

The Legacy of Transformational Moments in Feminist Psychology

Stephanie A. Shields
The Pennsylvania State University

Important turning points in feminist psychology can sometimes be traced to particular moments—specific publications or situations in which an individual or group sparked advancement of the field. Some of these moments are acknowledged in our collective understanding of our history. For example, Naomi Weisstein’s (1968) "Kinder, Küche, Kirche as Scientific Law: Psychology Constructs the Female" often marks the beginning of contemporary feminist psychology (Rutherford, Vaughn-Blount, & Ball, 2010). Just as there are widely acknowledged milestones, such as the founding of Division 35, the Association for Women in Psychology, APA’s Committee on Women in Psychology, feminist psychological organizations in other countries, and many feminist journals in psychology, there are also local transformational moments deeply woven into the fabric of our history. These may be geographically specific, as in the history of a particular region or university, or they may be local events that we now realize were moments in a larger pattern that has shaped feminist psychology.

The history of women in psychology has been a concern of feminist psychologists since the 1970s when a then-new generation of feminists realized that women were missing from the history of American psychology and worked to collect biographies and autobiographies to ensure that women’s place in the history of psychology would be there as a model for the women coming up in the ranks and never again be lost (e.g., Bernstein & Russo, 1974; Sexton, 1974; Scarborough & Furumoto, 1986, 1987; Russo & Denmark, 1987; Johnston & Johnson, 2008; Unger, 2010). Thanks to Alexandra Rutherford’s “Feminist Voices Project” (Rutherford, 2010), a digital archive of biographies, the body of information on women psychologists has continued to grow, revealing the complexity of feminist psychology’s history.

This is a moment we need to find and share these unsung transformational moments. There are many reasons to do so; I’ll mention only two.

First, we need to model a new way to keep our stories alive in the digital environment. Back in the day, when people had to depend on snail mail, the evolution of transformational moments generated a paper trail. Today, we would need to track a mountain of email and texts to put together the stories of feminist psychology’s continuing development.

Second, we need to know about these transformative moments because they can serve as inspiration to work for positive social change in our presently regressive political and economic environment. We are seeing a serious pushback against many of the achievements that modern

Carolyn Wood Sherif Award Address, 2014 American Psychological Association annual convention, Washington, D. C. **Please do not quote without permission.** To contribute your story to the project, go to <http://www.apadivisions.org/division-35/news-events/news/2014/transformational-moments.aspx>

feminism, including feminist psychology, has advanced and made possible. Reproductive rights is at the center of the storm in the U.S., but equal pay, the continued feminization of poverty, violence against women (at home and in areas of international conflict) all demand our focused attention in our teaching, scholarship, practice, and activism. Not only can unsung transformational moments inspire us, but they can also sketch/suggest/inform strategies and actions to bring about effective response to these crises.

In this talk I draw on feminist psychologists' recollections to highlight unsung transformational moments in the scholarship of feminist psychology. I conclude by relating this rich history to transformations still to come. First, however, I want to do a brief remembrance of Carolyn Sherif, in whose honor this award was established.

Carolyn Wood Sherif, 1922-1982

Carolyn Wood (Sherif, 1983; Shaffer & Shields, 1983; Mednick & Russo, 1983; Evans, 1980) was born in Loogootee, Indiana on June 26, 1922, the youngest of three children. Her father had a job at Purdue University which enabled Carolyn and her older siblings to attend college. At Purdue, she was a member of a special program for women science majors and finished college in three years. After graduating from Purdue with a B.S. with highest distinction in Science in 1943, Carolyn completed a Master's in psychology at Iowa State. While at Iowa, she read Muzafer Sherif's *The Psychology of Social Norms* (1936) and decided "that's the kind of social psychologist I want to be" (Sherif, 1983, p. ***).

