Sisterhood, Riot Grrrl, and the Next Wave:
Feminist Generations/Generating Feminisms

The 2nd biennial symposium of the Sallie Bingham Center will take place in Perkins Library on Duke’s West Campus on October 26-27, 2005. The symposium will be convened by Sallie Bingham at 4:00 p.m. on October 26, followed by a keynote address by Feminist Majority Foundation president Eleanor Smeal. On October 27 there will be six break-out sessions and a closing plenary on various topics from self-publishing as a feminist strategy to religion and ritual in the Women’s Movement.

At the end of our 2003 symposium, “Abortion: Research, Ethics and Activism,” we resolved to organize a symposium every other year on a theme emanating from our collections and coinciding with a topic of current conversation among our constituency within and outside of the academy. This year's theme is intergenerational and transgenerational feminisms. In brief, we envision bringing together leaders and other contributors to the Women’s Movement, from the 1960s to the present day, to explore questions about the genealogy of the movement and the evolution of feminist philosophies, as well as day to day, grassroots practicalities. We hope to facilitate an important and fruitful discussion that will provide a meaningful contribution toward mapping the future of the Women’s Movement.

The Sallie Bingham Center is a fitting place to have such an event as it houses some of the foremost collections documenting the U.S. Women's Movement of the past forty plus years. In addition, the Center has a long history of providing a venue for conversations that map the intersection of feminist scholarship and activism. As in 2003, Duke faculty, students and staff, as well as outside scholars, activists, and others will be participating. There will be an exhibit, receptions, a reading, and a film screening to round out the proceedings. For more information, please see our website: <scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/women/generations>.

“Word of a Woman: 40 Years of Feminist Publishing”


The Bingham Center’s collections include a rich variety of zines, underground feminist periodicals, pamphlets, and mainstream media pieces that reveal the incredible and wonderfully irrepressible ways in which feminists from the 1960s onward expressed their views to members of their growing communities.
An Interview with Historian Jocelyn Olcott

Dr. Jocelyn Olcott, Assistant Professor, Department of History, Duke University, is working on a project on the history of transnational feminist activism in the Americas. We spoke with her about her research:

SBC: Which collections in the Bingham Center have proved most helpful?
JO: I've particularly focused on the Bobbye Ortiz Papers, but I've also found useful materials in the Victoria Ortiz Papers, the NC-WILPF (NC-Women's International League for Peace and Freedom) Papers, and the Robin Morgan Papers.

SBC: What insight do the Ortiz materials give to the history of women's activism in South America?
JO: They demonstrate the internationalism of the 1970s and 1980s and the extent to which U.S. feminists were influenced and inspired by the very courageous activism of women in Central and South America.

SBC: How do the Ortiz materials elucidate the differences between the feminist movements in North and South America?
JO: Central and South American feminists in the 1960s-1980s faced violent repression. The Bobbye Ortiz Papers include lists from Argentina of feminists who disappeared during the Dirty War. U.S. feminists faced hostility but not that kind of violence. The Latin American emphasis on maternalism stems in part from this historical context. U.S. feminists have tended to see maternalism as a very cautious form of feminism, and it is in a lot of ways, but it was one of the few types of feminism that could go public during the military dictatorships and have any hope of avoiding annihilation.

SBC: What is in the Ortiz collection that excites you?
JO: There's a tremendous amount here that excites me, both for my own research and for its potential in teaching undergraduates. I guess the overarching aspect of the collection that really grabs me is that this phenomenon of transnationalism has a longer and more multidirectional trajectory than we have come to believe.

SBC: How do you think that the Ortiz material could be used in the classroom?
JO: There are about a million small research projects here waiting for someone ready to take up the challenge. I think it's useful in part because the women who show up in these papers are about the age of our students' parents, so it gives them a glimpse of the history their own families would have lived through. The collection includes some amazing ephemera -- buttons, t-shirts, bumper stickers, etc. -- that I think undergraduates might be able to analyze. All that stuff brings to life the rawness of the conflicts during that period -- Vietnam, Central America, Roe v. Wade, the ERA -- and provides some insights into the ways those same dynamics play out in today's political arenas.

“Word of a Woman” Exhibit (continued from page 1)

Feminist publishing, which is often self-published and self-distributed, is one of the cornerstones of feminist activism. The Bingham Center’s collections serve as a window onto the vibrant world of this dynamic movement.

In keeping with the symposium’s exploration of the continuities amongst generations of feminists, the materials in the exhibition are an important reminder that despite generational differences, the waves of the feminist movement share many of the same intellectual underpinnings. As the wide variety of materials demonstrate, feminists of the 1960s and 1970s thought and wrote critically about the evolution of feminist publishing and how their legacy might be best passed on to future feminists. Women of the more recent iterations of the feminist movement have often returned to the definitive feminist texts of the 1960s and 1970s and republished them in newer formats. The zines of the 1990s provide an example of this evolution.

