

Annual Report
Institute for Research on Women, Rutgers University, 2020-2021

Arlene Stein (Director) & Sarah Tobias (Associate Director)

I. OVERVIEW

IRW's annual theme for the 2020-2021 academic year was "Knowing Bodies: Science and the Sex/Gender Distinction." Due to Covid-19, our Distinguished Lecture Series, faculty/graduate student seminar, and undergraduate learning community were all conducted over Zoom. The university's hiring freeze prohibited us from engaging external workshop hosts, and so the Rutgers Public Engagement Project, which IRW also organizes, featured just one event. We were fortunate to be able to pivot from programming to our upcoming IRW publications, in particular to new volumes in our *Feminist Bookshelf* series with Rutgers University Press. We also began a new podcasting project designed to chronicle and preserve feminist stories. The following report provides a brief summary of IRW's activities and initiatives in the 2020-2021 academic year.

II. CORE PROGRAMMING

IRW Interdisciplinary Research Seminar

As mentioned above, the theme for IRW's 2020-2021 interdisciplinary seminar—and for all of our core programming—was "Knowing Bodies: Science and the Sex/Gender Distinction." The seminar discussed the concepts of gender, bodies, and science through the prism of cultural and generational change, exploring the growing complexity of how we understand sex, gender, and sexuality. In addition to the IRW Director and Associate Director, a total of fifteen individuals participated in this year's seminar: five faculty members, six graduate students, two visiting scholars, one postdoctoral associate, and one Douglass alumna. Scholars attending the seminar were associated with the Anthropology, Spanish and Portuguese, History, English (Camden and New Brunswick), Sociology, Childhood Studies (Camden) and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies departments. Seminar discussions showcased participants' research on topics as varied as "The Militancy of Gender and the Making of Sexual Difference in Early English Literature (ca. 700-1100 AD)," "Cleaning Up Tongues': Verbal Hygiene Discourses amongst Adolescent Schoolchildren in Tamil Nadu (India)," and, "Protect the (White) Children: Queer Secularism in the United States 1970-2020."

Final evaluations by participants praised the seminar for being "extremely cordial, curious, and generous." They appreciated the seminar's interdisciplinarity, remarking that it enabled them to engage with scholars from fields they would not typically interact with. One seminar fellow has already acquired a book contract for work presented at IRW; others credit the seminar with inspiring new work and intellectual partnerships. Several seminar members are now collectively part of a writing group. Many participants expressed appreciation for the seminar's online format, especially noteworthy in a year regularly punctuated by Zoom fatigue. One seminar fellow wrote: "I thought it allowed us to be very present and on-task and strangely intimate in a way that I can't compare but imagine might be better than in-person." Another wrote that the seminar's online "interactions were so positive and constructive. I loved meeting with everyone once a week. It made such a difference to an otherwise bleak academic year." In short, IRW's seminar remains a model interdisciplinary space that is highly generative and enables its participants to grow and thrive as intellectuals.

IRW Seminar on Knowing Bodies: Science and the Sex/Gender Distinction
Comments from evaluations

“This was one of the best experiences I have had in over twenty years as a faculty member at Rutgers. Over the years I have participated in many different think tanks and research institutes, including Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard, U Wisconsin-Madison’s Humanities Institute, NEH seminars at University of Cambridge and Kings College London. The IRW was extraordinary. Arlene Stein and Sarah Tobias are incredible facilitators for exchanging and building knowledge. Their ability to help scholars working in a range of fields and levels and at different stages of their careers is worth careful attention and celebration. IRW is truly an amazing resource for Rutgers.”

“I’ve felt supported and heard throughout a very difficult year. I also feel like I have listened to and supported others.”

“Extraordinarily interesting, intelligent and useful conversations. This seminar has been invaluable in my development as a scholar, teacher, and colleague at Rutgers.”

IRW Distinguished Lecture Series

IRW held six events in its Distinguished Lecture Series during the 2020-2021 academic year. Three events featured speakers from Rutgers, and the remaining events featured prominent scholars from other universities. All events were held on Zoom, which enabled us to attract large audiences; our average audience was 90 attendees and 140 people attended our biggest event. In addition to Rutgers faculty, students, and staff, audience members came from schools and colleges throughout the United States, including: the University of Chicago; University of Pennsylvania; University of Wisconsin-Madison; Yale University; Cornell University; University of Michigan; Swarthmore College; Wellesley College; Amherst College; Agnes Scott College; Indiana University Bloomington; University of California, Berkeley; Northern Arizona University; Appalachian State University; University of California, Riverside; and Rice University. Other attendees came from the United Kingdom, Portugal, and Peru.

