

What can we learn from the feminist movement?



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Let's set expectations

Let's set expectations

- I am not an expert on feminism
- This is not going to be comprehensive
- I am sharing insights and inspiration I have found in the feminist movement, that I think would be relevant for our strategic focus on **knowledge equity**



**Let's recognize
inspiration**

[[Deborah Rhode| Deborah L. Rhode]]

- Professor of Law at Stanford University
- Most-cited legal scholar on legal ethics
- Fellow of AAAS
- White House Champion of Change Award



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Fair use, from Rhode's own Web site

Anke (redlink!)

Voss-Hubbard

- Archivist and librarian
- Margaret Sanger papers
- **"The decisions of today will determine what's there tomorrow."**

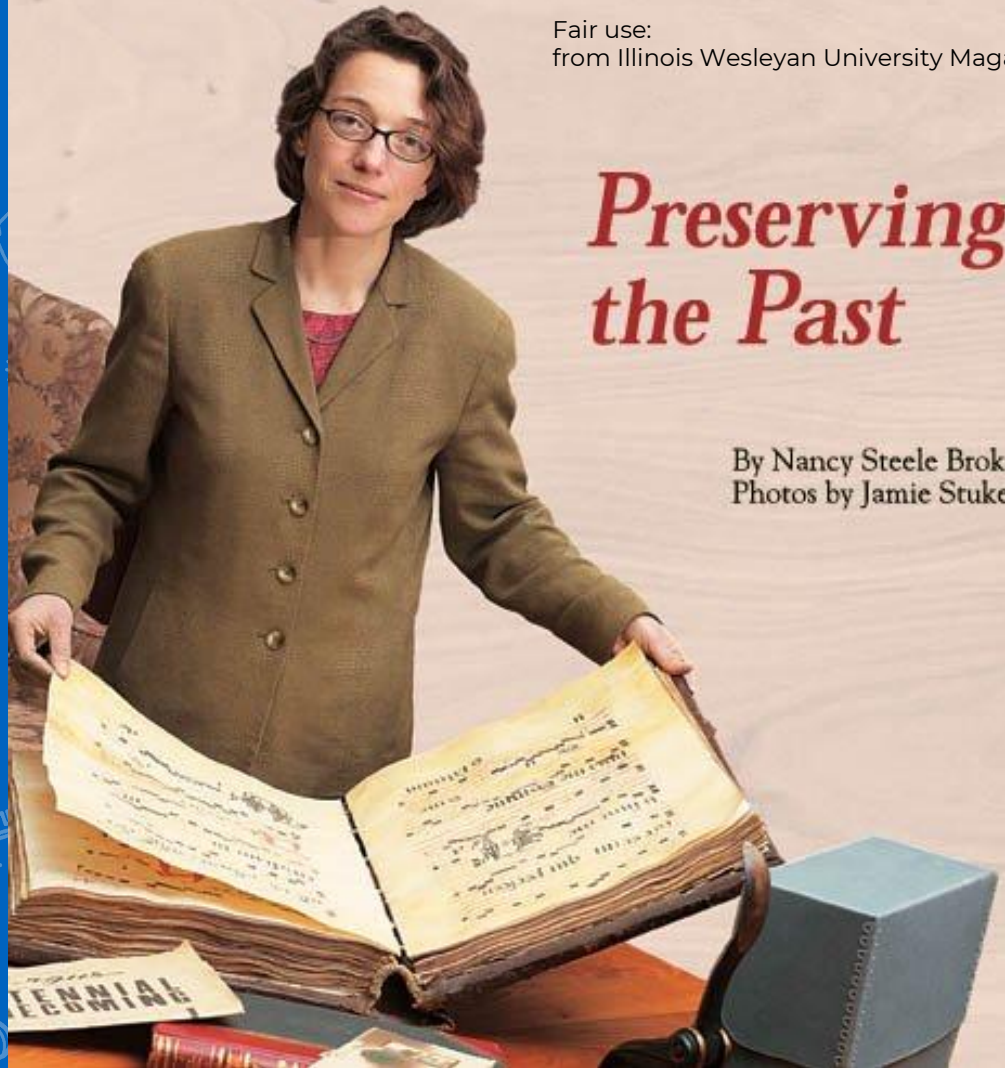


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Fair use:
from Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine

