

THE POLITICS OF FEMINIST PUBLISHING. *FEMINIST STUDIES*

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Abstract This article will examine the development of *Feminist Studies* into the journal it is today. It addresses three historically situated locations: «feminism», the «academy», and the U.S. publishing industry. The journal's history parallels, indeed is shaped by, the engagements of these three institutional histories. By now, the journal has a history of four decades, and that history is of interest beyond the chronicling of the journal's activities. Indeed, in examining the journal's history, we open a window onto the larger social and political questions in which the life of the journal is embedded.

Key words feminism, feminist publishing, women's liberation movement, women's community, academic women's studies.

Resumo

Políticas Editoriais Feministas

Este artigo analisa a evolução da *Feminist Studies* até esta se tornar na revista que é hoje. O artigo desenvolve-se em torno de três lugares historicamente situados: o «feminismo», a «academia» e a indústria editorial americana. A história da revista é paralela às ligações entre estes três percursos históricos institucionais, sendo mesmo por elas configurada. Hoje, a revista tem uma história de quatro décadas e o interesse dessa história vai muito para além daquele que pode ter o relato das suas actividades. De facto, ao analisarmos a história da revista abrimos uma janela para questões sociais e políticas mais amplas, nas quais a vida da revista se encontra imbuída.

Palavras-chave Feminismo, editoras feministas, movimento de libertação das mulheres, comunidade de mulheres, estudos académicos sobre as mulheres.

Resumen

Las políticas editoriales feministas

Este artículo analiza el desarrollo de la *Feminist Studies* hasta la revista que es hoy. El artículo parte de tres lugares históricamente situados: el «feminismo», la «academia» y la industria editorial americana. La historia de la revista es paralela a las relaciones entre estas tres historias institucionales, siendo, incluso, moldada por ellas. Hoy, la revista tiene cuatro décadas de historia y su interés va mucho más allá del interés que pueden tener el relato de sus actividades. Al examinar la historia de la revista, nos confrontamos con cuestiones sociales y políticas mucho más amplias y en las cuales se imbuje la vida la revista.

Palabras-clave Feminismo, editoras feministas, movimiento de liberación de las mujeres, comunidad de mujeres, estudios académicos sobre las mujeres.

Feminist Studies was founded to encourage analytic responses to feminist issues and to open new areas of research, criticism, and speculation. We are committed to providing a form for feminist analysis, debate, and exchange.

The feminist movement has demonstrated that the study of women is more than a compensatory project. Instead, feminism has the potential to reshape fundamentally the way we view the world. We wish not just to interpret women's experiences but to change women's condition. For us, feminist thought represents a transformation of consciousness, social forms, and modes of action.

Mission Statement, *Feminist Studies*

Feminist Studies, the premier journal in U.S. women's studies, was not, at the time of its founding, intended to be an academic publication at all: thus, the lofty mission statement not just to publish research but «to change women's condition». The original editors started meeting in 1969, an early moment in the emergent women's liberation movement, a time when women graduate students were on the leading edge of a new scholarship developed with few faculty mentors. Indeed, few women who might have shared their interests had positions as professors in U.S. universities at the time; the academic field of women's studies did not yet exist.

This article will examine the development of *Feminist Studies* into the journal it is today. It addresses three historically situated locations: «feminism», the «academy», and the U.S. publishing industry. The journal's history parallels, indeed is shaped by, the engagements of these three institutional histories. By now, the journal has a history of four decades, and that history is of interest beyond the chronicling of the journal's activities. Indeed, in examining the journal's history, we open a window onto the larger social and political questions in which the life of the journal is embedded.

In its founding years, the editors imagined a readership that would spill over the bounds of academy to include a broader community of intellectuals whose purpose was to advance women in accordance with the goals of a feminist movement. Unlike the new field of women's studies, we did not imagine ourselves the academic arm of the feminist movement; rather, we saw ourselves as fully integrated into the very body of feminism. It was conceived at a time when – in certain circles, at least – a bifurcation of «community» and «academy» was perceived; feminism and *Feminist Studies* intended to bridge that divide.

At least this was the language of that time. But what exactly was meant by «the community»? Which community did we have in mind? And moreover, does not this particular dualism not privilege the academy? In fact, today it is clear that this amorphous «community» signified, simply, those who are not of the academy. «Academy» has coherence; «community» is the other. Furthermore, it

was a particular «other» that referred to people close to the academy, but not established within – people who lived around universities or in college towns; or people who taught in other settings; or people in the kinds of academically credentialed, post-graduate fields that crossed boundaries between non-governmental research or policy institutes and the academy or government bureaucracy and the academy. The community that *Feminist Studies* was intended to reach was, in other words, not very broad – although in our myopia, we thought of it as the world. But *Feminist Studies* failed to bridge the academy and even this narrow «community», and that failure tells us much about intellectual life in the United States.

