Editorial:

Contesting Feminist Orthodoxies

This issue brings together exciting new essays on diverse topics. Disciplines range across sociology, social policy, cultural studies, media studies, history of feminism and lesbian studies, in both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary modes; contributors write from a range of feminist perspectives, by no means necessarily compatible with each other. What all of these essays have in common is that they aim to contest orthodoxies, even – or perhaps especially – *feminist* orthodoxies.

Each of these essays contests orthodoxies of sexuality, both of normative heterosexuality and also of those forms of sexuality which feminists have regarded as anti-normative and contestatory. Laura Alexandra Harris, for example, highlights the complex dynamics of class, 'race' and gender in both heterosexual and lesbian contexts to produce a radical 'queer black feminism'. Vron Ware explores the racializations of sexual identities, especially female sexual identities, in contemporary urban Britain, examining the ways in which female identities are constructed *through* racial identities. Both Jean Carabine's discussion of social policy and Debbie Epstein and Deborah Lynn Steinberg's analysis of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* focus on the (re-)constitution of normative heterosexualities in their very different fields. In each case, the authors highlight the *complexities* of sexuality and sexual identities: the ways in which identities are formed in the matrix of 'race', class, gender and social institutions. In each case too the authors offer not just analysis, but contestation of and resistance to those formations.

The essays also, importantly, contest feminist orthodoxies. Laura Alexandra Harris challenges the hegemony of white middle-class feminisms of the 1970s and 1980s – not just heterosexual feminisms but also lesbian feminisms – with a vital new articulation of 'queer'. Vron Ware challenges the continuing hegemony of certain feminist explanations of white women's racism, insisting on the profound implication of white women's agency and identity in illusory meanings of whiteness. Jean Carabine challenges the neglect of issues of sexuality in much feminist analysis of social policy. Debbie Epstein and Deborah Lynn Steinberg challenge the 'popular

feminism' of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, which claims to offer women viewers and participants empowerment as well as entertainment, but which ultimately recuperates them for normative heterosexuality.

The challenges and contestations that are mapped in this issue indicate the ways in which the earlier challenges to previously hegemonic feminisms – challenges from black women, lesbians, working-class women – have formed the springboard from which more complex approaches and problematics for feminism are being produced. These complexities are here being played out in many different locations, both in forging new terrains and in returning to older terrains which have been marginalized and neglected in more recent debates. Feminism continues to challenge itself as well as its 'enemies'. As these essays demonstrate, feminists contesting feminist orthodoxies are a vital part of the continuing project for feminist democratic transformation.

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