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Introduction to the Special Issue: Feminist Studies Association of the UK and Ireland

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Introduction to the Special Issue: Feminist Studies Association of the UK and Ireland

By Deirdre Niamh Duffy¹

The Student Essay Prize of the Feminist Studies Association of the UK and Ireland has been revived this year after a temporary pause. The prize, whose former entrants have since become leaders in feminist scholarship, was initiated as a mechanism for amplifying new and emerging voices within feminist studies. It is open to students across all levels of study in the UK and Ireland, in any field, to submit an essay that is of significance to feminist studies. Like all joyful things, it takes careful planning and is, true to the FSA, a collective effort. In a year which has seen more industrial action across Higher and Further Education Institutions in the UK and Ireland than ever before, we would like to extend our heartfelt thanks and solidarity to all those who continued to support the competition.

We had hoped that the essays submitted would reflect the breadth and diversity of feminist scholarship. We were certainly not disappointed. The submissions included papers on refugee hosting, feminist justice, witchcraft, labor market participation, feminist literature, research methods, educational experiences, and social movements. From our perspective, the competition reflects the essence of feminist research and is illustrative of what makes feminist studies so exciting. The range of the entries, including references to “Homes for Ukraine,” Sally Rooney, alcohol marketing, “lean in,” and Sabrina the Teenage Witch, is remarkable.

The quality, diversity, and ambition of the work produced by entrants, as well as being incredibly energizing, made the review process extremely challenging. The FSA Student Essay Prize is ultimately a competition. We are grateful to reviewers for their time and attentiveness to feminist principles. We hope that the feedback received is of use to entrants. It is intended to be supportive and to help those develop at an early stage of their careers.

The published papers in this issue are excellent. All reviewers praised the winner and runners up for their engagement with academic writing, their attention to detail, and their argumentation. We commend all the authors for their work and congratulate the winner, Claire Davey, for her contribution on the feminization of alcohol marketing and varied forms of resistance. Reviews of Claire’s work praised the paper’s analysis of an issue relevant not just to feminist scholarship but to feminist activism. It was described as “excellent,” “fantastic and original,” and a “powerful critique” of an “under-researched area.”

Mathilde Genest’s paper on sexual assault and survivor injustice was admired for its attempt to offer a fresh take, rooted in feminist perspectives, on a topic which has received significant attention. Survivor experiences of legal processes continue to be a site of persistent

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social injustice and Genest's intervention makes an interesting, carefully articulated contribution.

Resistance and the role of the creative arts are central to feminist studies and feminist activism. It was our pleasure to include Egle Karpaviciute's paper on the geographies of gendered violence and performance art. Karpaviciute's discussion was described as a "truly enjoyable read" which reflects the author's research potential.

Abigail Wells also writes passionately about resistance but in a very different space—schooling. It is important that feminist studies draw attention to the lived experience of feminist activism in everyday life. Reviews praised the paper's efforts to draw theories together and the clarity of argument.

The complexities of neoliberalism and feminist interpretations of it are critically important areas of feminist analysis. For feminist studies, it is equally important that scholars engage with these debates using different types of data and conceptual frames. The papers by Isabel Sykes and Karolin Lehmann are illustrative of the diverse ways emerging scholars approach shared concerns. Sykes' paper was described as "compelling," and the author's literary analysis was highlighted as excellent. Lehmann's mixed-method approach, engaging more directly with the labor market, was also praised for its analysis and considered by the reviewer as a work to be proud of.

Complexity, resistance, and the lived experience are also reflected in Megan Crossley's excellent analysis of the gendered politics of displacement and refugee hosting. Crossley's paper, described as "an important piece of work which definitely has a contribution to make," focuses on the Homes for Ukraine program and the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. However, it has important messages regarding bordering, migration, and the gendered politics of each that are applicable beyond this conflict.

Having assumed the role of Student Essay Prize coordinator for the first time, it was an honor to read the submissions. I, like the rest of the FSA Board, have the utmost admiration for all entrants. They reflect the continued significance of feminist studies and the drive, enthusiasm, and creativity of early career scholars. We cannot wait to see what these emerging voices do next!