

preface

WITHIN THE CURRENT CONTEXT IN THE UNITED STATES, we tend to think of “choice” as the leading slogan of the liberal movement to expand women’s reproductive rights, particularly the right to elective abortion. But choice depends on context: on what is available, what is mandated, what is prohibited or discouraged, and what has not yet been imagined. This issue of *Feminist Studies* expands our thinking about available and potential choices, both individual and social.

The issue opens with Stephanie Yingyi Wang’s ethnographic study of companionate marriage in China, in which she describes cooperative marriage partnerships that look heterosexual and appear to fulfill traditional familial expectations, but that facilitate same-sex liaisons and so create new family structures. Other essays in this issue describe the kinds of choices available to those who seek nontraditional or less conventional family and erotic bonds. Leila J. Rupp discusses the “queer dilemmas of desire” that perplex undergraduate queer women in US colleges, and Sonny Nordmarken opens possibilities for new trans epistemologies that disrupt and produce new gender practices, claiming that queer instability provides “infinite possibilities” for individual and social change. More traditional choices and families take differing shapes in other historical and cultural contexts. Carla Pascoe Leahy compares the levels of maternal satisfaction felt by three historical cohorts of Australian women: those of the immediate post-World War II generation, the later generation of the Women’s Liberation Movement, and the current generation. Miriam Kienle examines how two designers, Giorgia Lupi and Stefanie Posavec, decided to explore alternatives to big data by sending each other weekly postcards that quantified their lives according to “small/slow data” points. Other essays and poems emphasize constraint rather than choice about the kinds of identities that take shape within current social structures. Bettina Judd ponders the effects on herself and others of her own rage at racial injustice and of the stereotype of raging black women perpetuated by a society that has chosen not to

deal with its endemic racism. Similarly, Vivyan Adair's memoir on the stigmata of growing up in poverty exposes the limitations of individual choice in the context of violence, a theme echoed in the poems by Elisabeth Blair, which dramatize her experiences in an abusive institution for troubled teens. Trysh Travis reviews four books published in 2017 that together, but differently, tackle the difficult situations of the "drug-using woman" and her recovery. Marilyn Strathern and Jade S. Sasser review Adele Clarke and Donna Haraway's edited volume *Making Kin, Not Population: Reconceiving Generations*, with responses from multiple authors featured in the book. Finally, a short story by Mary Anna Evans and poetry by Hannah Baker Saltmarsh and Abigail G. H. Manzella voice other individual dilemmas related to choice. We end the issue with a News and Views piece by Sonja Thomas that offers more context on the recent Women's Wall protest in Kerala, India.

In "When Tongzhi Marry: Experiments of Cooperative Marriage between Lalas and Gay Men in Urban China," Stephanie Yingyi Wang frames cooperative marriage in mainland China between gay men and lalas (same-sex loving women), or tongzhi marriage, as an experiment in queer kinship. Such marriages appear to fulfill traditional roles on the surface, providing women and men who desire same-sex relationships a sanctioned institution — marriage — within which to fulfill these desires. According to Wang, these relational strategies are shaped simultaneously by China's heteronormative policies and by the global circulation of gay rights narratives, "transforming the heteronormative family institution from within." In this ethnography, Wang describes relationships as varied as those in which married partners are mutually supportive close friends who confide in one another about their same-sex relationships, to others in which subjects suffered from differing expectations between the partners, sometimes with gay husbands expecting deferential behavior from their lala wives, or between the couples and their parents and in-laws. Wang suggests applying a "decolonizing feminist methodology" to go beyond dichotomies of public/private, local/global, and success/failure and thus to better understand tongzhi marriage and critical queer subjectivities at this global juncture. Wang's article is a co-winner of the 2018 *Feminist Studies* Award for the best article written by a graduate student.

