

Institution: University of Sussex

Unit of Assessment: UoA 36 Media Studies

Title of case study: Bringing post-1968 feminism to life for new audiences: enriching public appreciation and understanding of the British Women's Liberation Movement

1. Summary of the impact

In March 2013, the British Library (BL) launched the first national oral-history archive of the British Women's Liberation Movement (WLM). A permanent public resource preserving the voices of 1970s/1980s feminists, the archive was the outcome of 'Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project', a three-year Leverhulme-funded research-partnership project led by PI Margaretta Jolly, in partnership with curators at the BL and the Women's Library (WL). Through the national prominence this archive has achieved and the numerous curatorial, educational, cultural and community activities directly associated with it, the research is having a significant impact on the public perception of feminism, bringing it to life for new audiences.

2. Underpinning research

Key researchers: *Dr Margaretta Jolly, Reader in Cultural Studies at the University of Sussex (2007–present) with Dr Rachel Cohen, SAA Research Fellow at the University of Sussex (2010–2013); Lizzie Thynne, Senior Lecturer in Film at Sussex (2001–present), 20 per cent SAA Research Fellow (2011–13).*

'Sisterhood and After' (SAA) was conceived because there was no national oral history of the (post-1968) WLM in Britain, nor any published general history. Motivated by a sense of urgency (WLM activists are mostly now in their 60s and 70s), SAA aimed to produce this history in the form of a professionally sustained and accessible archive collection and subsequent monograph in order to reveal, to as wide an audience as possible, the conditions of gender relations in late twentieth-century Britain, and the strategies women used to improve them.

Building on expertise developed at the University of Sussex's Centre for Life History and Life Writing Research (CLHLWR, 1999–present), oral history interviews with 60 activists were chosen as a practice-based method for capturing and analysing memories of the WLM, and to cover a wide range of campaigns and perspectives. In these (on average) seven-hour-long interviews, participants were asked about their role in campaigns and ideas, their own experiments with personal and political relationships, their experiences of adolescence, bodily life and identity, their views on the diversity of movements across and within the four nations of the UK, and how their lives compared with those of their mothers. Further biographical material was collected. Interviewees could correct and amplify the transcripts and summaries produced of their audio recordings.

As well as interviewee selection and documentation, Jolly – Director of CLHLWR and a leading specialist in feminist history [Section 3, R4].– undertook a third of the interviews. Research Fellow Cohen carried out most of the rest. As PI, Jolly worked closely with Polly Russell, SAA's curator at the BL (2005–present), to conceptualise the BL collection and presentation of material, and planned outreach activities. SAA's archive also includes 10 short films, dramatising particular campaigns based on the audio interview research. These were produced and directed by Thynne.

Taken as individual recordings, the SAA interviews constitute deep biographies that shed light on the circumstances and consequences of a person's activism. Taken together *as a history*, the collection documents the emergence, development and structure of the WLM, revealing a greater range of networks, political positions and campaigns than previously acknowledged. The researchers identified 10 core narratives, evident across the interviews, about women's rights movements during the 1970s and 1980s and further sourced supporting archival and visual materials that would help to illustrate these narratives for a public audience. The project's research publications have further elucidated the biographical consequences of activism, enabling greater understanding of its impact on the many individuals who became life-long activists. SAA has also made a contribution to cultural-

memory research, showing how gender relations can be different and better, and how oral history projects can be part of a process of feminist influence that goes beyond the more measurable aspects of campaigns. The team's analysis of methodologies and findings, presented in public as well as in academic conferences and publications, offers guidance to future scholars – including community historians beyond academia – struggling with issues of representativeness and oral history practice [R2].

3. References to the research

- R1** BL Collection C1420: Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project (60 audio interviews and verbatim transcripts; 10 documentary films – in electronic form).
Catalogue entry URL:
<http://cadensa.bl.uk/uhtbin/cgiirsi/x/0/0/5?searchdata1=CKEY7375945%20&library=ALL>. 120 audio clips from the collection are already accessible online, alongside the 10 films, with all the material to follow, at the BL Learning Programme website 'Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project', URL: <http://bl.uk/sisterhood>
- R2** Jolly, M., Russell, P. and Cohen, R. (2012) 'Sisterhood and after: individualism, ethics and an oral history of the Women's Liberation Movement', *Social Movement Studies*, 11(2): 211–226. Official URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2012.664902>
- R3** Jolly, M. and Roseneil, S. (eds) (2012a) Special issue entitled 'Women's Movements: FEMCIT and Sisterhood and After', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 35(3): 125–186. Online at: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/02775395/35/3>. Including:
- Jolly, M. and Roseneil, S. (2012b) 'Researching women's movements: an introduction to Femcit and sisterhood and after', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 35(3): 125–128.
 - Jolly, M. (2012a) 'Recognising place, space and nation in researching women's movements: sisterhood and after', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 35(3): 144–146.
 - Jolly, M. (2012b) 'Assessing the impact of women's movements: sisterhood and after', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 35(3): 150–152.
- R4** Jolly, M. (2008) *In Love and Struggle: Letters in Contemporary Feminism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- R5** Grant: Leverhulme Trust Award F/00 230/AK for 'Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project': £325,526, March 2010 to May 2013.

