This vibrantly eclectic issue of Feminist Studies can perhaps best be framed as a series of interventions into current literatures on masculinities and feminisms. Angela Willey and Banu Subramaniam explore the implications of the racialized “white nerd masculinity” that is at the heart of the popular television series The Big Bang Theory, while Jessica Johnson draws our attention to the significance of the virulently muscular brand of Christian masculinity preached by Mark Driscoll in his multi-state Mars Hill Church, which drew thousands of followers during the early 2000s. Both articles reveal the toxicity of these contemporary masculine formations, from their mundane and pervasive exposition in popular culture to more strident articulations in megachurches. Gergely Kunt offers a rare first-person glimpse into the complexities of a World War II sexual economy, examining via the diary of a Hungarian refugee the relationship between militarized masculinity and sexual assault and the exploitation of women in wartime. Other essays in this volume intervene in current debates about the form, histories, and implications of Western feminisms. Jennifer McLerran’s art essay on Mohawk artist Carla Hemlock expands on the “Native feminist ethics” invoked by Yaqui legal scholar Rebecca Tsosie, suggesting that for Native feminists, improving women’s lives cannot be separated from decolonization. Magdalena Grabowska demands Western feminists rethink their commonplace dismissal of women who lived under
state socialism as non-agentive, while Jo Reger calls our attention to the frequently problematized “wave” metaphor as she locates the roots of disidentification with previous generations of feminists. And Eileen Boris’s review essay highlights the racialized, gendered, classed, and transnational intertwining of fashion and feminism. The poet featured in this issue is Rachel Marie-Crane Williams. The issue closes with two reflections on the January 21st Women’s March on Washington: Mrinalini Chakraborty, one of its national organizers, describes in an interview the inception and logistical challenges of the march, while Tracey Jean Boisseau describes uplifting interactions with strangers that many march-goers experienced that day.

In “Inside the Social World of Asocials: White Nerd Masculinity, Science, and the Politics of Reverent Disdain,” Angela Willey and Banu Subramaniam analyze what they call the “reverent disdain” for science that continues to pervade feminist scholarship as well as public/popular culture. This reverent disdain leads to resistance to incorporating methodologies from the natural sciences into feminist studies, even while authority is ceded to knowledges produced within those disciplines. Willey and Subramaniam demonstrate the pervasiveness of this reverent disdain through a close reading of the immensely popular television show The Big Bang Theory. While the show portrays science as pure play and curiosity, with an innocent distance from the social, Willey and Subramaniam argue that, through its depiction of nerds, the show constructs brilliance in racialized and gendered ways that police and naturalize the boundaries of knowledge production in science, rendering it inaccessible to practice and to critique. In particular, the show creates an innocent white masculinity that effaces the hierarchies of race and gender that actually exist within science as well as in society at large. Willey and Subramaniam’s goal is to encourage feminist scholarship to reject the binaries of nature and culture and move toward more “naturalcultural” engagements in which critiques of science and engagement with scientific practice coexist as intellectual and political projects.

If Willey and Subramaniam highlight how nerd masculinity is made to appear outside of the social even as it reinforces social hierarchies, in “Under Conviction: ‘Real Men’ Reborn on Spiritual and Cinematic Battlefields,” Jessica Johnson excavates a muscular, evangelical Christian project to transform the sociopolitical by intertwining virulent masculinity, Hollywood movies, and the global war on terror.
Johnson troubles the distinction between the evangelical and the (secular) popular in her ethnography of Seattle’s Mars Hill Church, which at its height spread to five states and had approximately 13,000 attendees. The church had a charismatic and social-media savvy preacher named Mark Driscoll who urged men to stop being “pussies” and instructed married women to become sexually alluring beings for their husbands, even as he lay the blame for men’s problems on single women who were too sexually available. Through “film and theology” events, in which Hollywood films were screened and discussed, as well as in his sermons, Driscoll linked a militarized and sexualized visual culture with spiritual warfare. This spiritual warfare, enacted through security teams of citizen-soldiers made up of male church members, echoed the biopolitical instruments of the so-called war on terror that preemptively activate battle readiness against pervasive, ambiguous, and unseen threats. Johnson argues that in this particular evangelical project, biblical masculinity was “sutured to an aggressive sexual drive.” Driscoll’s misogyny eventually became the target of vocal protest, and Johnson provides moving testimonials from former male members of the church who had been affectively engaged in the church about how they became disillusioned with Driscoll’s message as well as with his mode of conveying it.

Gergely Kunt’s article, “Wartime Sexual Economy as Seen through a Hungarian Woman’s World War II Diary,” translated by Éva Misits, links the themes of masculinities and feminisms by recovering aspects of wartime histories that are often forgotten, lost, or intentionally erased. Scholars of gender and war have often noted that the wartime experiences of women are not usually incorporated into the broader nationalist and masculinist narratives that emerge in the wake of such conflicts. Thus, these wartime narratives, or in the case of Kunt’s essay, the World War II story of one Hungarian woman, Róza Bodó, told through her diary, disrupt the easy and mythic coupling of masculine glory and victorious nationalism highlighted in the aftermath of World War II. Kunt’s deep analysis of Bodó’s diary offers more than a simple disruption; it brings into view the explicit proliferation of the culture of rape as weapon of war and as a “right” of occupying forces (including US troops) and the difficult choices facing refugees and other women residing in conflict zones as they navigate often coercive sexual relationships with the men “in charge.” Kunt explicates the victimization and agency of women as they negotiated the wartime sexual economy as a means of survival.
While Kunt offers a disruptive war narrative on World War II, Magdalena Grabowska draws our attention to a parallel set of marginalizations in her exposition of women’s experiences living in socialist states in post-World War II Europe. Grabowska notes that common narratives of women’s lived realities under state socialism have generally represented such women as passive, non-agentive participants in these systems, depicting socialist women’s activism as inauthentic and not truly emancipatory. Through interviews with Polish and Georgian women who lived through this period of European history, Grabowska refutes this formulation and persuasively demonstrates the centrality of women’s activism to attaining the same rights as have been central to Western feminist movements; childcare, labor market participation, and access to reproductive control. She argues that through “participation in political parties” and state-run “women’s organizations,” socialist women engaged in a type of state building that successfully integrated their goals within the socialist state apparatus. In doing so, Grabowska restores women’s agency to the center of socialist state formation and urges, if not demands, that feminist scholars revise their presumptions that state socialism represents a “lag in the genealogy of the women’s movement—not only in the region, but also transnationally.” She points to Eastern Europe and the countries formerly annexed by the Soviet Union in the aftermath of World War II as an “indispensable and original site” of “global feminist theory and practice.”

