

What can we learn from the feminist movement?

CEE Meeting 2020
Ohrid online



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A background collage of various line-art icons representing different fields: a map of Africa, a mountain range, a planet with rings, a telescope, a bird, a film strip, the Eiffel Tower, a map of South America, a person in a hard hat, a clapperboard, pyramids, a camel, a map of Japan, a mobile phone, a map of Australia, a moon, a castle, a lightbulb, a figure with a cross, a satellite, a pharaoh's head, a film strip, and a person in a hard hat.

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**

[[Anke Voss-Hubbard]]

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

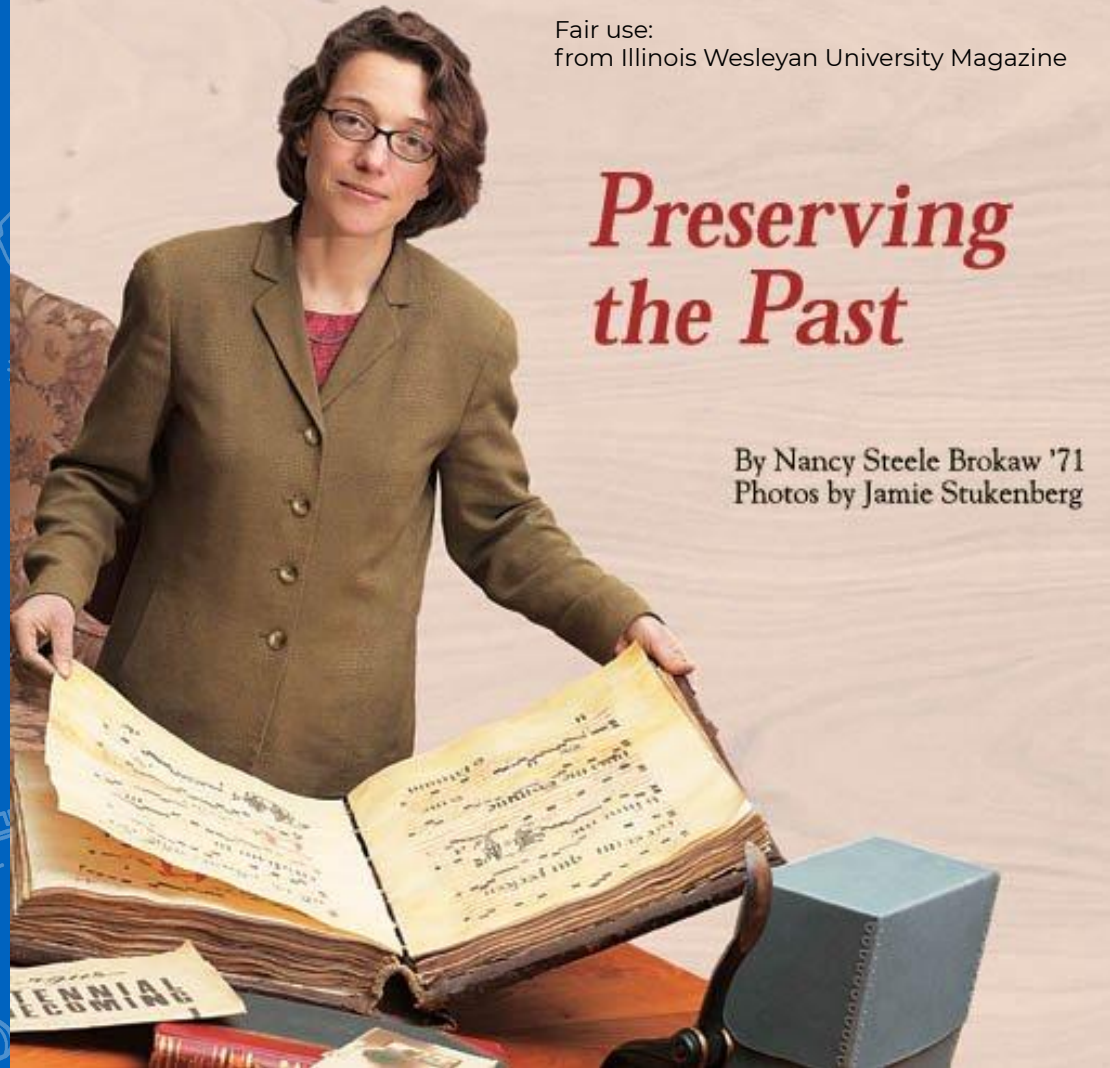


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Fair use:
from Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine

Preserving the Past

By Nancy Steele Brokaw '71
Photos by Jamie Stukenberg



[[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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AAAS = American Association for the Advancement of Science



Fair use, from Rhode's own Web site

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

- 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: 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 (21), Fanny Mendelssohn (10), Hildegard of Bingen (25), Francesca Caccini (9), Barbara Strozzi (10), Louise Farrenc (3), 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.**



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Voss-Hubbard 1995.

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.

This is already happening

- We see some efforts by marginalized groups to build their own curated collections, e.g. Indigenous peoples archives, LGBT archives, some of these [[traditional knowledge](#)] [databases in WIPO's list](#).
- It bears noting [not all of them are compatible with Wikimedia's expectations of universal access](#).
 - Example: “TK Men Restricted”

Lesson 2: 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 *de facto* (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!")
("maybe women just don't want to edit!"; "Where are all the Africans?")
- Demanding fairness should not equal agreeing to conform to all the pre-existing norms.



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



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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.)



Lessons for us

- Many in our communities lack awareness of systemic bias, or deny it, or think it cannot be solved.
 - The majority of them *are open to being educated and convinced*, but it would take **patience, perseverance, and sound argumentation.**

Lessons for us

- The cost of status quo is invisible to those unaffected by it.
- Unequal treatment and bias is sometimes *masked* or (unintentionally) *disguised* by appeal to formalities.
 - We can test, measure and document the above, to raise awareness and reduce occurrence.

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

- 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!

- Non-marginalized people 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.



Use your privilege: some examples

- English Wikipedia has a Civility policy, but in fact, *some* editors use obscenities on talk pages and *aren't punished*. (=people don't hold them to the official standard)

Use your privilege: some examples

- Some editors, deciding someone (a new contributor, or a person they disagreed with) doesn't know what they're doing (whether correctly or not), resort to stalking that person's edits, pointing out all mistakes and offering no help, and aren't stopped by others.

Use Your Privilege!

With more **allies**, we can **have the numbers to change** how welcoming our projects are, and amend policies towards greater knowledge equity.



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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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