With her Masters in hand, Carolyn accepted a job as a research assistant to the director of Audience Research, Inc. in Princeton, New Jersey. Carolyn was disappointed that the job involved simply gathering responses to surveys. That and the climate of sexual harassment made her decide she needed to move on. She wrote to Hadley Cantril at Princeton because she had read his books and liked them. About a week later he phoned her to offer her a research assistant position with Muzafer Sherif. She said yes without hesitation.

The impact of meeting Muzafer Sherif, already a well-known contributor who espoused social psychology and male-female equality with equal fervor, and whose work had already inspired me, cannot be overdrawn. He asked me how far I wanted to go in social psychology, and I replied "all the way." (Sherif, 1983, p. 284)

Their work together from the beginning was collaborative, and each of them were involved in anything either one published, individually or jointly, after the year 1945. Carolyn passed up Muzafer's attempts to persuade her to agree to co-authorship on many of their ventures, which she later realized was a mistake: "I now believe that the world which viewed me as a wife who probably typed her husband's papers (which I did not) defined me to myself more than I realized" (Sherif, 1983, p. 286).

Among many other joint publications, three books with wide impact were published under both of their names: *Groups in Harmony and Tension* (1953), *An Outline of Social Psychology* (1956), and the classic Robbers Cave experiment which was conducted in 1954, and later published in *Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation* (1961).

In 1958 both Carolyn and Muzafer realized that for Carolyn's work to be recognized in its own right, she would need to return to get her Ph.D. Carolyn decided to study with Wayne Holtzman

at the University of Texas; and Muzafer showed his support by leaving his position at Oklahoma to take a visiting professorship there as well. Carolyn recalls those years as being tough – not only was she a full-time mother of three, but she was now a full-time graduate student, the wife of a visiting professor, and a co-author of a social psychology textbook. Carolyn received her Ph.D. in Psychology with a minor in Sociology in 1961.

Carolyn's Ph.D. did make a difference, and she was offered a visitor's appointment at the University of Oklahoma, which she held for two years. Seeking tenure-track positions for them both led to visiting positions at Penn State, where Muzafer was appointed Professor of Sociology, and Carolyn Associate Professor of Psychology.

I have gone into some detail on the collaborative nature of their research not only to give you a full picture of Carolyn, but also to contrast with her memory today. In 2011 a query was posted on the Division 8 (Social and Personality Psychology) listserv. The question put to the listserv was "when you think of Sherif, does Carolyn come to mind, and if so, in what context?" Sixty percent of the responses said they thought only of Muzafer or had never heard of Carolyn. Only a quarter of the responses mentioned that Carolyn was an active partner in the research or that she was a pioneer researcher in her own right.

Carolyn was a founding member of Division 35/The Society for the Psychology of Women and was division president from 1979-1980. Her chapter *Bias in Psychology* (1979) critiqued the standard psychological methods that all but left out the influence of women and the psychology of women. The paper was recognized with the AWP's Distinguished Publication Award. In 1982 she received APA's Award for Distinguished Teaching in Psychology; that year she had also been nominated for APA's Award for Distinguished Contributions to Research. Carolyn died, after a brief fight with cancer, on July 23, 1982.

Carolyn was an important figure in my graduate training and equally important as a model and mentor. When I began graduate study at Penn State in 1971, ours was the first class that had more than a few token women. In fact, half of our 20-person class was comprised of women (though the entire class was white). Several of us already identified as feminists, so it felt very much like we were living in the exciting here-and-now of women's liberation. The psychology faculty, however, reflected the past: There were only two women (Carolyn Sherif and child-clinical psychologist Ellen Piers) among a tenure line faculty of about 30 (all white). There were 3 or 4 African American grad students among the sea of white faces.

The comparatively small numbers of non-white and non-male seemed both wrong and "natural." It felt wrong to be outnumbered and to be constantly reminded of one's outsider-insider position. It felt natural because that was simply the way it was, and it was clear that to think that it could be different, big changes needed to happen. The imbalances were not something that could be easily and quietly "fixed."

