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Being a Feminist Community During a Pandemic: Our Editors' Welcome

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Being a Feminist Community During a Pandemic: Our Editors' Welcome

Abstract

Volume 4, the pandemic issue of *The Seneca Falls Dialogues Journal*, features a selection of participants from our 2020 gathering who have transformed their conference offerings into articles for posterity, ones that aim to keep the dialogue going and widen the sphere of feminist inquiry.

Keywords

Seneca Falls Dialogues (biannual conference), feminism, Seneca Falls Dialogues Journal history

BEING A FEMINIST COMMUNITY DURING A PANDEMIC: OUR EDITORS' WELCOME

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[The Seneca Falls Dialogues](#) is a biennial meeting of feminist activists, teachers, academics, and students that convenes in Seneca Falls, New York, to extend and transform United States' suffrage history. Of our many gatherings, the October 2020 meeting was our most eagerly anticipated. The meeting was taking place during the centennial of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, which afforded us the space to understand and problematize the uneven access to the ballot offered by this legislation. Along with this suffrage anniversary, the 2020 Dialogues were scheduled in the fall, just after the death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, during a Presidential election season with everything at stake, from healthcare to trans rights, to violence against people of color by law enforcement and in the broader culture, to the erosion of democratic political norms at home and around the world. Amidst these events was a time in the Covid-19 pandemic when researchers were developing vaccines, but none were approved and available. We experienced a dip in infection rates in the region over the summer of 2020 but, come fall, as the conference date drew closer, infections began to climb again, along with new variants.

As the meeting date drew near, those of us planning the gathering asked: *what does it mean to be a feminist community during a pandemic?* As the pandemic impacted our financial resources, our access to childcare, and our health and wellness, we deliberated about the pragmatic, material conditions involved in an in-person gathering. Conference co-chairs Bek Orr, Christina Lee, and Morag Martin offered the planning group the options of cancelling, postponing, or hosting a virtual Dialogues. We chose

to gather on Zoom and started thinking in earnest about what the Dialogues could become in a digital space.

Our co-chairs Orr, Lee, and Martin were imaginative, dedicated, and focused on inclusion. We are deeply grateful for their leadership. [We gathered on Zoom](#) while traveling in our cars, or sitting on our living room couches, or at our desks and kitchen tables. We connected. We enjoyed live music, inspiring speeches, and most of all, lively conversation. Sometimes that dialogue happened in the “chat” feature, and more often we talked across the squares and boxes on our screens, sometimes breaking into a chorus of “unmute yourself!” and other times appreciating each others’ pets as they wandered across screens. Sometimes we moved conversations into text threads and emails when our time ran out. As we held a space for our voices and visions, it was a different, dispersed, distributed, and more diverse gathering than ever.

Welcome to volume 4, the pandemic issue of *The Seneca Falls Dialogues Journal*, where a selection of participants from our 2020 gathering have transformed their conference offerings into articles for posterity, ones that aim to keep the dialogue going and widen the sphere of feminist inquiry.

The issue begins with a reflection and farewell from our founding editors, Deborah Uman and Barbara LeSavoy. They offer us a history of the journal, and a compelling history of The Seneca Falls Dialogues. Uman and LeSavoy argue that academic journals and their editors have a long tradition of acting as “gatekeepers of knowledge; the diversity of editorial boards has not kept pace with the increase of women and people of color in many academic disciplines.” Their goal for *The Seneca Falls Dialogues Journal* was the opposite: “to develop an editorial practice that embraced Sara Ahmed’s definition of feminism as ‘how we pick each other up’ (1).”¹ Their purpose was clear: “we wanted to open the gates, promote diverse views, and welcome all voices—emerging and established, and everything in between.” Uman and LeSavoy show how, “with each iteration of the Dialogues and the journal, we hoped to reflect the changing landscape of feminism, and particularly its embrace of intersectionality . . . For

¹ Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, Duke University Press, 2017, pg. 1.

Crenshaw, the intersectional lens ‘refuses to erase’ people’s complex lived experiences.”

We are committed to upholding the guideposts set by our founding editors. To edit as a practice of picking each other up involves acknowledging and then bridging barriers to access—access to the time, resources, and material conditions of publication. Picking each other up also involves acknowledging what has knocked us down, publishing perspectives that analyze and work to eradicate systemic barriers to equity, justice, rights, and coalitions, and imagine and enact different relations.

