

Introduction to Reconfiguring Class and Gender: Working Papers from the 2002–2003 Seminar

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About the Seminar

The papers collected in this volume emerged from the individual and collective work of the participants in the 2002–2003 Seminar, “Reconfiguring Class and Gender: Identities, Rights, and Social Movements.” The 2002–2003 Seminar was the sixth annual interdisciplinary seminar offered by the Institute for Research on Women (IRW) in collaboration with the Institute for Women’s Leadership (IWL). Through the work of its annual seminar, the IRW aims to advance research and teaching on women and gender within and across the disciplines on all three Rutgers University campuses. It also strives to provide a space for intellectual exchange between University researchers and visiting scholars from the U.S. and abroad, and to promote collaboration among the member units of the Institute for Women’s Leadership.

From September, 2002 to May, 2003, fourteen Rutgers faculty and doctoral fellows, visiting scholars from Korea, China, central and eastern Europe, and the United States, and other university and community researchers engaged in a year-long conversation exploring the transformation of class structures, experiences, and representations and the implications of these changes for feminist theory, politics, and practice. The rise of a global, capitalist economy has been accompanied by increasing economic inequality, social dislocation, and political instability. Women as a group are still disadvantaged relative to men, but class inequalities *among* women are real and are widening. How does this changing economic and social landscape affect theories of gender and class? In what ways should feminist movements rethink their goals and strategies to incorporate class differences and the emergence of new political identities? To what degree are women’s labor and gender rights integrated into governmental, corporate, community-based, and faith-based responses to the new global economic and political order?

Seminar participants represented a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds and departments (anthropology, economics, education, history, labor studies, management, political science, philosophy, public policy,

social work, sociology, and women’s and gender studies), research methodologies, and theoretical premises. To bridge some of these distances and help define a common intellectual project, we began the year with selected readings on class and on feminist theory and methodology. I also invited Leslie McCall (Sociology and Women’s and Gender Studies), the first speaker in the Institute’s 2002–2003 Thinking About Women/Thinking About Class Distinguished Lecturer Series, to discuss her work-in-progress with the seminar. Professor McCall’s essay, now forthcoming in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, explores how a reliance on a range of qualitative and quantitative methodologies can enrich the study of intersectionality and deepen the insights of feminist research.

We devoted most of the seminar sessions to discussions of pre-circulated papers based on fellows’ projects, with each discussion launched by a brief response from another fellow. Over the course of the year, in addition to Professor McCall, five other distinguished lecturers also visited the seminar. During the fall, seminar members met with Vivyan Adair (Women’s Studies, Hamilton College) and with Evelyn Nakano Glenn (Ethnic Studies and Women’s Studies and Director, Center for Race and Gender, University of California, Berkeley). Professor Adair used vivid examples from her experiences of childhood poverty and life as a single mother on welfare to explore how social and physical markers of class difference can isolate and demean. Professor Glenn discussed her recent research on how race, class, and other inequalities affect the attainment of citizenship for women. Spring visitors included Joan C. Williams (Professor of Law and Executive Director, Program on Gender, Work, and the Family, Washington College of Law, American University) and Sheila Rowbotham (Sociology and International Centre for Labour Studies, Manchester University). Professor Williams presented an analysis of how the gender system of household and market labor is affected by differing class realities and aspirations. Professor Rowbotham offered astute insights into the motivations and philosophical assumptions underlying acad-

mic research on class and social movements and how these vary across time and place.

About the Working Papers

The essays in this volume began as research proposals submitted by IRW fellows and visiting scholars. These proposals then blossomed into larger papers, read and critiqued by the seminar. For this anthology, we asked that the larger seminar papers be condensed into 8–10 page working papers. We hope that this introduction to the work of the Institute fellows and visiting scholars will encourage readers to seek out the published books, articles, dissertations, and essays that these working papers now reflect and helped stimulate.

The volume groups the fifteen papers into three sections. Part one, *Rights, Identities, and Social Movements in the United States*, considers the relationship between individual identity and systems of inequality as well as the connections between collective identities and social reform. My own essay seeks to recover a tradition of American feminism that sought social as well as individual rights and argued for the dismantling of the masculine standard in government and employer policy. The reform agenda championed by U.S. social justice feminists in the decades following World War II was only partially realized, but their efforts were crucial forerunners to the employment rights revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. Dee Garrison profiles another group of pioneer women activists in the postwar U.S.: those who resisted the spread of nuclear power. She finds them to be skilled political strategists who mobilized the culture's own symbols of conservative motherhood against the power of the state and who launched a movement that ultimately proved impossible for government policy-makers to ignore. Monica Bielski investigates one of the largest contemporary movements: that of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender/transsexual (LGBT) employees to end employment discrimination and broaden social rights. Based on a national telephone survey of U.S. labor institutions, Bielski describes the concrete steps taken by many labor unions to respond to sexual diversity, and she weighs possible explanations for the considerable variation among labor institutions in how and whether they advocate for the rights and needs of sexual minorities. Averil Clarke relies upon personal open-ended interviews with Muslim and Christian college-educated African-American women to ascertain the effect of

their faith in decisions concerning sexual practice, childbearing, and marriage. Turning conventional wisdom on its head, Clarke's research suggests that communities in which traditional family structures and conservative social norms prevail are more likely to support decision-making leading to greater gender inequality for women and diminished economic opportunity for both men and women.