- In **“Reproductive Justice in a Global Pandemic”** (September 17, 2020), Kimberly Mutcherson (Dean, Rutgers Law School) addressed the reproductive implications of the race, class, and gender-based health disparities that have been a deeply disturbing aspect of the current Covid-19 pandemic. She argued that the ability of women, especially black women, to make decisions about whether or not to have children and raise them in safe environments is particularly fraught. She discussed whether the current moment of racial reckoning might make it more possible to grapple with and rectify long entrenched reproductive injustices.

- In **“Science Fiction, Trans Literature, and Community Building”** (November 5, 2020), Catherine Fitzpatrick (Rutgers-Newark) described her experiences editing an independent trans press, and creating the ground-breaking, Stonewall-award-winning anthology *Meanwhile Elsewhere: Science Fiction & Fantasy from Transgender Writers*. Approaching this text not as an agglomeration of pieces by individual writers but as a community production, she chronicled how the anthology came into being as a result of community organizing, and explored its contribution to imagining and creating future trans communities.
- In **“Speciation/Extinction: Sexing and Gendering 21st Century Biosocialities”** (December 3, 2020), Juno Salazar Parreñas (Cornell University) addressed how ideas of sex and gender are vital for understanding the emergence of new viral, agricultural, and conservationist life forms and frailties. Anxieties about the generation of new species (speciation) and the annihilation of other species (extinction) have infused the zeitgeist of the 21st century. For instance, coronavirus species have evolved into new kinds of deadly agents, while lives already vulnerable to mass death have become increasingly more endangered and exploited. Against past articulations of biology and society, such as sociobiology, Parreñas argued for a feminist vision of biosociality.
- In **“Who Stands Under the Umbrella? The Politics of Naming and Categorizing Intersex”** (February 11, 2021), Elizabeth Reis (Macaulay Honors College, City University of New York), discussed the July 2020 decision of the Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital in Chicago to stop performing intersex surgeries designed to make genitals appear more typically male or female. Reis noted that congenital adrenal hyperplasia, the most common cause of atypical genitals in children with typically female XX chromosomes, was excluded from the intersex umbrella—and therefore from the surgical prohibition. Reis’s talk explained the stakes of such classificatory decisions, and how they have important repercussions for patient care.
- In **“Floral Dreams: Sex (Un)told and (Re)told”** (March 25, 2021), Banu Subramaniam (University of Massachusetts, Amherst) explored histories of science to explore how plant reproductive biology emerged historically from formations of colonial racial and sexual politics, and how evolutionary biology was premised on the imaginations of race(d) heterosexual romance. Drawing on key examples, Subramaniam’s talk sought to (un)read plant sexuality, sexual anatomy and bodies to imagine new possibilities of plant sex, and sexualities, and their relationalities.
- In **“‘I Thought You Were Somebody Else’: Centering Black Women and Femmes in Racial Justice”** (April 29, 2021), Salamishah Tillet (Rutgers University-Newark) discussed Richard Wright’s posthumously published short story, “Man of All Work,” about Carl Owens, an African-American man in the 1950s who is unable to find a job and ultimately secures employment in a white household by pretending to be his wife, Lucy. Wright’s story reveals the heavy toll of racism on African-Americans but also effectively erases Lucy’s own encounters with sexual violence. Tillet examined the wider challenges of subsuming gender to race, and the ongoing violence and erasure that Black women and femmes face in social justice movements today as a result of the continued association of Blackness with masculinity.

IRW Undergraduate Learning Community

Since the 2007-8 academic year, IRW has pioneered the development of an undergraduate learning community based in a research institute, offering advanced undergraduate students an intimate yet rigorous environment for intellectual growth. During 2020-2021, IRW ran two semester-long learning communities (Fall 2020 and Spring 2021) led by Undergraduate Learning Community Coordinator Sara Perryman. Ms. Perryman is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies at Rutgers-New Brunswick, writing a dissertation on critical university studies and decolonizing composition pedagogies.

*IRW Undergraduate Learning Community on Knowing Bodies: Science, Sex, and Gender
Comments from evaluations*

“The podcast project was great because I could present a topic that I truly cared about in a way that was much more fun than a typical research paper.”

“I loved this class! I was very impressed with the speakers and was able to learn a lot from their presentations.”

“Even though it was asynchronous, I felt like the learning experience was totally different from my other classes. The Canvas site was super engaging, and I liked the optional online ‘coffeehouse’ meet-ups because they helped build community during a really difficult time.”

Under Sara's guidance, a total of 32 students from 19 majors, ranging from Genetics and Computer Science to Economics and Criminal Justice, participated in IRW's virtual Learning Community during 2020-2021. Participants attended IRW's Distinguished Lecture Series, gathered online to connect and discuss related readings, and actively engaged in the course Canvas site, as they developed their own research/activist projects related to the theme of “Knowing Bodies: Science, Sex, and Gender.” These projects culminated in 5-10 minute podcasts, through which students learned about public scholarship and how to tell their research stories through sound. Through virtual workshops, they learned research skills, interview and recording techniques, and how to use podcast-editing software.