Leila J. Rupp probes a set of dilemmas facing queer undergraduate students in the United States — specifically those assigned female

at birth and identify as queer. As she explains in her “Queer Dilemmas of Desire,” a substantial body of scholarship scrutinizes how young straight women have responded to changes in sexual mores since the 1960s and how there is a tension between persistent slut shaming and an embrace of women’s right to sexual pleasure. But much less attention has been given to challenges that queer women continue to face. Rupp focuses on the experiences of over 120 students at the University of California, Santa Barbara, as narrated in interviews conducted by her students and research assistants between 2006 and 2012. By analyzing the pathways students took in coming out and their experiences of being gay on this diverse campus, which has a visible and active queer community, Rupp discerned several queer “dilemmas of desire,” including the difficulty of distinguishing between intense friendship and erotic love; the confusion caused by leaving a relationship undefined; the way the hook-up scene removes inhibitions but also creates unease; the slippery line between “acceptable tomboyishness and queer gender nonconformity”; and increased access to pornography as educational but also discomfiting. In short, despite heightened queer visibility in contemporary US culture, students narrated their queer coming of age as marked by a medley of confusing experiences and emotions. Although these differ from straight dilemmas of desire in that there is less concern about gendered power imbalances and the adverse ways in which desire is perceived, the persistent lack of clarity regarding relationships between women is striking.

Sonny Nordmarken uses the term “gender anomie” to describe the uncertainty surrounding which pronouns to use in referring to a person and argues that the resulting instability has great potential to disrupt gendered hegemonies and create new norms. In “Queering Gendering: Trans Epistemologies and the Disruption and Production of Gender Accomplishment Practices,” Nordmarken acknowledges the real dangers faced by nonwhite gender minorities and the limitations of research conducted by a white US academic with disproportionately white interview subjects and a scope limited to the particularities of English-language syntax. Nevertheless, Nordmarken asks us to heed the effects that shifting pronoun usage and trans visibility (and illegibility) have already had on spaces both “wise” and “unwise” to the merits of disentangling sensory perceptions of bodies from assumptions regarding appropriate gender pronouns. This transfeminist analysis, which builds on both discursive

and interactionist approaches and draws on fifteen years of auto/ethnographic fieldwork as well as twenty semi-structured interviews conducted in San Francisco in 2011, allows for optimism in its call to *do* instead of *undo* gender.

Even within apparently traditional relationships, variables of historical context and social class create significant differences in individual experiences and the identities people believe they are called into. In “From the Little Wife to the Supermom? Maternographies of Feminism and Mothering in Australia since 1945,” Carla Pascoe Leahy records the “maternographies of feminism and mothering” of three different cohorts of Australian women since the Second World War. Their oral histories appear to reveal a simple progression from “a female identity centered on mothering to one focused on paid work,” but Pascoe Leahy argues that throughout these long decades, the women’s “maternal narratives” reveal the contradictions they experienced in the ideologies of “selfhood, work, care, and gender” such that the disruptions of traditional roles remain “unresolved” to the present. The women’s movement in Australia in the 1970s framed motherhood as a problem best to be avoided. Instead, their feminist demands centered on equal pay and equal opportunities for work. Millennial Australian mothers, in turn, now express their conflicts in terms of the impossibility of “having it all,” at the same time that they have achieved goals including free university education and expanded parental leave of eighteen weeks for women and two weeks for their partners. Yet the very process of giving their oral histories to the researcher provided these mothers with a validating format for recounting their maternal experiences.