The next five essays, grouped under the rubric *Inequality and Globalization*, move us beyond the U.S. context to consider the impact of globalization, the interrelation of economic development with the ideologies and structures of domination based on gender, class, and race, and the responses of activists within community-based NGOs and labor associations, within the academy, and within the World Bank. Leela Fernandes makes a convincing case for the rise of a new urban middle class in liberalizing India whose distinct culture and status rests in part on increasing the physical and cultural distance between it and the poor. Although new forms of labor and community associations have arisen to advocate for the poor, their effectiveness has been limited, and the possibility of sustained cross-class feminist alliances emerging to counteract the economic, social, and cultural trends Fernandes identifies appears remote. Dorothy L. Hodgson offers a somewhat more positive view of the consequences of globalization and the potential of cross-class grass roots organizing. She delineates how the human rights agenda has informed the objectives, agendas, policies, and practices of one of the most prominent and successful women's networks, WILDAF (Women in Law and Development in Africa), concluding that cross-class networks like WILDAF have influenced economic development, helped improve women's lives, and found ways of promoting the leadership of non-elite women within their own ranks.

The Center for Women's Global Leadership has been at the forefront of the human rights movement since the 1980s. Drawing upon their own personal engagement with both the theory and practice of the global women's rights movement, Elmira Nazombe and Lisa Clarke present a rich and nuanced analysis of some of the most puzzling tactical and strategic dilemmas facing the movement today and offer their thoughts on how the movement can better position itself for the struggles of the new century. Kate Bedford provides a close reading of the World Bank's gender policy state-

ments from 1979 to 1994, revealing a shift toward a more celebratory embrace of women's employment as liberatory which, as Bedford shows, leaves the tension between household and market labor unresolved and the problems of poor jobs not fully acknowledged. Part two concludes with Carola Frege's exploration of how academic understandings of employment and labor problems in Continental Europe and Britain have been shaped by an earlier era of industrialization and the differing labor movement histories in each country. She proposes the revitalization of industrial relations research through an embrace of the more politicized European tradition of social science research.

The last section, *Transforming Labor*, contains six essays linked by a concern for how our labors, individual and societal, household and market, are evolving and how the work we do affects our self-esteem, capacities, and identifications. Kathryn Kluegel evokes the world of fashion models in New York and Milan, puncturing the myths associated with participation in the glamour industry and showing the double-edged nature of careers in which appearance is the primary commodity being traded. Laura Curran shifts our focus to mother-work and the care of foster children in mid-century America. Using the case records of the Philadelphia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Curran depicts a world in which "the relational work of foster mothering" was at times celebrated, at other times rendered invisible and demeaned. Social service agencies in postwar America also were conflicted over how to balance the competing needs and rights of foster children, biological parents, foster parents, and professional social workers.

Relying primarily on quantitative methodologies, the next three papers dissect the job satisfaction and

productivity of employees and specify some of the connections between family life and employment. Blanche Grosswald's ambitious essay aims not only to define the concept of "meaningful" work but also to encourage a broadening of employment policy. As our expectations of employment rise along with the number of hours we spend on the job and the years we spend in job preparation, why not consider articulating a new labor standard and societal norm of meaningful work for all? Corinne Post and her co-authors argue that productivity differences among men and women in science and engineering can best be explained by expanding the dependent variables to include a "favorable work context." Moreover, their research suggests that men and women scientists and engineers are perceived and treated differently depending on marital status and family structure. Julie Whittaker's analysis of 1997 and 1998 national survey data on public attitudes toward workforce issues reveals a number of potentially useful propositions concerning job satisfaction. On the one hand, the gender gap is small in terms of job satisfaction, particularly in regard to non-pecuniary concerns. On the other, race is a strong predictor of work satisfaction, with African-American women being quite dissatisfied at work.

Diana Tietjen Meyers' meditation on the ever-present labor of creating a moral and coherent self—one in which we all engage—concludes our collection. Meyers is heartened by the rise of narrativity as a mode of apprehension and analysis in the academy, a development spurred in part by feminist theorists. Extending this effort, Meyers places the stories we tell at the heart of our relation to ourselves and to our judgments of truth and reality.