In its initial years of publication, between 1972 and 1976, *Feminist Studies* was published independent of any university affiliation. The editors were a network of friends, and friends of friends, at the center of which was a women's liberation movement consciousness-raising group of, mostly, Columbia University graduate students; but like all networks, the circuits moved out from the center, in this case reaching women who were engaged in the variety of political activities that existed on the campus periphery in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The contributors to the first two issues attest to the blurred boundary between university and the particular community I have described above. They were a mix of nonacademic activists – reproductive rights workers, a civil rights attorney, journalists – and graduate students, recent doctorates, newly appointed instructors, and young assistant professors. For many, this was their first publication; for all it was their first publication of feminist research on women. Topics covered in the first two issues were abortion, prostitution, birth control, education reform, women and nature, motherhood, sex roles, sexuality, working-class women, job discrimination, and reports on movement activities in Israel and South Africa and on the growth of women's studies programs in universities. The authors all documented and condemned the oppression of women as a group in society; argued that this oppression was systemic; and advocated wide sweeping social change. With the exception of two history articles – one on South Asian Indian women; one on U.S. colonial religious dissenter, Ann Hutchinson – all resembled articles in non-academic feminist publications like *Ms.* magazine. Most were short, speculative essays, typically written in the first-person plural «we», and in a style that captured the emotional charge of a radical feminism that had emerged out of the 1960s countercultural New Left.

However, a special double issue (vol. 1, nos. 3-4) published in the spring of 1973 signaled an important shift in the balance of academic and so-called community influence. This was the collection of selected papers (later reprinted by Harper Torchbooks as *Clio's Consciousness Raised*) from the very first Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, held at Douglass College/Rutgers University in New Jersey. According to Judith Walkowitz, one of these first editors and also a new assistant professor in history at Rutgers, the editors «recognized the

field of women's history was at its inception point at the Berkshire conference and wanted [their] journal to be a part of it». But even beyond this is the plain and simple fact that the editors and the Berkshire Conference organizers at Rutgers/Douglass (many of whom were recent Columbia Ph.Ds) knew each other well, and knew that they needed each other. For *Feminist Studies*, the major problem in its early years was attracting good – that is, publishable – material. This is never easy for a new periodical and *Feminist Studies*, after it had exhausted its friendship network of early contributors by publishing their articles in the first two issues, was no exception. The editors' overlapping connections to the Berkshire Conference organizers kept the journal alive. Between 1973 and 1976, three double special issues were published with articles that originated as conference papers from the first two Berkshire conferences. The arrangement was reciprocally advantageous because, in turn, *Feminist Studies* provided a publishing outlet for the conference participants and became the first publication to promote the new field of women's history.

Keeping in mind that *Feminist Studies* was originally conceptualized as a publication for both academic and community audiences, one might conclude that it was the editors' decision to affiliate their journal with the Berkshire Conference that altered the identity, content, and even the politics of *Feminist Studies*. But I think the shift to a more narrowly academic audience was inevitable. By 1977, feminist scholars more and more engaged in political activities within their own universities – working to establish women's studies programs, women's caucuses within their professional associations or autonomous professional associations, and working to fight discrimination in hiring, promotion, and pay. Their successes in turn created the conditions that influenced the future of *Feminist Studies*. A such development was that publishing opportunities opened up for feminist scholars even in traditional university-based publications. (According to Susan Cardinale, who was the University of Maryland's women's studies librarian in the late 1970s, 153 scholarly journals published special issues about women between 1970 and 1975 and thus began the legitimization of feminist scholarship in the academy.) Another development was the increased hiring of feminist scholars who then found themselves orienting their work lives toward the demands of university jobs and especially the requirement to publish in traditional U.S. academic style—third-person narrative, extensive citations, and abstract rational argument instead of the first-person appeals to the authority of emotion and experience found in publications from the feminist «community».

Feminist Studies editors, who had tried to bridge both the academy and the community, found it increasingly impossible to do so, perhaps because they themselves were no longer part of both. By 1977, the editors were no longer graduate students, and the kinds of community that they had been a part of – consciousness-raising groups and those political groupings that operated on the periphery of campuses – were disintegrating. In 1977, the close connections fostered by such tight-knit collectives had ceased. *Feminist Studies* was reorganized

and was thereafter entirely edited by academic feminists. Minimal, but absolutely crucial, financial support was provided by the University of Maryland.

Can one discern traces of *Feminist Studies'* non-academic, movement roots in the academic journal that *Feminist Studies* has become? It is true that non-academic writers rarely published in *Feminist Studies* after the first year, although the editors regularly try to commission their work. Our failure in this regard attests to the difficulty of sustaining intellectual work outside the intricate systems of subsidies that is the U.S. university system. Only academically employed intellectuals are paid, in their university salaries to write for journals like *Feminist Studies*. Writers who are employed in other settings are used to being paid by the publication; indeed, this is how they earn their livelihood. But publications that remunerate writers for their work operate at a much higher level of income than academic journals; most are supported by advertising income – a system that has not worked very well for women's political writing, as Gloria Steinem had often commented, from her experience trying to sustain the popular publication *Ms.* by raising advertising revenue. Foundation money, which has been particularly significant in supporting right-wing publications, supported *Signs: A Journal of Women and Culture* through its first years of publication, but I'm not aware of foundation support for any other feminist publication. So, *Feminist Studies* made its peace with the segmentation that characterizes U.S. intellectual life, although we did continue to publish creative writing and art and used the sections we label «Commentary» and «News and Views» for political writing that is not presented in the typical scholarly style.