Like many women grad students at other universities, the message was clear that we were not expected to succeed. I recall the first week of class when another woman grad student (Pamela Cooper) and I met with the professor with whom we had teaching assistantships. While he puffed sagely on his pipe (I can't recall whether he had his feet up on the desk or not) he informed us that "females" did not finish graduate school. After the meeting we went directly to the staff assistant for the graduate program to get the data. Alas, Dr. Whaley was correct. Women were somewhat less likely to finish; men were highly likely to drop out, too. Though when you lose one or two of two or three women, the effect is more noticeable than losing three or four of 15 or

more men. Pam and I also felt that something must be going on that made the environment unwelcoming to women, but we didn't have a name for it. The constructs of *chilly climate* (Sandler, Silverberg, & Hall, 1996) and information on the effects of tokenism (e.g., Niemann, 2003; Yoder, 2002) were still 10 years away.

This was a common occurrence at the time. There was something in the air, but it was hard to put a name to it and unclear what to do about it. What made a difference for us was not only the youthful energy of a cadre of feminist grad students, but people above us in the food chain who helped us focus that energy on activism. And we needed help—Penn State is at the geographic center of Pennsylvania, and at that time “civilization” (i.e., Philly, Pittsburgh, NYC, and Washington, DC) was a four or more hour drive away and the local airport was at the top of a foggy mountain.

Phyllis W. Berman, a developmental psychologist and one of three women lecturers in the department, was the spark that we needed. Her husband was a tenured professor the theatre department, but she was a lecturer because Penn State at that time was loath to hire both members of a couple into tenured positions, even in different departments in different colleges. (Carolyn and Muzafer were the exceptions that proved the rule.) Phyllis and I invited all women faculty, lecturers, and grad students to meet at Phyllis' home to discuss our “mutual interests as women psychologists” (I still have a copy of that dittoed invitation). The turnout for the meeting was terrific—though I couldn't tell you exactly how many women came. Best, however, was that Dr. Sherif attended. That was huge.

To us she was Dr. Sherif, but Carolyn's actual experience was far more difficult than what we graduate students could see. In her autobiography (Sherif, 1983) she recounts, for example, how resistant the department was to promoting her to Full Professor despite her substantial research record and international visibility in social psychology. In fact, she was not promoted until 1970 and then only because the Sherifs threatened to move to another university. She also noted that she received salary adjustments beginning in 1972 when the university was worried about being investigated for gender discrimination. She was crystal clear in crediting the women's movement for her changed circumstance:

To me, the atmosphere created by the women's movement was like a breathing fresh air after years of gasping for breath. If anyone believes that I credit it too much for changes in my own life, I have only this reply: I know I did not become a significantly better social psychologists between 1969 and 1972, but I surely was treated as a better social psychologist. (Sherif, 1983, p. 280)

That first meeting of women grad students, lecturers, and Dr. Sherif, and the meetings that followed galvanized our feminist community. We cajoled Carolyn into running a seminar on the psychology of women the following academic year. The seminar was a personally and intellectually transformative moment for nearly all of us who participated, including Carolyn. And the seminar then led to the creation of an undergraduate course on the psychology of women and the launch of women's studies at Penn State.

Our organizing was productive, but it did nothing to make a dent in departmental business as usual. The same year that we were organizing (1971-72), the department conducted searches for six tenure-line positions. And *every* one was filled by a white man. Had that search taken place the following year, once women in the department began to organize, I believe the outcome would have been different. Working against us in pressing for change was the low proportion of

white women and miniscule proportion of women and men of color in the pool of potential faculty applicants. In 1971-72 (the year of that job search), the proportion of Ph.D.s. going to women and men of color and white women was only beginning to rise above token levels. In 1970 just over 20% of the Ph.D.s awarded in psychology went to women (Cynkar, 2007). By 2008, 70 percent of new Ph.D.s were women (National Science Foundation, 2010). In 1978, only 6.8 percent of Ph.D.s awarded in psychology went to women and men of color, and by 2008, the proportion had only increased to 20 percent (Thurgood, Golladay, & Hill, 2006; National Science Foundation, 2010). (I cannot find psychology data reported broken down by gender and racial ethnicity, from either APA or NSF, even for recent years.)