Students also continued their work outside of class by attending two virtual art exhibits: “Gendering Protest: Deborah Castillo and Érika Ordosgoitti” and “Women: A Century of Change.” Other activities included watching the film, *Update! Political Advertisement X 1952 – 2020*, attending a poetry reading jointly held by Rutgers, Emory, and the University of Michigan's Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies departments, and participating in “A Dream of KikeokÑ/Kuponya: Black and Native American Healing,” featuring keynote speakers President Jonathan Holloway, Dr. Cornel West, and the Rev. J.R. Norwood. Students also went to online yoga and meditation classes.

Evaluations described the learning community as a creative and supportive feminist classroom that exposes students to a broad range of topics from multiple perspectives. Workshops on research methodologies and digital technology helped students build practical skills and develop innovative and exciting research projects. Students felt inspired by one another and formed close relationships that strengthened their ability to communicate and conduct collaborative research.

III. IRW PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

IRW continued to lead the Rutgers Public Engagement Project during 2020-2021 but, as mentioned earlier in this report, organized only one event during the academic year because the hiring freeze made it impossible to reimburse external workshop hosts. On October 22, 2020, we offered our Scholarly Publishing Workshop, typically limited to IRW seminar members, to the entire university community. Led by Angelique Haugerud (Anthropology; former editor-in-chief of *American Ethnologist* and *Africa Today*) and Peter Mikulas and Kimberly Guinta (Rutgers University Press), attendees learned about the intricacies of publishing in academic journals and how this process differs from publishing scholarly monographs.

IV. IRW PUBLICATIONS

IRW Book Series: *The Feminist Bookshelf*

IRW has made significant progress toward the first three books in its new series with Rutgers University Press, tentatively entitled *The Feminist Bookshelf: Scholarship for the 21st Century*. As this report goes to press, the first volume, *The Perils of Populism*, is currently in peer review. This book is an interdisciplinary collection of essays featuring the work of feminist scholars and activists who were part of IRW's 2017-2018 Distinguished Lecture Series. Contributors include: Nancy Fraser, Amrita Basu, L.A. Kauffman, Sabine Hark, Cynthia Miller-Idriss, and Valentine Moghadam.

The second book in the series, *Feeling Democracy*, is based on presentations from IRW's 2020 spring conference on this topic. This volume will feature essays by Noelle McAfee, Kathryn Abrams, Nermin Allam, Deborah Gould, Ileana Nachescu, Kirin Gupta, and Ciara Torres Spelliscy. We have received and edited five of these essays and anticipate that the volume will be ready for submission in Fall 2021. We also have three essays in-hand for our third volume, *Public Catastrophes, Private Losses*, which will be based on IRW's work in the 2018-2019 academic year.

***Rejoinder* Journal**

In May 2021, IRW published the sixth issue of its online journal, *Rejoinder*, a forum for feminist, queer, and social justice-inspired work. The theme of this issue was "Climate in Crisis." Our contributors show that feminists are leading efforts to document the climate catastrophe, protect the planet, and foster climate justice—but that this path is not straightforward. This issue of *Rejoinder* features essays, poetry and artwork by: Jody Boyer, Chelsea Call, Rachel Garber Cole, Susan Darley, Stephanie Jordan, Colleen Keough, Rose Muthoni Kibara, Sally Kitch, Osprey Orielle Lake, Shanna Merola, Nnenna Okore, Yvonne Skaggs, Natasha Soto, Amanda Thackray, Meredith Turshen, and Andrena Zawinski. *Rejoinder* is edited by IRW Associate Director Sarah Tobias and Andrea Zerpa is the art editor. The journal is a partnership with The Feminist Art Project. It may be viewed online at: <http://irw.rutgers.edu/rejoinder>.

IRW Special Issue of *Feminist Formations*

May 2021 also saw the publication of “The New Status Quo: Essays on Poverty in the US and Beyond,” a special issue of *Feminist Formations* edited by IRW Associate Director Sarah Tobias and former IRW Director Nicole Fleetwood. The publication, five years in the making, is based on IRW’s programming during the 2015-2016 academic year. The special issue features poetry by Asia Johnson, artwork by Melanie Ceravantes, book reviews by Caitlin Reed Wiesner, Julian Kevon Glover, and Ricardo Montez and articles by Susila Gurusami and Rahim Kurwa, Terrance Wooten, Elena Shih, Ashley J. Bohrer, Keesha Middlemass and Jyl Josephson, Alyosha Goldstein, Rosemary Ndubuizu, Premilla Nadasen, Ashley Hufnagel, Elizabeth Verklan, and Suzanne Enzerink. IRW held a panel discussion with four of the contributors on May 4, 2021, to celebrate the launch.

