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**Winning and Short-listed Entries from the 2010 Feminist and Women's Studies  
Association  
Annual Student Essay Competition  
By Nadine Muller and Srila Roy**

In this special issue of the *Journal of International Women's Studies*, the Feminist and Women's Studies Association UK & Ireland (FWSA) is delighted to present the winner and the shortlisted entries of its annual student essay competition. Founded in 1987 as a network of scholars, the FWSA has since become a national association with over 300 members whose research interests range from the social and health sciences to the arts and the humanities. Next to our prestigious annual book prize and our annual international conferences and events, the quantity and quality of entries we receive every year for our small grants competition for collaborative postgraduate research activities and for our essay competition are testament not only to the continuing importance of feminist, women's and gender studies but also to the constant development and expansion of postgraduate research within these fields. In recognising and publishing a shortlist of entries to the student essay competition, we hope to draw attention to the ongoing research which is being carried out by postgraduates within the UK and Ireland as well as supporting the authors of these essays in – what are for some of them – their first steps in an increasingly challenging and difficult professional environment. This year's shortlist of essays is marked by its in-depth engagement with a range of current contexts in the realms of both theory and practice. From highlighting increasingly problematic representational politics on a national scale, exploring and establishing new directions in feminist theory, to carving out new spaces of resistance and empowerment, the articles collected in this issue demonstrate diverse and original ways in which feminism changes, persists and manifests itself within the current social and political climates.

Two of the essays of this special issue – including the winning essay by Dieuwertje Dyi Huijg – offer reconceptualisations of 'intersectionality' for feminist theory and politics. This is not only surprising given the analytic force of the concept but also considering its apparent overuse in a range of feminist-inspired studies today. Both Huijg and Fotopoulou extend received understandings of intersectionality via critical readings of 'race' and queer theory, thereby offering new modes of reading domination and the possibilities of destabilisation, resistance and agency therein. Huijg's project of rethinking intersectionality takes as its case study the subjectivities of young, white feminist activists with the explicit (and original) aim of seeing the workings of whiteness intersectionally. Reading the 'intersectional agency' of these women, Huijg finds that their feminist activism is marked by agency on the axis of gender and passivity, or 'inaction', as she puts it, on the axis of 'race'. Gender and race thus shape their subjectivities in contradictory ways, enabling at once action and inaction, and that, too, in ways that reinforce the hegemony of whiteness. There are multiple implications of Huijg's sophisticated and politically urgent project, not least of which pertains to the importance of exploring whiteness in feminist politics and activism. Intersectionality should not, she suggests, solely be understood 'as the junction of axes of social signification but also as the junction of positions in power relations'; and agency should not be associated with action alone but with both, action and inaction.

In bringing studies on intersectionality in conversation with queer theory, Fotopoulou also extends the analytical purchase of the concept, especially in terms of its use as a methodological tool. She begins by mapping some of methodological problems implicit in

the use of intersectionality before moving onto argue how ‘queer’, as used in queer theory and politics, might be a useful way out of the current impasse she identifies. In so doing, the benefits of reading queer intersectionally are also made obvious. Finally, and productively bringing postcolonial theory into the conversation, Fotopoulou suggests hybridity as one possible complementary methodological approach to intersectionality and queer studies insofar as it can facilitate ‘an understanding of shifting textual and material borders and can operate as a creative and political mode of destabilising not only complex social locations, but also research frameworks’.

Moving from the realm of theory into the area of discourse analysis, Jeanne Firth’s essay provides a careful and thought-provoking analysis of the gendered discourses surrounding the ‘obesity epidemic’ by examining the action plan of the White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity and Michelle Obama’s ‘Let’s Move’ campaign. These discourses frame obesity as a failure of the individual and illustrate a merge between American individualism and neoliberalism, promoting self-regulation and responsibility as key to the management of obesity. As Firth’s analysis reveals, these discourses reveal ideological anxieties about not only race and American citizenship but also shifting gender relations and the female body.

Emilia Aaltonen’s article, “Punching like a Girl: Embodied Violence and Resistance in the Context of Women’s Self-Defense”, takes us to enquiries into feminist practice and women’s lived experiences. Reviewing, first, gendered debates surrounding female and male bodies as passive and aggressive respectively, Aaltonen goes on to explore the ways in which women’s self-defense classes can subvert these traditional dichotomies. Gender, as a learned performance, can be also be unlearned in the process of the repetitive actions in self-defense. Hence, Aaltonen argues, women’s self-defense can pose both a theoretical and practical challenge to the traditional feminine corporeal habitus.

Similarly, but in the very different context of punk music sub-cultures in the UK, Naomi Griffin explores the potential of the DIY punk and hardcore music scene, understanding such a sub-culture to be an ‘imagined community’ that resists oppressive ideologies. Drawing on an innovative auto-ethnographic study that focused on the body, gendered performativity and gendered spatialities besides weaving in the author’s own identity and standpoint, Griffin reveals how the ‘scene’ is a thoroughly gendered space besides being a process of gendering. Exploring the tensions of power and resistance therein, Griffin reveals the complexities of punk ideology and its practice in offering women the possibility of forming new identities whilst reinforcing older, hegemonic ones.

We hope you join us in congratulating the authors on their success in this competition and on their thought-provoking work. Please promote and find out more about the FWSA and its initiatives, including the next round of our essay competition, by visiting [www.fwsa.org.uk](http://www.fwsa.org.uk).