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Creating Seneca Falls Dialogues Journal

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Creating Seneca Falls Dialogues Journal

Abstract

After six years of productive collaboration, we realized, somewhat reluctantly, that it was time to hand over the editorial reins to other members of the SFD team. We are reluctant, only because we have so enjoyed working together and with our colleagues on a project about which we feel proud. As we reflect upon our editorial journey, it is especially meaningful to glance back at three extraordinary volumes, each published in the spirit of the journal's founding principles of feminist agency and voice. We both look forward to supporting the journal as members of the editorial board and are excited to see what our talented friends and colleagues, Mary, Lisa and Jill will do with the next iterations of the *Seneca Falls Dialogues Journal*.

Keywords

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

CREATING SENECA FALLS DIALOGUES JOURNAL

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The Seneca Falls Dialogues, which began in 2008, is a biannual conference designed to reinvigorate the location of the first women’s rights conventions as a site of feminist activism and intellectual exchange. The organizing committee consists of a coalition of academics, activists, and professionals dedicated to principles of equality, education, and inclusion. In 2013 members of this committee gathered in the Elizabeth Perkins Mansion, home of the Greater Rochester Area Branch of the American Association of University Women.¹ Our goals were to review our 2012 Dialogues and start preparing for 2014. Sharing snacks and lively conversation, we sat around a large wooden table, feeling energized by the success of the previous fall’s Dialogues, which focused on the “Politics of Leadership and Civil Rights.” This 2012 conference featured student and faculty-led conversations on topics such as gendered leadership, third wave feminism, and the use of silence in feminist activism. The conference program included a thoughtful keynote by historian Nancy Hewitt, a screening of Leah Shafer’s interactive film, “Sentiments & Usurpations,” in which previous Dialogue attendees recited lines from Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s 1848 *Declaration of Sentiments*, and stories from three 1960s Student for Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

¹ Named, “The Elizabeth Perkins Mansion,” c. 1906, this spacious home was built as a wedding gift to Elizabeth from her parents in her 1902 marriage to Erickson Perkins. When Elizabeth became a widow in 1940, she gifted the residence and its stewardship to the Greater Rochester Area Branch (GRAB) of the American Association of University Women (AAUW). One distinctive feature to the Elizabeth Perkins Mansion and its GRAB AAUW partnership is its exclusive women-only ownership.

(SNCC) participants, Judy Richardson, Betty Garman Robinson, and Dorothy M. Zellner.

Brockport student Tuesday Obourn, who attended the 2012 Dialogues and was a member of the committee, led an initiative to start a journal as a way to archive the knowledge imparted at each biennial conference, and in doing so, to expand the reach of the Dialogues beyond the conference weekend. Based on their experience creating *Dissenting Voices* in Barb LeSavoy's Women and Gender Studies senior capstone, Tuesday discussed how a journal could offer Dialogue participants an opportunity to reflect on their presentations and refine their ideas. A lively discussion followed, addressing what our goals might be for such a publication, whether it should be a peer-reviewed scholarly journal, and how we might arrange publication logistics. While we didn't immediately resolve every question, we agreed that such an enterprise was worth pursuing and that the goal of the journal was to focus on access and inclusion to be achieved by supporting and amplifying emerging voices and perspectives. We (Deborah and Barb) volunteered to serve as founding editors and we would publish the journal through the Digital Commons Institutional Repository housed at SUNY Brockport and managed by Information Technology Project Manager, Pat Maxwell. Tuesday, who was about to graduate but who had championed the journal conception, agreed to serve as an editorial assistant.

The 2014 Dialogues began with new energy. We highlighted the journal repeatedly over the conference weekend so participants could think about how they might transform their dialogues into a written format and everyone seemed excited about the possibility. We answered many questions and stressed that the submissions could be collaborative and experimental, just as the Dialogues were. Again, the 2014 Dialogues were spirited and thoughtful and the topic of ecofeminism gave us all a sense of urgency as we were inspired by keynote speaker and Eco-Warrior, Tanya Fields, who deploys urban farming in the south Bronx to tackle social, racial, and economic justice goals. Following the Dialogues, we contacted presenters and audience members alike, encouraging them to submit materials for publications. We had an encouraging response, including a number of submissions that included student co-authors. Barb