Preserving the Past

By Nancy Steele Brokaw '71
Photos by Jamie Stukenberg



Let's define terms

Let's define terms

"Feminism is a range of political movements, ideologies, and social movements that share a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal, and social equality of sexes" --[[Feminism]]

Asked to assess the impact of the women's movement on the world, **Gloria Steinem** said:

"It is like being asked to describe the universe and give three examples"



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**Many struggles;
many aspects**

Many struggles; many aspects

- Suffrage (the right to vote)
- Property and inheritance rights
- Equal pay; **equal terms**
- Equal employment opportunities
- **Equal access** to education
- Reproductive rights
- **Freedom from harassment**
- **Recognition and representation in art and history**
- ...



A background collage of various line-art icons including a map of Africa, the Eiffel Tower, a planet with rings, a telescope, a bird, a film strip, a clapperboard, a person in a hard hat, a mobile phone, a map of Australia, a moon, a castle, a lightbulb, a person with a cross, a satellite, a pharaoh's head, a film strip, a hand holding a film strip, and a person in a hard hat.

And even...
Men's liberation

Lesson 1: The Problem Is Real

and some people need convincing...



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The "belief in a just world" issue

- Most people believe the world is basically just, and follows orderly rules wherein people get what they deserve and deserve what they get.
- To sustain this belief, people are willing to alter their assessments of merit, to [even retroactively] justify existing social arrangements.

The "no problem" problem

For many (most?) Wikipedians, systemic bias and effective (even if unintended) exclusion of minorities or marginalized people and knowledge is either **not a problem, or not their problem.**



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Rhode 1991

The "no problem" problem

- "There is no problem" (naive vs. wilful)
- "There is a problem, but we have **no responsibility** for causing it, or fixing it."
 - We are for inclusivity and equity in principle, but we dismiss initiatives toward it as 'unworkable', 'impractical', 'unaffordable', etc.
 - "Not for us to solve." and [[WP:GREATWRONGS]]

The de-valuation of difference

- Minimizing actual differences of needs, approaches, meanings, values is a way of obstructing genuine equity (fairness)
- "Equality in formal rights masks inequality in daily experience" ("anyone can edit!")
- Demanding fairness should not equal agreeing to conform to all the pre-existing norms.
("maybe women just don't want to edit!"; "Where are all the Africans?")



Denying Responsibility

- Acknowledging we have a serious problem, but it's elsewhere. Not on *our* wiki; not in *our* WikiProject; not at *our* events; not in *our* edits.
- Assigning responsibility elsewhere. Educators, governments, families, religions, victims, ...

Denying Responsibility

- Some marginalized people internalize the marginalization and deny there's a problem.
 - Acknowledging victimhood can come with loss of self-esteem and other costs.
- It can be difficult to demand, or imagine having, what one never had before.

Relocating Responsibility

- Blaming the victim
 - Bias is easy to miss or excuse if some blame can be found in the victim (unfair treatment of mistakes)
 - This creates a further, sometimes deeper victimhood
- Claiming non-responsibility and nothing else
 - "Reliable sources on African topics are a big problem, but Wikipedia can't be expected to solve it."

Resisting Alternatives

**Apparent intractability
is often
resistance to review and revise priorities**

Resisting Alternatives

- Conceding the premises but dismissing solutions
 - "Yeah, it's not fair, but that's just how it is."
- Considering status quo as given and immutable, but the needs of the marginalized as negotiable.
- "We just can't afford what it would take to change" (but can afford continued bias, monoculture, lost contributions, lost perspectives, etc.)

Lesson 2: Documentation matters



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Let's play a game!

- Name five classical music composers
- Now name one classical music composer who was a woman
 - No?
 - Some help: Clara Schumann, Fanny Mendelssohn, Hildegard of Bingen, Francesca Caccini, Barbara Strozzi, and many more
- **Why was this so hard?**

Other invisibilities

- "The discovery of America in the 15th century"
- "In the 18th century, when Australia was first settled..."
- "Americans" meaning citizens of the USA. (also: "the States", "the United Kingdom")
- ...

The World According to Sources

Available sources influence,
sometimes determine, what
gets told, counted, included.



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The World According to Sources

- "Without knowledge of women in history as actual history, dead women are sheer ghosts to living women - and to men." -- Mary Ritter Beard (1876-1958)
- And as Nintendo warned us:

Everything not saved will be lost.



public domain
US National Archive
collection

"No documents -- No history!"