Unsung Transformational Moments

Given the power of our experience at Penn State, I realized that there are probably many more unsung transformational moments that with their local character could easily be overlooked in telling the grander history of feminist psychology. And we know that if you don't write your history, that history will be lost.

As a result I decided to begin to collect those stories. My goal was to collect feminist psychologists' narrative recollections of important events from the late 1960s to the present that they believe have shaped or are shaping current scholarship in feminist psychology. I sent an invitation to share stories of transformational moments to our major listservs. If you have not seen this request or have not had an opportunity to respond, no worries. Once I began the project, I realized that it must continue. All contributions will be archived, but at this moment I am not sure whether it will be at APA or elsewhere.

Before I go on, I want to thank everyone who has contributed so far. Everyone has responded with candor and an appreciation of the importance of these unsung transformational moments to our larger historical project. I cannot do justice to all of their stories, and I can share only a few in the time we have today. As this project continues many more stories will be added and there will be more opportunities to identify the threads and themes that weave our stories together.

Of course there are limitations to what I have collected so far: responses are almost exclusively from feminist psychologists who received their PhDs before 1980, and most transformational moments I've collected are from the 1960s and 70s. Women of color are underrepresented in proportion to their presence in the field and their role in feminist psychology. I have received few international contributions so far.

Today I will cover just three themes that emerge from these individual accounts: The critical role that teaching psychology of women has played in the development of our field; the significance of personal moments in seeing and understanding the larger socio-cultural context of sexism (the personal is historical); the way in which small projects—through personal commitment and coalition-building—move from transformational moment to have a broader impact.

The Critical Role of Teaching

I start here because this theme links so beautifully with my story of our graduate seminar at Penn State. It illustrates how fortuitous timing can be and—when the right combination of people,

need, and opportunity come together, a wide-ranging movement can develop over a relatively short span of time.

Michele Hoffnung recalls that when she was hired as a new assistant professor by Mary Washington College in 1969, she asked to teach psychology of women.

I didn't know of any such course, but I knew it was needed. I was deeply involved in the women's movement and I wanted my professional life to reflect my political understanding. At the same time, I began editing a reader, *Roles Women Play: Readings in Women's Liberation* (1971), to be used in such a course. . . . When I was hired at Quinnipiac College in 1970, I again requested to teach psychology of women. . . . Mine was the very first gender course at QC, but it inspired women in other departments to propose and teach related courses: Women's Literature; Women's History, etc. At the same time, several of us collaborated to team-teach Introduction to Women's Studies. . . . I realize this is not an event in a singular sense, but a development that had enormous impact upon me, my colleagues, and our students. When I say colleagues, I do not mean only the feminists who worked so hard to establish the courses and the program. I also mean the non-feminist men and women, who were pushed to understand sexism in more personal ways. When I was hired at Quinnipiac, I was the only woman in my department. I will be retiring from a department that has 7 women and 8 men. Although I still teach the psych of women course, others could.

Bernice Lott tells a similar story:

I was working at the University of Rhode Island as a sabbatical replacement in psychology (what we now call an adjunct). It was (probably) spring of 1970. Psychology did not yet have a building so we were in quonset huts. I received a visit from a young faculty member in Art History (Natalie Kampen) who came to my door with about 3 young women. You can picture their 70s hippy clothes and demeanor. They said they knew about me and that I was the one who HAD to do a course on feminist psychology or women or gender. We talked; they were insistent and persuasive. There was clearly no such course, so I promised to develop one, and I did! I called it "The Female Experience."

