches, die-ins, protests, and otherwise leading various responses to police brutality.

(Chatelain and Asoka 2015)

In her response Chatelain emphasizes: “Women across the generations are participating in this movement, but I think we’ve had a wonderful opportunity to see especially young, queer women play a central role”.

**Conclusion**

This volume was generated in the context of the #MeToo protests that began in the US and spread to other countries and which has encouraged many students and faculty in academia to speak out personally and collectively against sexual harassment
and sexual violence in colleges and universities. In the US, it has led to successful outing of high-profile male entertainers, politicians, business leaders, and academics who have, for a long time, gotten away with sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and rape (Gessen 2018). In reaction to these developments the largest number of women in history were elected to the House of Representatives in the US. At the same time, there is an erosion of women’s reproductive rights. Despite the standing US Supreme Ruling (*Roe v. Wade*) that guarantees women’s freedom to choose abortion, access has been drastically reduced in many states. A recent report from the European Union Parliament also documented that women’s reproductive and sexual rights were attacked in Italy, Poland, Romania, Hungary, and Austria. On the other hand, Irish voters legalized abortion by repealing their restrictive constitutional amendment (De Freytas-Tamar 2018; see also Cafolla 2019).

It is tempting to read the story of women’s movement activism through the narrative of progress, from gaining the right to vote to the creation of new laws against discrimination, and the increase in women holding elected offices in many Western or Northern countries as well as the successful institutionalization of women’s and gender studies in the academy. However, even within these countries, we are witnessing attacks on the legitimacy of women as leaders in politics and business, their right to employment and promotion in male-dominated fields, women’s reproductive rights, and a backlash against key feminist organizations like Planned Parenthood and women’s and gender studies.

Despite, or perhaps as a consequence of its many successes, women’s and gender studies is contested as a legitimate and necessary institutional formation in contemporary academic politics. It is one of the units that has been under attack in the context of the neoliberal focus on fields that can garner external funding like the sciences. Interdisciplinary fields like women’s and gender studies and disciplines within the humanities have been especially vulnerable to budget cuts, hiring freezes, and even elimination in the current era of “austerity” (Naples 2018). For example, Takamitsu Sawa reported that in Japan, “on June 8 [2015], all presidents of national universities received a notice from the education minister telling them to either abolish their undergraduate departments and graduate schools devoted to the humanities and social sciences or shift their curricula to fields with greater utilitarian values” (2018, n.p.).

Right-wing resistance has also escalated in other national contexts. For example, in 2018, Hungary removed gender studies programs from accreditation for master’s programs. Reporter Elizabeth Redden (2018) quotes the Hungarian Prime Minister Zsolt Semjen that “gender studies ‘has no business [being taught] in universities,’ because it is ‘an ideology not a science’” (n.p.). The announcement was met with international protests from the European Union and prominent academics from around the world, but was also supported by other academics as reported by the Budapest Bureau of Reuters (2018) which quoted sociologist Balint Botond:

> Gender-faithful liberals have already caused irreparable harm in the souls of generations growing up in the past decades. We need to fight them without compromise and achieve a complete victory, otherwise they will end up destroying us. (n.p.)

Jennifer Evans (2019) explains that “the war on gender studies is a pillar in the authoritarian critique of liberalism” (n.p.). She cites Roman Kuhar and David
Paternotte (2017) who argue that “several parts of Europe are facing new waves of resistance to ‘gender theory’” and claims for “marriage equality, reproductive rights, sexual liberalism and anti-discrimination policy generally” (n.p.). Evans also reports that gender studies professors have received “hate mail” following speaking out against gender inequality and she cited the experience of Professor Paula-Irena Villa who chairs sociology and gender studies at the Ludwigs-Maximilian-University of Munich. Other incidents of backlash are evident around the world. For example, Judith Butler was the target of a “mob in Brazil to protest her visit as ‘a threat to the natural order of gender, sexuality and the family’” (Jaschik 2017, n.p.). Evans (2019) reports that a “dynamite-shaped device” thought to be “a bomb was left outside the National Secretariat for Gender Research in Gothenburg, Sweden” (n.p.). Although it was a fake, “the intent to threaten and scare was clear” (ibid).

As Bronwyn Winter, Nancy A. Naples, and Réjane Sénac (2018) note, this is a time of “paradox” where “on the one hand, gender and sexual equality have become a global political frame, yet on the other, they are a contested subject, as the societal and cultural role(s) of women, and the extent and limits of rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) minorities, are being subjected to intense scrutiny.” In addition, attacks against women’s reproductive and immigrant rights and violence against religious and ethnic minorities is escalating in different parts of the world, and at the same time movements for social justice, antiviolence, trans youth, and immigrant rights are growing in visibility.

The stories of women’s and gender studies are stories of reclamation (of voices and lives left out of history), resistance (to sexism and other patterns of inequality and oppression), and reflexivity that contributes to its vitality as a vibrant intellectual site with broad contributions to wider academic goals of inclusion and critical education. However, its success within academia and the critical engagement of feminist faculty in academic affairs also contributes to the paradox of, on the one hand, antifeminist backlash as discussed above and, on the other, postfeminist arguments that women’s and gender studies is no longer necessary as it has been effectively integrated into the relevant disciplines. Of course, neither position acknowledges the power of interdisciplinary feminist analyses for revealing the complexity of the “relations of ruling” that contour “everyday life” (Smith 1990) through diverse institutions, discourses, and everyday interactions. Furthermore, it ignores or discounts the dynamics of activism and social change that can only be effectively explored through an interdisciplinary lens generated through feminist praxis. As we honor the efforts of past generations for providing a foundation for contemporary women’s and gender studies, these intellectual formations remain open to change and reformulation as feminist faculty and students face new challenges and contribute new insights from contemporary praxis.

Note

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