

# **Building and Maintaining Feminist Institutions in Gainesville during the 1970s: An Historical Analysis**

Leila Adams

Ronald E. McNair Scholar

# Outline

- Methodology
- Study
- Significance
- Terms/Existing Scholarship
- Conclusions
- New Research Questions

# Methodology

- 7 oral histories from movement participants
- 20 issues of *WomaNews*
- Other archives:
  - *The Iguana*
  - *The Independent Florida Alligator*
  - *The Gainesville Sun*

# Feminist Institutions in Gainesville

- 1974 – Rape Information Crisis Service
- 1974 – Gainesville Women's Health Center
- 1975 – Women's Center
  - Womanstore
  - *WomaNews*
  - Breakthrough

# Significance

- First five cities to develop a Women's Liberation Group between 1967 and 1968
- Under-studied – Giardina 1967-1970
- Contribute to social movement and feminist theory
- Better understand the nature of feminist institutions

# Defining “Feminist Institution”

- Estelle Freeman: “a separatist political strategy”
- Grassroots organization founded and operated by women for the purpose of serving women’s political interests
- Operates independently from men and resources provided by men to ensure “complete woman control”

# Criticism of the Term “Feminist Institution”

- Patricia Yancey Martin –
  - “an ideal type that is largely unattainable”

# Broadening the term “Feminist Institution”

## ■ Steven Buechler – continuum



**Collectivist**

Ex: Redstockings

**Bureaucratic**

Ex: NOW

Rape Information  
Crisis Service



Peaceful Paths

Gainesville Women's  
Health Center

Women's Center



# Conclusions

- Feminist Institutions are not “largely unattainable” but are difficult to maintain. As a result, they tend to move towards bureaucracy, while rarely moving towards collectivism.
- Closing as Strategy not Failure: Feminist Institutions close to preserve themselves and reopen at more favorable times.
  - Womanstore/Amelia’s/Wild Iris
- Feminist Institutions can receive outside funding and still maintain woman control.
  - Women’s Center/ *WomaNews*/Wild Iris

# Future Research

- 1970 – 1973 and 1983 – present
- Investigate cross-racial alliances in the movement: Collaboration or Conflict?
- Investigate the economic difficulties lesbian couples faced as business partners in founding institutions.

# Special Thanks

- Ronald E. McNair Undergraduate Research Program.
- Dr. Trysh Travis, UF Center for Women's Studies and Gender Research.
- Radical women still living in or near Gainesville, Florida.