Following its reorganization in 1978 into a fully academic journal, *Feminist Studies* did not, however, abandon its commitment to publish explicitly «political» articles, but more and more these were in the format of academic research. It is interesting to trace the politics evident in these research articles, taking note, first, of the impact of the split, in the mid – to late – 1970s, in the women's liberation movement into two tendencies – that of the community-based lesbian feminist movement that referred to itself as «radical» and that of the group that began to use the label «socialist feminist» for its politics. Looking back at *Feminist Studies* at this time, I believe we can see that it was the association with the young academics who were instrumental both in organizing the early Berkshire conferences and in reorganizing *Feminist Studies* that positioned the journal with the socialist feminists. This is not a simple question of political orientation alone, but also a question of disciplinary orientation. The Berkshire Conference participants were historians who were very much influenced by the kind of Marxist-inspired social history that gained wide popularity during the 1960s, when American scholars found social history conducive to both the New Left's revival of Marxist materialist analysis as a serious scholarly inquiry and the social sciences' impact on perspectives and methods in the humanities. The contents of *Feminist Studies* – from its second volume year through the early years of the 1980s – were heavily weighted toward articles on working-class women or histories of cross-

class alliances, trade unionism (or its absence) among women workers, and the relationship between production and reproduction. And although most of the articles focused on the United States, almost one-fourth were on England and France – not surprising since English and French historians and their journals were the inspiration for the U.S. school of social history.

Although the words «socialist feminist» seem rather dated in the United States these days, one can still discern this orientation in *Feminist Studies* articles. For example, although the journal is more truly interdisciplinary than in 1978, *Feminist Studies*, like socialist feminism more generally, still favors historical analysis; even literature and social science articles are usually historically contextualized. Also, at a quite early moment within the development of women's studies scholarship, *Feminist Studies* work showed sensitivity to the differences among women – especially of class and race. Again, this related to its socialist feminist orientation. But finally, *Feminist Studies* was slower to pick up on the new scholarship that was emerging from lesbian analyses of the politics of sexual orientation and on postmodern analyses of the role of culture in structures of domination.

Today, of course, the radical/socialist divide is history; indeed, we hardly use these words in describing feminist categories today. And certainly, today's *Feminist Studies* reflects the no-longer new thinking on sexuality, culture, and difference, and, on the other hand, has seen its own contributions in theorizing the material differences among women taken up by those who once feared we were destroying the ground upon which feminism stood in questioning the category of woman. But the segmentation of intellectual life in the U.S. that divided academy and community has increased rather than lessened. The once vibrant periodicals published by tight-knit community-based collectives in the 1980s and 1990s have almost all disappeared; even *Ms.* magazine is today a shadow of its former self.

For those committed to feminist publishing, the challenges we face are multiple. Women's studies academic journals now shoulder the burdens of supporting a feminist politics, even while attending to the highest standards of academic publishing. With the demise of non-academic feminist publishing, it is up to us to search out and report on the activities of feminist activists beyond the borders of the university. It is up to us to encourage thoughtful essays commenting on issues of concern to feminists wherever we are located. And it is up to us, finally, to maintain a unity at least within the university that we failed to do so beyond the university.

Interdisciplinary journals play a special role here, for it is we who work to span the divide opening up within the university that is making it hard and harder for scholars to communicate across disciplines. The reorganization of *Feminist Studies* in 1977 marked not only our acknowledgment that we had become a more narrowly academic journal; it marked also a re-orientation from a women's history journal – a path along which the Berkshire Conference papers seemed to be leading us – into a more truly interdisciplinary journal. This, too, should be

viewed as a political stance. Today, women's studies has transformed the U.S. academy, but not entirely as feminists imagined in the 1970s. One element of the transformation is the legitimization of feminist scholarship within traditionally bounded disciplines, like literature, history, sociology, and psychology. Without denigrating discipline-specific research, it is also clear that these successes in the disciplines have made it more difficult for feminist academic scholars to communicate across the boundaries that the academy has arbitrarily constructed. But we must not confuse the academy's interests with women's. Disciplinary boundaries, departmental boundaries, College or Faculty boundaries are maintained to protect turf. But women's needs are not served by turf wars. In our desire and need to expand the knowledge of the gender system that structures our lives and to identify the possible sources of resistance and change, feminist scholars need to draw on the research of the broadest array of approaches. *Feminist Studies*, which could not bridge the divide that confines scholarship too much so within the academy, continues to believe it can at least bridge the divide that would isolate feminist academics one from the other. It is important that we sustain interdisciplinary research and creative work; it is important to the feminist politics that is the very foundation of our journals.

Claire Moses has been *Feminist Studies'* Editorial Director since 1977. She works closely with an editorial collective who together share editorial responsibility and decision making. She believes that the high level of respect that journal enjoys proves that collective responsibility and leadership – often considered a utopian fantasy of the early women's liberation movement – can work ably in reality. Claire is also professor of women's studies at the University of Maryland and author of histories of French feminist movements and U.S. collective women's struggles.
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