Outputs can be supplied by the University on request.

4. Details of the impact

The 'Sisterhood and After' research has succeeded in enriching public appreciation and understanding of post-1968 feminism in the following ways:

- It led directly to the production of a new, public, digital and searchable archive of personal voices about the WLM held at the BL Sound Archive, with two public, multi-media gateways, both of which drew on the team's practice-based research: an extensive schools-facing website (online at: <http://bl.uk/sisterhood>), permanently hosted by the BL's Learning Programme, which provides 10 detailed but accessible narratives to trace campaigns and debates; and the online short films produced/directed by Thynne. The narratives showcase 120 audio clips alongside the films, supporting images, animations and a detailed timeline, and are framed with questions for discussion and Teachers' Notes. The site links to the Sound Archive catalogue, where the full archive entry is found. In its first 18 days, the Learning Programme website attracted over 12,000 visitors and nearly 30,000 page views. Between 8 March and 31 July page views totalled 50,241.
- SAA research project material was used to enrich national exhibitions/workshops:
 - Propaganda: Power and Persuasion Exhibition at the BL, 17 May–17 September 2013, featuring extracts from and workshops about SAA, including two of the films by Thynne.
 - The Long March to Equality' Exhibition at the WL, featuring extracts from 'Sisterhood and After', 17 October 2012 to 22 March 2013. Kate Murphy, guest curator, noted that it 'added great depth to the exhibition to be able to hear the voices of women who had been involved in

the many events and campaigns of the 60s, 70s and 80s that were represented’.

- The research was used directly in public and educational outreach activities by its two national cultural-institution partners:
 - The BL prepared a substantial series of public-outreach engagements (March 2013–March 2014) to use and showcase SAA material, including 10 fully-booked 90-minute-long schools workshops for Year 7–13 pupils (May–September 2013) in relation to the BL’s ‘Propaganda and Power’ exhibition (300 pupils attended). Russell also shared the research at a BL Teachers’ Forum in London on 6 July 2013 for secondary-school English teachers, after which attendee Anne Turvey wrote that ‘I know I speak for so many people. It was thought-provoking and moving AND full of things for teachers to think about “using”’. This event led to three further bespoke group workshops at the BL and Russell also fed project materials into other exhibitions, media events and focus groups. At one of the latter, participant Claire Stansfield wrote: ‘We’ll use [SAA] in A-level politics for feminism / AS history for the changing nature of women and I’ve passed it on to colleagues for use in sociology’.
 - SAA’s other curatorial partner, the WL (now based at LSE) used a public-facing website to share its creative interpretation of SAA oral-history materials.
- The launch of the SAA archive attracted prominent news and social media coverage:
 - The BBC World Service ‘World News’ programme announced the launch in its bulletins on 7 March 2013.
 - Positive articles about SAA were published in *The Telegraph* (7 February and 8 March 2013), *The Guardian* (9 March) and *The Times* (9 March).
 - A link to the SAA page on the BL Learning Programme site link was tweeted on the exhibition launch date by journalists Caitlin Moran and Zoe Williams, with just under 500,000 Twitter followers between them.
- Curators and community historians, teachers and pupils, and writers, broadcasters and artists have used the research to challenge stereotypes and offer role models in further pursuit of equal rights and gender justice, and to bring feminism to life for new audiences.
 - In BBC Radio 4 *Woman’s Hour* on 6 March 2013, presenter (and SAA interviewee) Jenni Murray used extracts from the archive alongside interviews with a project team member and a feminist academic to publicise the SAA project launch and to follow up on a multigenerational phone-in on ‘What feminism means to you?’. The senior producer for the feature, Kate Murphy, said that ‘extracts from the Sisterhood and After Project were used to great effect [in it], bringing these voices to the wider general public’.
 - Journalist Caitlin Moran participated in the creation of a video trailer for SAA.
 - The *TES* produced an online teachers’ resource-files collection.
 - ‘The Silver Action Project’ Performance Art Event by artist Suzanne Lacy took place at the Tate Modern, 3 February 2013 (with a follow-up event involving Jolly on 9 March). A project on older feminists, it employed Jolly as a consultant because of her SAA role and drew directly on SAA project findings, expertise and contacts.
 - BL Lead Curator of Oral History and Director of National Life Stories, and Secretary of the Oral History Society, reported that: ‘The project also makes a useful contribution to the collective endeavours of the oral history community in the UK. It is important to the Oral History Society and public historians in general, to see these kinds of academic-activist partnerships flourish. I can see the project impacting on popular historical understandings of the period as well as the history of gender relations, but also acting as an encouragement to younger generations of feminists and activists who themselves want to explore oral history.’
 - Feminist Archive South re-used materials from the SAA in their Heritage Lottery-funded community history project to catalogue Bristol WLM activist Ellen Malos’ archives.
 - BL Curator Polly Russell has argued of Jolly’s contribution to SAA that it ‘complicate[s] the stereotypes around feminist history and feminist stories. ... [W]hen we’re teaching in workshops, that is very interesting to students, and allows them to explore some of their own stereotypes and ideas about feminism.’ As Abiola Olanipekun, work-placement trainee at the BL, wrote: ‘As a young woman, I am not old enough to recall some of the key aspects of the