The articles discussed thus far all rely heavily on interviews as evidence. They also, in ways more or less evident, incorporate the author’s own lived experiences. In “Dear Data: Feminist Information Design’s Resistance to Self-Quantification,” art historian Miriam Kienle attends to a project by two designers, Giorgia Lupi and Stefanie Posavec, that speaks to the impulse that many feminists have to employ methodological approaches that draw heavily on detailed and often personal specifics. For their project *Dear Data* (2015), Lupi and Posavec spent a year exchanging weekly postcards on which they drew visualizations of data describing different aspects of their lives. The resulting data visualizations are unusual for their relative illegibility, which, as Kienle explains, “expose[s] the instability of data itself.” In grappling with “the

now commonplace act of quantifying the self,” the two designers, Kienle argues, offer a “model for a feminist approach to data visualization.” Indeed, Lupi has written about how doing *Dear Data* changed the way she works: she now strives harder to customize graphics and to make clear data’s contingency as well as the human decisions involved in its collection and organization. Kienle’s article, in the context of this issue of *Feminist Studies*, suggests that *Dear Data* may also have implications for scholars outside the design field — as a way to retool consciousness about data collection and analysis.

Bettina Judd complicates disciplinary boundaries in “Sapphire as Praxis: Toward a Methodology of Anger.” Her “data” include, but are not limited to, television, music, current events, and her own poetry, collages, and biography. She addresses a problem whose scope effectively demands such inclusiveness: the silencing — and worse — of black women through the trope of the angry black woman. In developing a “methodology of anger,” Judd provides a roadmap for dealing with the dilemma produced by the figure of Sapphire, who is, for many black women, both heroine and adversary.

In the review essay “Toward a Feminist History of the Drug-Using Woman — and Her Recovery,” Trysh Travis examines recent works that can inform a feminist understanding of the forces driving addiction. In particular, she shows how different disciplinary orientations can pose limits to our understanding. Travis is especially interested in how we can imagine better practices for alleviating addiction. With special thanks to Lisa Rofel, we also present a forum reviewing Adele Clarke and Donna Haraway’s book *Making Kin Not Population: Reconceiving Generations*, an edited collection taking on the quandaries of how feminists should approach population as a concept and a social issue in the context of new environmental challenges. In our forum, the authors of the edited collection respond to comments from Marilyn Strathern and Jade S. Sasser. In her response, Haraway asks us more broadly to consider “what *could* kinship be open to” if it were “released . . . from baby-making familism.”

The creative writing in this issue of *Feminist Studies* continues to interrogate the theme of individual affect in changing social situations. These creative pieces expand and vary the themes of the scholarly essays. Mary Anna Evans’s prose piece “Personal Continuum” adds nuance to assumptions about reproductive and romantic choices as the protagonist tentatively responds to her partner after she has miscarried

a pregnancy. The poem “Built for Two” by Abigail G. H. Manzella, in contrast, traces a three-generational relationship, not between a heterosexual couple, but between granddaughter and a grandmother who encourages her granddaughter’s dancing and poem-writing until her own decline reverses their roles. The poems of Elisabeth Blair tease us with attempts to explain the questions and identities of her unidentified speakers. “You’ll get better,” the cruel speaker says ominously to the victim in “Listen.,” while a boy is abused in “The English boy” alongside unnamed others in “How it feels is a series of questions.” Other painful memories are recalled by Vivyan Adair in “Stigmata: A Memoir of Pain and Resistance,” reveals the markers and injuries of class that are visibly displayed on the bodies of the poor in the form of scars, bad teeth, and ringworm infections. Adair challenges us to respond to these facts not with pity and avoidance but with more vigorous action for social justice. Finally, in her poem “This Girl I Lost Touch With,” Hannah Baker Saltmarsh implies a whole trajectory, from an impoverished rural upbringing and cult-inspired religious faith to adult independence for someone who may or may not be one’s self over time. Her cautionary poem “Lost Love Lounge” warns that “a mother’s love is never enough,” while another of her poems meditates on basketball errors, male shame, and the “self-aggrandizing self.”

Finally, our News and Views essay examines the Women’s Wall protest that took place on January 1, 2019, in Kerala, India, against the prohibition of women entering the Sabarimala Hindu temple. Sonja Thomas argues that this protest, which was touted by many as expressing feminist consciousness in India, should be contextualized within caste hierarchies, religious divisions, and political party interests.

Judith Gardiner and Bibi Obler,
for the *Feminist Studies* collective