Alongside Kunt’s and Grabowska’s alternative feminist histories is Jennifer McLerran’s “Difficult Stories: A Native Feminist Ethics in the Work of Mohawk Artist Carla Hemlock,” in which the author examines how Mohawk fiber artist Carla Hemlock challenges conventional Western definitions of feminism through her approach to quilting and beading. McLerran emphasizes how Native history, colonialism, and nature inform Hemlock’s artistic production, which is widely exhibited at Native art fairs, traveling exhibits, and museums such as the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian. In her close reading of Hemlock’s art, McLerran uses the lens of Yaqui legal scholar Rebecca Tsosie’s “Native feminist ethic” to reveal an ethic of care that encompasses the health and vitality of land, community, and culture. In this version of Native feminism, improving women’s lives cannot be separated from decolonization. Hemlock uses traditionally feminine artistic forms and practices—quilting, beading, decorating moccasin tops
or “vamps”—to upset viewers’ expectations and engender dialogue. For Native women, quilting is a “transcultural” practice in that it was impressed on Native women as part of the colonial project but it is now practiced widely by Native women who combine European-American and indigenous materials and imagery to create a new aesthetic in their work. Hemlock, for example, embeds beading and wampum belt imagery into her quilt designs and draws heavily on Haudenosaunee cosmology and the critical role of the female in Native creation mythology. She further upsets viewers’ expectations by incorporating political statements about environmental justice, tribal sovereignty, and the gender-based violence of settler colonialism. Hemlock’s works challenge assaults on the environment such as fracking; confront the staid iconography of Mohawk ironworkers; commemorate the treaties Native peoples made with settlers; and memorialize the disappearance and murder of many thousands of Native women and girls in the colonial project.

In “Finding a Place in History: The Discursive Legacy of the Wave Metaphor and Contemporary Feminism,” Jo Reger proposes an alternative to the oft-studied question of “waves” as the means of characterizing US feminisms. The critique of the wave metaphor to describe the distinct history of US feminism has been the subject of book-length studies, anthologies, and articles for at least the past twenty years. Reger acknowledges these literatures while engaging more with the legacies of this meta-metaphor. She examines the ways in which different generations of feminists understand and engage with one another and these histories. Reger argues that the “discursive legacy of waves” is important to analyze, particularly because of how postfeminism and antiracist feminism have developed in critical relation to it. She notes ironically how feminist generations see one another “through a lens of opposition” and how newer generations of feminists articulate a critical appraisal of earlier movements and disidentify from older generations. In the end, these distinct standpoints create a framework of contestation that affects emerging feminist views of the viability of feminist movements.

In a review essay on recent books on fashion, Eileen Boris interrogates the development of feminist ideas and their articulation and movement across borders (national, cultural, and political). She explores feminist literatures on “fashion” through three categories: bodies (the models themselves), personal style bloggers, and the transnational flow/exchange of styles. Gesturing to the work of fashion theorist Joanne
Entwistle, Boris notes, “Body work becomes beauty work, and beauty becomes a technique of distinction and control imbricated with power and generating knowledge.” Yet Boris also clarifies that dress can be imbricated in hegemonic norms and also deeply engaged in resistant work. The monographs reviewed by Boris interrogate bodies and their meanings as framed by fashion, look to the disasporic connections and intergenerational passage of knowledges central to the creation and transmission of fashion trends globally, and highlight the transnational movement of style through unexpected mediums, including everyday religious practices. Boris concludes her essay with a prediction that “feminist fashion studies will expand as more of us find in its objects and activities a medium to link the cultural with the structural, discourse with the material, and thus reconfirm that bodies matter—not only as sites of biopower but also as initiators of resistance.”

Rachel Marie-Crane Williams’s prose poem “Both Sides Now” is featured in this issue. Williams reminds us of the pain and abuse women both carry in their bodies and enact on others’ bodies. She describes prison sex offenders’ groups of women as well as men and how difficult it is to acknowledge that women can also be sex offenders and how important it is for women to connect with one another in collective support.

Also in this issue, we include two short reflections on the ground-breaking January 21 Women’s March on Washington: one is an interview with a member of the organizing team of the march, National Head of Field Operations and Strategy, Mrinalini Chakraborty; the other is attendee Tracey Jean Boisseau’s first-person account of what it felt like to be in the crowd during the march. These two different angles of vision—from above and below, so to speak—present a fuller sense of why this was a historic event: the unprecedented logistical coordination and inclusive vision that its organizers mobilized and how people on the streets conducted themselves in genuinely inspiring ways.

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