Like Michele, Bernice's search for the right textbook led her to write her own, *Becoming a Woman: The Socialization of Gender*, which was published in 1981.

Courses on the psychology of women were not always welcomed institutionally. In 1971 **Florence Denmark** was asked by a large group of students to teach a Psychology of Women course, and she agreed to do so. "The students went to the program head who turned them down. Then they went to the Dean who also rejected the course. Finally, they went to the President, psychologist and social activist, Harold Proshansky, who approved the course."

Florence observes: "For me the transformational part of this experience was that I learned not only about student power, but how to be a feminist instructor, sharing with the students the organization and operation of the course rather than utilizing more traditional instructive methods. It transformed my whole way of running a class."

Within a very few years, the Psychology of Women course went from novel experiment to established fact. Our SPW President-Elect, **Maureen McHugh**, recalls returning a call from

Irene Frieze at University of Pittsburgh in the spring of 1974 (from a phone booth!). Irene wanted to invite her to the graduate program at the University of Pittsburgh, specifically to be Irene's teaching assistant for the Psychology of Women.

The lasting impact of those early courses is amazing for the books and articles that teaching inspired, and for the early and lasting impact on undergraduate (and in many cases, graduate) education. Maureen, for example, estimates that over the past 40 years she has taught psychology of women to over 5000 students.

The Personal is Historical

“The personal is political” is a phrase that for many of us summed up a major insight of the feminist movement of 40-plus years ago, namely, awakening to the realization that one's personal experiences were not simply “stuff happens,” but were instantiations of a broader, and complex political story played out in individual lives. **Fran Trotman**, for example, remembers being in a

supervision group that consisted of mainly white women psychologists (I was the first and only African American woman psychologist in my state). We investigated our own issues as they related to our patients. It became a ‘Consciousness Raising Group’ and our perceptions were broadened.

This experience was important for her in part because “at the time (late 60's-early '70'), ‘feminists’ were often seen as whiny white women who were complaining about issues that were specific to middle-class white women, not [African American women].” She goes on to say that women she met at APA at that time were

concerned about sexism and racism in APA and were struggling with APA about the sexism, racism, and other ‘isms’ in the organization. These women were warm and welcoming and seemed genuinely interested in my experiences as a Black woman. I also saw the courage in these ‘feminists’ as we struggled to improve APA and form AWP and Division 35.

Many respondents pointed out how their own personal lives were bound up in wider political and cultural changes. Some of these stories are intensely personal, like **Irene Nielsen's** years' long struggle to be free of an abusive husband at a time when marital rape was not a concept and nearly impossible for a married woman to get credit in her own name. **Christine Griffin** recalled sexual harassment by a major figure in social identity theory at professional conferences in the late 70s, “before there was really a feminist concept of sexual harassment in circulation.”

Ellyn Uram Kaschak began her clinical internship at the Palo Alto VA Hospital in 1970. She remembers that “the new interns were met with a barrage of sexist training ideas and again no female supervisors. One of my male supervisors, in the spirit of equality, had me go out and buy child pornography in order to “treat” the several child molesters who were hospitalized at the time. I did not yet see anything wrong with this gesture and wondered at why I felt so squeamish.”

For many feminist psychologists, early recollections of a feminist consciousness as a psychologist came from moments such as these—vague unease that something was not right, but

not yet having a fully formed awareness of the structural sexism that propped up and kept in place systemic inequities. And without an appreciation of what one could concretely *do*.

Alice Eagly captures the intensity of first awareness.