Toward this end, this issue features the activist traditions and methods of women of color as we endeavor to agitate for change and work across differences. Dulce María Gray, Denise A. Harrison, and Yoku Kurahashi reflect on suffrage history from Latina, Black, and Japanese perspectives, capturing a global suffrage history absent from most U.S. conversations. Alison Parker, Valeria Sinclair-Chapman, and Naomi R. Williams offer excerpts from their Dialogue on Black women’s intersectional politics and activism. Their article presents a historical perspective on contemporary Black women’s voting and labor rights activism, discussing “why and how previously marginalized groups have struggled to gain inclusion in the American political system, and how the efforts of Black women have shaped and prodded efforts to build a more democratic nation.” Ionah M. Elaine Scully transformed her Dialogue about the power relations that arise in collaborations across activist organizations. In her article, Scully draws on indigenous epistemologies to develop a method for creating “communities of care” in coalitional endeavors. As a decolonial offering, Scully examines the forced “ruptures in our relations to one another” and outlines one of her attempts to create an antiracist, feminist coalition premised on “survivance.”

This second half of the issue features feminist analysis of women working within sexist institutions to critique and transform them. Arien Rozelle described Susan B. Anthony’s arrests at the polls, arguing that public relations, while often a tool used by the privileged to maintain the status quo, was used effectively by Anthony in activist work for social change. The work of Melanie Kelly, Colby A. Murphy, and Mary E.

Graham critiques the sexually exploitative treatment of National Football League (NFL) cheerleaders by their employers. They point out that some women, like NFL cheerleaders, may be overlooked by conventional White feminist advocacy. Kelly et al. observe, “The overlapping #MeToo and Black Lives Matter Movements have exponentially increased the reputational stakes of NFL teams’ choices regarding cheerleader entertainment and their treatment of women cheerleaders.” Angela Clark-Taylor, Emily Creamer, Barbara LeSavoy, and Catherine Cerulli examine the role of a campus women’s center: how it informs campus and community understanding of feminism, and its impact on the lives of those who utilize it. Their work contributes to the growing research on women centers in higher education, focusing on “intergenerational community perceptions of feminism and the role of feminism in informing women center practices.”

Volume 4 of the Seneca Falls Dialogues Journal was made possible by the time and expertise of our outside reviewers. Faculty from across the region read and evaluated all our submissions, making our peer-review process robust and allowing us to provide detailed, careful feedback to authors. We are also grateful for the generosity of artist Brittany Williams, whose mural art provided the aesthetic, thematic inspiration for our 2020 Dialogues, as well as our current volume of the journal. Williams' Wall\Therapy mural can be found on Joseph Street in Rochester.

We have found a new digital home for *The Seneca Falls Dialogues Journal*. The journal has moved from its location at SUNY Brockport to the [Fisher Digital Publications](#) location at St. John Fisher College. Fisher is our digital home, and Pat Maxwell has agreed to stay on as managing editor, a position she has held since the journal’s founding. It is this delicate combination of sponsorship–Fisher's platform hosting, and Pat Maxwell's keen editorial management, knowledge, and skill—that will allow the journal to persist and thrive. We are deeply grateful for this compact of support.

Our next issue of the journal will invite submissions that reflect on the places of feminist work in our region, past and present. Feminists gather to share knowledge, examine problems, and develop resiliency, creativity,

and durable structural change. We do this in the face of entrenched power imbalances within feminism in the areas of race, class, age, ability, political, and sexual difference. How do our gatherings reinforce or repair the historic betrayals within feminist movements? The editors seek contributors to reflect on the questions of where feminists should gather now, how we acknowledge and eradicate fraught coalitional relations, and why place matters. Please look for our call for submissions, coming in May 2022. We are seeking short position papers (500 words), article-length arguments, and multi-modal, creative work that engages questions like: What is the political, cultural, and symbolic weight of where feminists choose to gather? What criteria should be adopted for where feminists gather to share research, experience, and ideas in the coming years? What are the features that might make up a “politics of place” for future feminist gatherings (particularly in western New York, or elsewhere of relevance to our regional focus), one that does not erase the tensions within feminist history in the U.S., and one that contributes to a just, inclusive, and intersectional feminist community building? What is feminist place-making in the 21st century?

Editors

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