- Beard labored to create the World Center for Women's Archives. Founded in 1937, but shut down in 1940 for lack of funding.
- Beard continued to encourage citizen archiving and archive collection. Eventually gained recognition by establishment librarians, advising on collection strength.

"No documents -- No history!"

- With Margaret S. Grierson of Smith College, Beard succeeded in founding a lasting "Historical Collection of Books by and about Women", later renamed the [Sophia Smith Collection](#)
- (ironically, Beard considered her own letters and manuscripts of little interest, and did not preserve them.)

"No documents -- No history!"

- Beard warned that the archives would only succeed if faculty incorporated them in their teaching.
- But in the early days of the collection (1940s-1950s), most faculty avoided using the collection, and steered their students away from it.
- **Today, the Sophia Smith collection holds more than 700 different collections, over 3 thousand linear meters and is a major source of reliable information.**

Lesson for us

- Lack of sources, and too-narrow definitions of "reliable sources" and "notability", are hindering us today, and should be reviewed, and probably revised
- But at the same time, a long-term strategy is to create more documentation, that in time and with increased standards of curation, will become recognized as a reliable source.

Lesson 3: Allies, opponents, and the silent majority



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The Importance of Allies

- Dominating cultures and dominating norms usually have the force of numbers
- The numbers often come not from active oppressors or members of a privileged class, but from the silent cooperation of the majority
- Allies to marginalized groups are a key resource in resisting oppression and increasing equity.

The Importance of Allies

- We've heard about the importance of encouragement and support for the marginalized, and the importance of invitations and accommodation of difference
- Our wikis have their share of bigots (racists, sexists, etc.), like most groups of humans, but they are always a minority themselves. Bigotry triumphs only with the silent assent of non-bigots.

Use Your Privilege!

- Feminist males acting as allies (not just having benign opinions) help bring about equity.
- Especially in highly unequal situations, those with privilege can be powerful allies to liberation and equity.
- If you have privilege (whether real-world or wikiprivilege), please use it to help us all.

A modest proposal

Revision as of 08:08, 12 May 2018 (edit) (undo)
(thank)

[Ijon](#) (talk | contribs)

(→*General notability guideline: added caveat*)

(*Tag: 2017 wikitext editor*)

[Next edit](#) →

+ works in all forms and media, and [[WP:NONENG|in any language]]. Availability of secondary sources covering the subject is a good test for notability, **if the subject's culture/country is generally well-covered in secondary literature.**

Just a couple of months ago, I made this change to the English Wikipedia's Notability policy page. I thought it was an evidently reasonable way to qualify that statement.

I was reverted.

So I explained on the talk page.

Use Your Privilege!

"I think the sentence "Availability of secondary sources covering the subject is a good test for notability." as it stands is in fact false; it is only a good test for notability where the subject's culture/country/context is *generally* well-covered in secondary sources. If they are, and this subject is not covered in those secondary sources, the subject is perhaps not notable. But when the whole country/culture/context is *generally* not well-covered in secondary sources, then the lack of secondary sources about *this* subject is *not* a good test for *this* subject's notability. I think my change reflects this logic."

Use Your Privilege!

But other established editors interpreted my proposed change as an attack on any limitation of notability, or that I proposed to accept original research, and said:

Use Your Privilege!

"When a country or other context does not have a literature of reliable sources that covers its important topics, it's sad, but it means those topics are not notable by our standards."

"It doesn't matter *why* references are or not available, only *whether* they are."

"For years the Wikimedia Foundation has been floating the idea of improving coverage of under-represented cultures by allowing oral histories and other primary/unconventional sourcing. It always goes down like the Hindenburg under assault by a battalion of flamethrower-wielding editors."

Use Your Privilege!

So with 7 supporters of my change and 10 against it, status quo remained.

With more allies, we can have the numbers.



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Sources

Sources

- Deborah L. Rhode, "The 'No-Problem' Problem: Feminist Challenges and Cultural Change", in *The Yale Law Journal*, Vol. 100, No. 6 (Apr., 1991), pp. 1731-1793
- Anke Voss-Hubbard, "'No Document—No History': Mary Ritter Beard and the Early History of Women's Archives", in *The American Archivist*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Winter, 1995), pp. 16-30



Thank you for listening
(share this!)

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