The year was around 1970, when I attended a meeting of social psychologists held in Massachusetts, I think at Smith College. . . At that point I was an assistant professor at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst specializing in the study of attitudes and social influence. It was a small conference, with approximately 40 people (faculty and graduate students) present. I attended a session that included a talk on gender stereotypes, my first exposure to any research on this topic. The speaker, if I remember correctly, was Paul Rosenkrantz. He presented findings similar to those that he and others published in 1972 in the *Journal of Social Issues* pertaining to stereotypes of women and men. I was surprised by the display and remember feeling shocked and blinking back tears. I didn't understand why I reacted so emotionally. At any rate, that event triggered my interest in gender roles and stereotypes. I had no idea of the implications of gender stereotypes at that point. I merely knew that they were somehow important and limiting to women. At that moment, I could not have begun to articulate the how or why.

Today, in our teaching and through our research we hope to inspire awareness of the pervasive and damaging effects of stereotypes and sexism, but now with an appreciation of gender as a sociostructural system of power relations that intersects with/co-creates other axes of oppression/dominance. I wish I could say that an intersectional sensibility informed the/our thinking, but for many of us it was a more inchoate apprehension than a theorized understanding. Theory came later. At that time, the first, often sudden awareness was what we called a "click!" moment. Click as when the light comes on, when you "get it," get the presence and implications of sexism happening at that very moment.

The "click!" moment inspires development of feminist consciousness, but that's just the first step. Sexism (and related other ugly *isms*) always lurk. But with the benefit of those earlier years of trying to name sexism, we can now come to a sooner, clearer understanding of how that sexism operates and what we are prepared to do to challenge it. The "click!" moment has evolved into the "whoa!" moment. **Leonore Tiefer** describes "whoa!" moments in relating how she came to see that the language of feminist values were being taken up and used to further pharmaceutical industry interests.

By 1998 I had been trying in every way I could think to be a feminist sexologist - research, teaching, clinical practice, organizational work. I worked hard, was very prolific and enjoyed the years, but it seemed kind of insular. . . And then Viagra was approved in March, 1998, and a piece appeared in *the New York Times* asking "where was the Viagra for women?" I thought, WHOA! I must do something about this, but what, what what?

Leonore goes on to describe a lunch later that year with a colleague who had worked with Pfizer on the psychophysiological aspects of Viagra and who had met with her to recruit her to Pfizer.

He thought a feminist hook ("They're going to make drugs for women, Leonore, don't you want to make sure they're as good as possible?") would induce me for sure. Pfizer cares about women, he kept saying, I know these people personally. . .

[After lunch] I realized that I had been given an extraordinary opportunity by this conversation and Ray's naïve intention to sign me up for the new sexuopharmaceutical venture. . . I realized that feminist sexology could no longer be conducted on the previous landscape of clinical practice, teaching and research. . . I would have to better understand how the rhetoric of "feminism" is used by corporate interests. . . [and] I would have to undertake a new life chapter as an activist, not just academic, feminist psychologist.

From Ripples to Waves

Sometimes a reaction to an event or situation can turn into a generative movement with its own life. Another set of transformational moments began as projects with fairly circumscribed goals, often a response to something that needed correction or bringing in voices that had been excluded or overlooked. Sometimes general goals were quite clear from the beginning, but it wasn't clear how to realize them, or how to give them shape. For example, **Christine Griffin**, a member of the first editorial group of *Feminism & Psychology*, the first international journal in feminist psychology, describes how in the late 1980s it took two years of meetings "to imagine the space into being." Too often progress toward goals met opposition. **Sue Wilkinson**, for example, recalls that feminist academic psychology in Britain arguably began with two symposia she had organized for the BPS Social Psychology Section conferences in 1983 and 1984—fully ten years after Division 35's first program at APA convention. Following a two year struggle, including being turned down by the BPS Council, the Psychology of Women Section was formed in 1988 (Wilkinson, 1990; Wilkinson & Burns, 1990). Sue also notes that in 1998 a BPS Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section was also founded, but only "after a long struggle, including homophobic abuse, and being turned down three times by the BPS Scientific Affairs Board and/or Council as 'too narrow' and 'too political'" (Wilkinson, 1999).