and Deborah assembled a group of colleagues to serve as reviewers and talked with them about how we could realize our goal of inclusion. Academic journals and their editors have long been understood 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. As Mary K. Feeney, Lisa Carson and Helen Dickinson explain, this lack of diversity “inhibits knowledge creation,” exacerbates bias and conveys to many submitters that their works are not welcome (46).² Our goal was the opposite—we wanted to develop an editorial practice that embraced Sara Ahmed’s definition of feminism as “how we pick each other up” (1).³ We wanted to open the gates, promote diverse views and welcome all voices—emerging and established, and everything in between. One concrete way to achieve this was not to reject any submissions outright – if a submission had significant shortcomings, we would send the author(s) a revise and resubmit recommendation along with detailed suggestions for revision. Barb and Deborah reached out to authors receiving this recommendation and offered assistance for the revision process. Because of the digital platform for the journal, we also were not limited to print submissions and were able to include a link to Leah Shafer’s documentary in the journal.

A year after the October 2014 Dialogues, the first volume of the *Seneca Falls Dialogues Journal* was ready for prime time. In addition to the documentary, it featured seven essays and twenty-one authors. Our authors were college professors and staff and graduate and undergraduate students. Topics included confronting student resistance to ecofeminism, the impact of toxins on consumer products, and the roles of nature and technology in the anime film *Princess Mononoke* (which remains our most frequently downloaded essay). To celebrate the launch of our inaugural issue, we held a celebratory luncheon, bringing our organizing committee

² “Power in Editorial Positions: A Feminist Critique in Public Administration,” *Public Administration Review*, vol. 79, iss. 1, pp. 46-55. For another discussion of the challenges of feminist journal editing, see Emma Bell, Susan Meriläinen, Scott Taylor and Janne Tienari, “Time’s up! Feminist theory and activism meets organization studies,” *human relations*, vol. 72, iss. 1, pp. 4-22.

³ *Living a Feminist Life*, Duke University Press, 2017.

and editors, journal contributors, and college administrators together in the carriage house just behind the Susan B. Anthony Museum & House. At the luncheon, we introduced and distributed print versions of the journal, which everyone admired. The excitement about the journal also fueled enthusiasm for the Dialogues and led to promises of student scholarships and institutional support.

Future Dialogues led to modifications and improvements of the journal. The performance of the University of Rochester Women's Choir in 2014 was so moving that a group of us interviewed the conductor, Philip Silvey, and incorporated ideas from this conversation about his inclusive approach to choral conducting and composition into volume 2 of the journal's introduction. We followed this practice for volume 3, interviewing Tokeya Graham, Reenah Oshun Golden, Selena Felming, Lu Highsmith and Kristen Gentry—the members of We All Write—about their 2016 stirring performance in the Wesleyan Chapel, in which they transformed an iconic space by giving voice to women who were excluded from the women's rights convention held in the same spot in 1848. We also used our covers to highlight aspects of the Dialogues—displaying historical and contemporary photographs of women workers shared with us by 2016 keynote speaker and artist Brenda Kenneally for volume 2, and a mural image of 2018 keynote speaker KaeLyn Rich for volume 3 that is part of the *Her Voice Carries* art project led by Sarah C. Rutherford. A version of Kaelyn's powerful talk on activism and the possibility of affecting change is also included in volume 3 of the journal. Behind the scenes we strived to improve the editorial processes, holding virtual training sessions with the review board to insure more consistency in our author feedback and to review our goals of inclusion and support for young and emerging writers. With each iteration of the Dialogues and the journal, we hoped to reflect the changing landscape of feminism, and particularly its embrace of intersectionality. Twenty-eight years after coining the term, Kimberle Crenshaw described intersectionality “as a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects.” For Crenshaw, the intersectional lens “refuses to erase” people's complex lived

experiences.⁴ As feminist editors, we too work against erasure, striving to create a platform of equity and inclusion.

After six years of productive collaboration, Barb and Deborah somewhat reluctantly realized that it was time to hand over the editorial reins to other members of the SFD team. We are reluctant, only because we have so enjoyed working together and with our colleagues on a project about which we feel proud. As we reflect upon our editorial journey, it is especially meaningful to glance back at three extraordinary volumes, each published in the spirit of the journal's founding principles of feminist agency and voice. We both look forward to supporting the journal as members of the editorial board and are excited to see what our talented friends and colleagues, Mary, Lisa, and Jill will do with the next iterations of the *Seneca Falls Dialogues Journal*.

⁴ “Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later,” *Columbia Law School*. 8 June 2017. <https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality-more-two-decades-later>. Accessed 10 June 2021.