



DiGeSt

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Editorial

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Editorial

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As subtly indicated by its volume number, this General Issue marks the tenth anniversary of *DiGeSt: Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*. It marks ten years' worth of critical scholarship about the systemic role certain forms of socio-cultural difference play in perpetuating inequalities for some, while safeguarding privileges for others. Through a decade of General and Special Issues, the journal has continually attempted to address what is at stake when we talk about gender and diversity – an ambition firmly entrenched in the very first editorial of its inaugural issue. Indeed, the very founding of the journal reflected a critical recognition not just of the need to address the societal salience of gender and diversity, but of the urgency to interrogate their academic demarcations too. Introducing itself as 'one of the first (if not the first) scholarly journals to cover the research focusing on both diversity and gender studies', *DiGeSt's* origins are explicitly couched in the energetic adoption of intersectionality as an epistemic and analytical framework by the various fields and disciplines focused on particular axes of difference. Hence, the journal would avoid propagating a singular take on 'social categories such as sex, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, "race", class, age, disability, (chronic) illness'. Instead, it sought and seeks to attend to the multifarious and often contingent ways in which they compound one another. Surveying the General and Special issues *DiGeSt* has published since clearly shows how these founding commitments have consistently shaped its scholarly identity. And the cursory discussion of the present General Issue's content below demonstrates how they continue to determine its direction towards the future.

Apart from the specifically intersectional and interdisciplinary ambitions that marked *DiGeSt's* founding, it also emerged out of a distinctly domestic need. Researchers addressing topics specifically related to diversity and gender in Belgian settings often faced (and continue to face) expectations to devote precious paragraphs out of limited wordcounts to describing the empirical context of their work when submitting their work with established journals – requiring them to balance explanatory demands with conceptual ambitions. In response, *DiGeSt's* editorial policy has consistently prioritized the leeway of its national and international contributors to focus on the substance of their analyses and arguments, instead of expecting them to summarize information available in other sources just for the sake of squeezing all supposedly relevant facts into one article. That the journal can now look back on a decade of supporting and distributing the scholarship of authors situated in- and outside of Belgium, whilst attracting a strong international reader base too testifies to the appropriateness of this approach. It illustrates how diversity and gender studies do require rigorous and well-founded engagements with the various axes of difference that mark socio-cultural reality, but particular editorial practices as well. Principally recognizing the pertinence of local, situated contexts and experiences, without subjecting researchers working on what happens at the margins of global scholarly conscience to supererogatory demands to demonstrate their relevance. Hence, it is the journal's ambition to continue to reflect its foundational aspirations in the future – and the present editorial team can only hope that the fifteenth or twentieth general issues will similarly be marked by pride of *DiGeSt's* past achievements and enthusiasm for its prospective accomplishments.

At any rate, the composition and substance of our present General Issue remain fundamentally shaped by the goals set ten years ago. Expressively avoiding singular, reductive engagements with the multifariousness of diversity and gender in contemporary society, each of the contributions included reflects the position *DiGeSt* seeks to assume in the broader scholarly environment. The roundtable discussion opening the Issue – hosted by **Ladan Rahbari** and **Louis Zimman** – discusses auto-nethnographic experiences the discussion's organizers and participants – **Misha Kavka**, **Erinne Paisley**, **Faye Mercier** and **Balázs Boross** had when creating and using profiles on the dating app *Hinge*. Under the title "Affordances, Diversity and Inclusion on Dating Apps", the roundtable addresses those issues related to socio-cultural differences that emerged in the context of a larger project on the interplay between digitization and cultural attitudes towards love and intimacy. Prodding at the various levels of meaning emerging from terms like 'alternative', 'inclusive' and

‘diverse’ in the context of digital dating culture, some observations critique the contradictions between *Hinge*’s marketing towards an idealized white, straight, upper-middle-class consumer base, which then feed into reflections about the significance of the app’s affordances vis-à-vis the presentation of users’ gender identity and other dimensions of intimate subjectivity. Going further into its complicity in perpetuating pernicious facets to online dating culture, the roundtable addresses the commercially-informed exclusionary affordances *Hinge* offers to its users, and highlights the self-reflexivity it strategically uses to justify the legitimacy it lends to categorically excluding potential partners based on ethnicity, gender identity or (dis)ability. Through its approach, the roundtable is not so much focused on tangible instances in which the app reiterates harmful societal assumptions about socio-cultural difference. Rather, it highlights how *Hinge*’s affordances and architecture invite and facilitate them. In doing so, it presents scholars working on media without particular preoccupations about diversity and gender in mind with critical tools to consider their salience when engaging with digital applications.

The research articles at the core of this General Issue’s corpus are diverse in substance, conceptual approach and methodology, but nevertheless similarly align with the journal’s core values. The first of these – “Uncovering the Hidden Bias: A Study on Ageism in Hollywood’s Portrayal of Ageing Femininities in Romantic Comedies (2002-2021)” by **Femke De Sutter** and **Sofie Van Bauwel** – produces a robust empirical base for the largely conceptual body of works that has previously engaged with the casual and often unmarked ageism of popular media. After explicating the disinterest for older femininities in popular romantic comedies with quantitative data – complementing the largely single-text focused studies available in the field, the article demonstrates how the limited visibility offered to older female subjectivity is further restricted along axes defined by age group, race, class, able-bodiedness and sexuality. The slowly building visibility for ageing femininities in popular media notwithstanding, De Sutter and Van Bauwel’s work shows, portrayals continue to obfuscate the diversity of experiences that mark ageing. Indeed, the prominence of particular stereotypes by many of the films studied reflects how popular discourses on ageing – and especially those on female ageing – are premised on outspokenly negative attitudes and assumptions.