women's liberation movement and pivotal turning points for equality in this country. Nonetheless ... I feel a wholehearted appreciation for the liberation movement [and] a genuine appreciation for the project of "Sisterhood and After" which has documented the movement through dedicated and uncompromising research.'

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

C1 Interview with BL Curator (4 June 2013); website statistics reported by BL Web Developer, in emails dated 19 September 2013.

C2 Evidence as follows:

- Russell (interview 4 June 2013): <http://www.bl.uk/whatson/exhibitions/propaganda/index.html>
- Email from Kate Murphy to Jolly, 19 September 2013. Also see account of Teresa Doherty, formerly The WL curator (interview 16 September 2013). Exhibition details here: <http://thelongmarchtoequality.wordpress.com/sisterhood-and-after-2/>

C3 Evidence as follows:

- BL outreach activities: Polly Russell (interview as above). Feedback from Anne Turvey, attendee at Teachers' Forum, by email to Russell, 8 July; and from Claire Stansfield, BL Focus Group participant, by email to Russell, 20 June 2013.
- WL curatorial and outreach activities and website: Teresa Doherty (interview as above).

C4 News and social media indicative coverage

- The BBC World Service 'World News' programme, 7 March 2013:
- Emma Barnett, 'British Library to open first national Women's Liberation archive', *The Telegraph*, 7 February 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/9855707/British-Library-to-open-first-national-Womens-Liberation-archive.html>;
- Emma Barnett, 'The archive remembering the ladies who made women visible', *The Telegraph*, 8 March 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/9917436/International-Womens-Day-2013-Remembering-the-ladies-who-made-women-visible.html>;
- Sheila Rowbotham, 'The Week In Books', *The Guardian Review*, 9 March; and
- Fiona Wilson, 'British Library launches an archive of Women's Oral History', *The Times*, 9 March 2013, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/life/courtsocial/article3708981.ece>.
- Caitlin Moran's tweet: <https://twitter.com/caitlinmoran/status/309986918962167808>; Zoe Williams' tweet: <https://twitter.com/zoesqwilliams/status/310010582516518912>

C5 Evidence as follows:

- BBC Radio 4 *Woman's Hour*, 6 March 2013. Programme currently online here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01r0gp5>. Email from Murphy to Jolly, 19 September, 2013. *Woman's Hour's* weekly average audience is 2.68 million people.
- Moran's video trailer for SAA is online: <http://www.bl.uk/learning/news/sisterhood.html>
- *Times Educational Supplement*, 28 May 2013: <http://www.tes.co.uk/teaching-resource/Sisterhood-and-After-Women-and-39-s-Liberation-Movement-6331407/>
- 'Silver Action': http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tanks-tate-modern/music-and-live-performance/bmw-tate-live-suzanne-lacy-silver-action_ On the day, the event attracted 956 visitors, 3,000 mentions on Twitter and 2,900 visitors to the Tate Modern website (email from A.R. Townsend, 9 October 2013), <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/blogs/suzanne-lacy-silver-action-artists-statement>.
- Emailed letter from Rob Perks to Jolly, 18 October 2013.
- Interview (3 September 2013) with D.M. Withers, Community Archivist, Trustee Feminist Archive South and Manager, February to October 2013, of FAS' Ellen Malos' Archive: <http://feministarchivesouth.org.uk/ellen-malos-archives-heritage-lottery-project/>
- Russell (interview as above); Olanipekun's account: <http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/socialscience/2013/05/a-young-womans-response-to-the-sisterhood-and-after-website.html>.