

PREFACE

This issue of *Feminist Studies* shows how pervasively women's reproductive roles have been and still are manipulated and interpreted, particularly in twentieth-century U.S. society, and how women are negotiating choices about reproduction and sexuality, work, sport, and art. These actions have political implications for all involved—individuals, groups, and institutions. Even though feminists have broadened the frame of reference in embracing the totality of women's lives, a current mainstream preoccupation with the biological threatens to bring us back to square one. However, this is a new square, as the articles in this volume point out: "new" because as things change, they may reconstitute into new, more devious, and more subtle forms of inequality. As the authors of these essays warn us, there is a need to stay vigilant.

Rickie Solinger's timely lead essay about the politics of hospital abortion committees provides a historical perspective to this controversial topic. Before World War II, Solinger shows, physicians remained flexible about hospital abortions, even though abortion was outlawed, because they gave priority to maternal health. After the war, however, the claims of the fetus were advanced separately from, even in opposition to, those of the mother, who was recast solely as a carrier or container. Medicine became legalized and the law became medicalized. Physicians replaced mothers as guardians of the unborn, and abortion decisions turned from serving women's health to effacing women, whose morality was reduced to service to the fetus and who were themselves reduced to being solely their uteri.

Alice Adams further explores the "uterine metaphor" in the late twentieth century, finding that in the utopian fiction of Marge Piercy as in the theoretical philosophy of Luce Irigaray, mothers are still conceptualized as selfless guardians of the culture's morality or as dangers, so that feminism requires the end of biological motherhood. The pregnant woman is still seen, as in traditional masculinist discourse, as the platonic cave from which the fetus emerges. These utopias negate biological mothers: again, the fetus is seen as person; the mother, as its background. In the newest technologies, as in those beautifully illustrated popular books, the womb is no longer a dark mysterious space but a clear window showing only the growing person inside, and popular new techniques of childbirth like Leboyer's depend on the physician's identification with the unborn and with a biotechnology cleansed of maternal agency and superseding the maternal body.

The political implications of attitudes to women's bodies also feature

in Linda M. Blum's history of breastfeeding in the United States in the twentieth century. She chronicles how levels of breastfeeding fell in response to government and corporate pushing of artificial breastmilk, which they called "formula" so that it sounded scientific and pure, preferable to the mother's milk which was tainted with the mother's body. At present, primarily middle-class white women enjoy the privilege of breastfeeding, because working-class women's jobs have conditions hostile to the practice. On the other hand, the advantages of breastfeeding for both mothers and babies cause Blum to review and revise contemporary theoretical arguments about the meanings of equality and difference for women in favor of a strongly transformed woman-centered context for mothering and breastfeeding. Of course, the mother remains a complex and independent person whatever the uses or vagaries of her body, as Lyn Lifshin's poems about a blind and aging, but zestful, mother remind us, whereas Faulkner Fox's imaginative prose sees a woman by herself, aware of her body, exploring her sexuality.

Like Blum's article, Nancy E. Rose's essay on "the two channels of the welfare state" also looks at interconnections among institutional power and gender privilege in historical perspective. Rose traces the bifurcated U.S. government work and welfare programs from the 1930s to the present, contrasting the relatively progressive programs, which were created primarily for white men out of work in the 1930s and expanded to include men of color in the 1970s, with the punitive and restrictive programs aimed at women, especially women of color, dominant in the 1950s and 1980s. This historical analysis, Rose argues, leads to policy conclusions: feminists should work for voluntary rather than mandatory government programs that enable workers to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

In "Beauty and the Butch," Susan K. Cahn discusses women's sexuality in another social context, that of women's sport. As in the essays above, a historical perspective on the last fifty years of U.S. culture shows complex opportunities and restrictions for women. "Mannish" women athletes, especially white women, were first stigmatized for being unappealing to men, then for being uninterested in them. On the other hand, women's sports like softball provided a comfortable space for women and fostered a culture in which women could enjoy their bodies in strength and skill and enjoy other women's companionship without dividing lesbians from heterosexual women.

If Susan K. Cahn celebrates the strength of women's bodies and the possibilities for lesbian bonding in women's athletics, Tee A. Corinne

an unapologetically romantic view of the female body and of lesbian lovemaking in her contribution to this issue. Her art essay explicitly delineates the grace and beauty of female genital forms and deliberately mythologizes lesbian sexuality.

In twentieth-century U.S. public policies toward abortion, breastfeeding, motherhood, welfare, and women's sports, male anxieties about female sexuality have constrained possibilities for women. Mark Breitenberg looks further back in history to underscore the "anxious masculinity" that made sexual jealousy a pervasive theme in early modern England from Shakespeare's *Othello* to popular sermons and conduct books. Using Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, Breitenberg argues that masculine sexual anxiety was the necessary condition for the development of romantic love and that paradoxically female social powerlessness led to men's obsessive need for female chastity, a need that increased their own anxiety and vulnerability.

Like Shakespeare, the male "geniuses" of the musical pantheon and their audiences are not immune to the sexual anxieties of their times. A hostile musicologist responds to Susan McClary, author of the review essay on musicology and feminism in the 1990s, that what's wrong with feminists is that they "deny themselves the single function—the bearing of children" that distinguishes them from men. As this issue shows, feminists deny that women can be identified with the "single function" of motherhood, and McClary explains why some traditional musicologists become so angry when feminists demonstrate that the supposedly pure and content-free world of music is deeply implicated in the social structures in which it is composed and performed.

Analyses of contemporary daily existence and interpretations of the past both call for feminists to move beyond socially prescribed positions and view issues and events in relation to one another and in the widest possible contexts. Only in this fashion can the feminist politics of engagement succeed in transforming our lives and our society.

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for the editors