Hereafter, **Hane Maung**’s “Classifying Sexes” addresses the misappropriations of biological uses of the term ‘sex’ by actors seeking to delegitimize, marginalize and stigmatize trans* people. Departing from the philosophy of biology, the article surveys the available knowledge on sex differences to dispute the legitimacy of gender-critical claims that point to anisogamy to substantiate binary, essentialist interpretations of sex differences. Apart from establishing the fact that such views consistently draw from obsolete and outdated sex classification schemes, Maung discusses how contemporary insights about the complexity of and varieties in human sex differences – which are contingent and mutable – fundamentally trouble any project that seeks to dichotomize them. These observations, in turn, demonstrate that scientifically sound perspectives on biological sex are not at all inconsistent with gender affirmative positions about the rights and needs of the trans* community. Rather, the ‘biological’ claims perpetuated in anti-trans* discourses are incommensurable with the state of the art in biological sciences. This, the article concludes, calls for essentialist claims from ‘antigender’ positions to be challenged directly – not only by reiterating the social and cultural salience of gender as a constructed category, but by explicating the flaws in dichotomous conceptions of biological sex too.

Sigrid Wallaert’s article then turns our attention from the philosophy of biology and its relevance to contemporary understandings of gender to the philosophy of anger and its implications for feminist politics. “Reading Rage: Theorising the Epistemic Value of Feminist Anger” departs from the general observation that public expressions of feminist discourse have in recent years been marked by anger and rage – ranging from the broad protest movements that materialized around *#MeToo* to the way in which prominent female politicians in the US weigh on current affairs – to embark on an in-depth exploration of the

inequities female anger is met with, and the potential it nevertheless holds. Wallaert draws from the work of Miranda Fricker to address how female anger is habitually subjected to ridicule and stereotyping – leading both to testimonial and hermeneutical forms of epistemic injustice, which are further compounded by racial and classed asymmetries. Subsequently turning to how female anger can communicate in spite of the risks posed by epistemic injustice, especially to give voice to women from marginalized communities, the article calls on feminist scholars and activists not to sanitize anger in favour of communicative discipline. Hence, Wallaert shows that feminist discourse should build a space in which anger can be read and interpreted, rather than suppressed and dismissed.

“Reflections and Recommendations to be Representative of the Community in a Community-Based Youth Sport Program”, finally, reports on the ambitions **Sthephany Escandell, Kallie Reckner** and **Jana Fogaca** had concerning the pursuit of an inclusive and representative sample in their research, but – more importantly – reflects on the challenges they faced in reaching those goals. In recognition of the documented difficulties that occur when trying to recruit a demographically diverse sample of participants, the authors discuss their adoption of various strategies that have been recommended in existing scholarship, such as the reduction of thresholds and barriers known to deter potential study participants from marginalized communities and the creation of an advisory board with community representatives to maximally address the target population’s needs through the study. The use of these strategies nevertheless failed to produce the desired results, however, with a pilot version of the intervention in fact attracting an expressively more diverse group of participants. Recognizing the limitations of their study, then, the authors reflect on the discrepancies between methodological recommendations about safeguarding the inclusivity of study designs and their empirical realities. Facing the assumptions with which the team approached the intervention, while simultaneously critiquing the disjunction between the celebration of innovative and experimental methods and the risk-averse strategies normalized by the tenure system, the article offers a nuanced and multifaceted account of the mechanisms that underlie many studies’ casual admission of the ‘limited diversity of their sample’.

As a complement to the various excellent empirical contributions to this General Issue, its “What Are You Reading?” section features the in-depth engagements by early career scholars with works they find particularly relevant for their own research. Representing the rich breadth of contemporary diversity and gender studies, the contributions by **Emma Verhoeven, Nele Buyst, Sara Atwater, Daan Kenis, Joke Struys, Lisanne Meinen, Isabel Walters** and **Sigrid Wallaert** address how theoretical frameworks developed by established academics assist them in determining their own conceptual, methodological and empirical positions. Touching on topics related to feminist ethics, disability studies or the epistemics of indigenous knowledge, the section demonstrates how diversity and gender studies have become a fundamentally multifaceted research environment, marked by the recognition that prioritizing singular axes of difference would fail to grasp the complexities of contemporary socio-cultural reality. With its rich discussions of the implications of ‘caring thinking’ on video games research about neurodiversity, the potentialities of feminist humour to reconfigure variously demarcated boundaries or the need for an interdisciplinary answer to contemporary ‘anti-gender’ rhetoric, the “What Are You Reading?” section once again reflects the approach *DiGeSt* appreciates and aims to stimulate in diversity and gender studies.

Aside from the substantive contributions made by the roundtable discussants, the articles’ authors and the participants of the “What Are You Reading?” section, this General Issue is premised on an impressive amount of largely invisible labour. First and foremost, the role played by our editorial intern, **Elisabeth Goemaere**, merits special recognition. Her proactive attitude and eye for detail were matched only by her good humour and collegiality, and our gratitude for her presence in the team this semester applies to much more than her practical input alone. But the final result would also not have been possible without the voluntary efforts of the various peer reviewers that assessed manuscripts submitted to the

journal, and their insightful, constructive and empathic feedback has made an invaluable mark on this General Issue. In recognition of this tenth anniversary of *DiGeSt: Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, we do not only want to explicitly thank the reviewers who allocated their time to the articles featured in this present issue, however. Rather, we want to take this opportunity to also express our deepest gratitude to everyone who has in one way or the other contributed to the journal over the past decade. Without the all too imperceptible role played by peer reviewers, editorial board members, guest editors, copy-editors and interns, *DiGeSt* would not have been where it is today. Inasmuch as these countless efforts are clearly a reason for us to be grateful, they are just as obviously a motivation to be confident about the journal's future too.