V. OTHER INITIATIVES, NEWS, AND PROGRAMMING

IRW Podcasting Project

In Spring 2021, IRW began working on a new podcasting series, “Mnemosyne.” Mnemosyne is the Greek Goddess of memory who reminds us of the importance of remembering our pasts. In this spirit, IRW’s podcasts are designed to preserve feminist pasts by capturing feminist stories. Each podcast will feature a 30-minute conversation about feminist activism and/or interdisciplinary research. IRW Administrative Assistant, Andrea Zerpa, who originally learned podcasting as part of IRW’s undergraduate learning community, and IRW intern Ameena Qobrtay, have spearheaded this project. Andrea and Ameena have recorded interviews with four Rutgers faculty members. These interviews will be edited and released as podcasts in Fall 2021.

IRW Oral History Project

During the 2020-2021 academic year, IRW continued working with the Rutgers Oral History Archives (ROHA) on a project to document the institute’s past. This year ROHA interviewed Nancy Topping Bazin, who was a founder of the Women’s Studies Institute, the unit that ultimately evolved into IRW. Nancy’s transcript is now publically accessible on ROHA’s website. In addition, ROHA interviewed Catherine Stimpson, the first director of the renamed IRW. ROHA will continue to interview former staff and administrators associated with IRW to ensure that this important slice of women’s history is captured for perpetuity.

Co-sponsorships

In an atypical year, with far fewer opportunities for co-sponsorship than usual, IRW collaborated with the Center for Women in the Arts and Humanities, the Center for American Women and Politics, the Slavery and Freedom Studies Working Group at the CCA, and the journal *Feminist Formations*. As the pandemic ebbs and public programming resumes, the Director and Associate Director will continue to cultivate significant relationships and pursue possible collaborations with Rutgers units and entities beyond the university. Our collaborative and co-sponsored activities in 2020-21 can be seen in Appendix B, IRW’s calendar of events.

VI. VISITING SCHOLARS AT IRW

While IRW was unable to formally host visiting Global Scholars during the 2020-2021 academic year, two former affiliates, Dr. Basuli Deb (Queens College, CUNY/India) and Dr. Leslye Obiora

(University of Arizona/Nigeria) joined our “Knowing Bodies” seminar. Dr. Obiora will resume a formal affiliation with us next year when the university reopens.

VII. TOWARDS 2020-2021

Icecaps are melting. Seas are rising. A pandemic rages. Racism is endemic. Fires burn. Poverty flourishes. Authoritarians rule. At a time of widespread skepticism toward science, and when leaders sow distrust in facts and truth, it is more difficult than ever to think of the future in affirmative ways. For intellectuals on the right and the left, the future can conjure visions of the end of history, or the sense that there is “no future.” In the face of these challenges, can we imagine alternatives?

Artists, writers, and theorists continue to imagine different worlds, as do progressive social movement activists. Participants in the worldwide citizens’ movement for social change and global justice proclaim, “Another World Is Possible.” Feminists and queer people have often been at the forefront of these dissident struggles, imagining alternative pathways to the future. Futures and futurity have often been understood in relation to linear notions of time, and understandings of progress. But queer theorists challenge normative teleology and as theorist José Esteban Muñoz put it, “The future is queerness’s domain.” Perhaps we need new conceptualizations of time and space that imagine futures in alternative ways. Visual theorist Tina Campt suggests that we “imagine beyond current fact to envision that which is not but must be.”

IRW’s annual theme for 2020-2021 is “Futures.” We hope that the School of Arts and Sciences will continue to support our infrastructure and programming as we explore the important issues that this theme raises.

IRW Staff 2020-2021	About the IRW
<p>Director Professor Arlene Stein</p> <p>Associate Director Sarah Tobias, Ph.D.</p> <p>Administrative Assistant Andrea Zerpa</p> <p>Undergraduate Learning Community Coordinator Sara Perryman</p>	<p>At the forefront of feminist research for over forty years, the Institute for Research on Women (IRW) advances cutting-edge, interdisciplinary, feminist scholarship on gender, women and sexuality. Part of the School of Arts and Sciences at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, IRW was founded in the mid-1970s by faculty and administrators seeking to expand feminist scholarship and activism beyond the university's fledgling Women's Studies program. Today, IRW supports a broad range of programming designed to stimulate research on women, gender, and sexuality within and across the disciplines, throughout and beyond Rutgers. Promoting faculty and student connections and building intellectual community are also central to IRW's mission. Affiliate members of IRW currently include almost 900 faculty, graduate students, and advanced undergraduates drawn from a wide range of disciplines at the New Brunswick, Newark and Camden campuses.</p>