During the symposium, please take some time to visit the exhibit cases outside the Rare Book Room in Perkins Library.

-Amy McDonald, co-curator of exhibit
The Mary Wager Fisher Papers

Mark your calendars! On October 21–23, 2005, Durham will host Ladyfest NC, a festival to showcase, celebrate, and encourage the art and activism of women. Ladyfest NC will be a feast of music, movies, workshops, and other festivities. These events will take place in a variety of local venues.

As part of Ladyfest NC’s slate of workshops, the Bingham Center will offer a session titled, “You Are Making History: How to Inform Your Activism with the Historical Record, and Vice Versa.” Other workshop topics range from basic automotive maintenance to how to create a zine. Anyone interested in being involved or offering a workshop, a performance, or just their time and energy can submit a proposal via the Ladyfest NC website at: <http://www.ladyfestnc.com>.

Mary Anne Barckhoff, one of the local organizers, is “hoping to make this Ladyfest as diverse as possible.” Anyone who supports the education, advancement, and celebration of women is invited to participate. “We’ve had proposals from as far away as California,” says Barckhoff.

Ladyfest began in Olympia, Washington, in August 2000. Inspired by the Do-It-Yourself ethic of punk rock and the militant feminism of Riot Grrrl, planners of the first Ladyfest organized a festival to inspire women’s self-empowerment and benefit grassroots organizations that support women. Since that time, Ladyfest has spread to cities all over the globe.

The Mary Wager Fisher Papers

Dr. Eric Gardner, Associate Professor, Department of English, Saginaw Valley State University, is a 2005-2006 recipient of a Mary Lily Research Grant from the Sallie Bingham Center. Gardner writes about his work on Mary Wager Fisher and the African American literary community in Washington, D.C.

The Mary Wager Fisher Papers, part of the William Righter and Mary Wager Fisher Papers in the Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library at Duke, offer a rich resource for students of nineteenth-century American women’s history, literature, medicine, and politics. Fisher (1845-1915) began her literary career in the 1860s using the pseudonym Minnie Mintwood and wrote everything from gossipy reports of the Washington, D.C. political scene and travel pieces to sentimental stories and some of the earliest accounts of women in medicine.

Fisher’s correspondence chronicles not only the development of her career as an author, but also her complex personal relationships, including letters from close female friends that hint at romantic love for Fisher, as well as touching letters from her future husband.

What first drew me to the Fisher papers was a set of three letters, two from African American novelist Frank J. Webb and one from African American writer and educator George Boyer Vashon, that were the result of an article Fisher was planning on black literature. The letters describe the richness of the nascent black literary community in post-Civil War Washington.

What is fascinating about these letters is that Webb’s and Vashon’s letters to Fisher have notable similarities to letters Fisher received from several lesser-known writers. Even as Fisher jockeyed for notice by the country’s top editors, other writers hoped a word from Fisher might help them. Even Webb hoped Fisher would put in a good word with Harper’s editor S. S. Conant.

This complex networking among authors, especially women and African Americans, offers fertile ground for further research. As such, it adds to the lure of the fascinating, and largely understudied, material in the Fisher papers.
Upcoming Events


Sept. 29, 2:00 p.m.: “Two Cultures; or, The Sciences and Humanities, Then and Now,” Priscilla Wald, English and Women's Studies, Rare Book Room, Perkins Library, Duke University

Oct. 21-23: Ladyfest NC, Durham, NC

Oct. 26, 7:00 p.m.: Judy Chicago, lecture and reception, Nasher Museum of Art, Duke University


Symposium Schedule
Oct. 26
3:00 Registration opens
4:00 Welcome: Sallie Bingham
4:30 Keynote address: Eleanor Smeal

5:30 Opening reception

Oct. 27
8:00-3:30 Registration
8:30-9:00 Welcome coffee with Susan Roth
9:15-10:45 Concurrent sessions:
  Academic & Institutional Feminism
  Modes and Methods of Feminist Publishing
  Film Screening, “I Was A Teenage Feminist”
10:45-11:30 Coffee break (LGBT Center)
11:30-1:00 Concurrent sessions:
  Politics of Identity in Modern U.S. Social Movements
  Documentation Strategies for Living Social Movements
  Religion, Ritual, and the Women’s Movement
1:00-2:15 Lunch (on your own)
2:15-4:00 Closing plenary
4:15 Closing reception

Oct. 28, 2:00 p.m.: Paula Kamen, reading from All in My Head, Perkins Library, Duke University