What might have started as a reaction *against* something could quickly evolved to be an assertion *for* something, and a new vision of what psychology could be.

Ellyn Uram Kaschak points to the importance of Phyllis Chesler's *Women and Madness* (1972) and Jean Baker Miller's *Toward a Finally a New Psychology of Women* (1976) in sparking awareness of the sexism rampant in clinical training and clinical practice.

Finally a group of us decided to form a group to develop an alternative to what we were being fed at this and other internships. We named it the Women's Counseling Service of San Francisco. We began to develop theory and practice and, in 1972, began to actually offer what we called *Sociotherapy: A Feminist Alternative* (Kaschak, 1976). Several other groups were forming at the same time in cities such as New York, Boston and Los Angeles. This turned out to be the beginning of feminist therapy. FYI we are currently producing a special issue of the journal *Women and Therapy* on this very topic.

Leonore Harmon tells a similar story about bringing a feminist perspective to counseling psychology. She recalls that the editor of *The Counseling Psychologist* (TCP) would have an open meeting with the editorial board at APA each year. She and a few other women had been discussing what Division 17 could do to make its members more aware of issues in counseling women. She continues:

We hit upon the idea of suggesting an issue of [TCP] devoted to [the process of counseling women] and took ourselves off to the meeting that [the editor] John Whiteley had scheduled. Several members of the all male editorial board were there. The discussion was almost comical. They thought we were talking about affirmative action within Counseling Psychology to benefit ourselves. It took a while to delineate the problem as one involving how Counseling Psychologists look at the process of counseling our women clients and the assumptions involved. Luckily, John Whiteley understood and encouraged us to submit our ideas as a proposal.

The resulting issue in 1973 covered a range of topics from gender bias in personality theory to career counseling; a second issue on counseling women appeared in 1976. The two were later published as an edited volume in 1978.

In these and other instances of transformational moments, “making it happen” required readiness to question the status quo and willingness to go out on a limb, sometimes using “approved” channels, sometimes striking out in a new direction.

I want to spend a little more time telling the Nag’s Head conferences story. For me it captures how a transformational moment can have a cumulative impact over several years’ time. It also embodies the power of feminist community.

Here is a bit of background. For years, social psychologist Bibb Latané held weeklong thematic conferences (The Nags Head Conference Center) at his beach home in Nag’s Head, NC (and later in Highland Beach, FL). In the 1980s one conference theme was “Sex and Gender.” Nag’s Head was wonderful professional venue for focused, intensive discussion of feminist research in psychology outside of Division 35 and AWP meetings, so the conference was a magnet for feminist psychologists. Occasionally it also brought participants who were exclusively interested solely in biologically-driven sex-related differences and who had no interest in problematizing gender as a social construct or discussing the real-life implications of our research.

After one Nag’s Head meeting which had a fractious edge because of one openly sexist participant, several people suggested that Latané change the name of the session from “Sex and Gender” to “Feminist Scholarship” to draw participants who wanted to engage with gender issues seriously.

Faye Crosby continues the story this way:

Bibb Latané did not embrace the suggestion. [Then] In 1991, three of the women who [had attended the Nag’s Head “Sex and Gender” conference] found themselves together at a conference and realized that they did not have to rely on Bibb or anyone else to make changes but rather just needed to organize some meetings themselves. Janice [Steil] thought that a good spot for the conferences might be the [Martha’s Vineyard] home of Faye Crosby’s family. All three women contacted Faye who then asked her parents if they would be willing for the island house to be put into service for a “sort of sleep-over party for some middle-age women scholars.” Faye’s parents asked “would you be one of those scholars, dear?” and agreed to the house being used for the conferences when Faye said yes.

All invited were told that the limit was 12 conferees and that spaces would be filled on a first-come-first-served basis. Almost instantly, 13 people were signed up for the weekend gathering which had been advertised as a “conference cum slumber party.”

The first meetings were organized around feminist dilemmas, with the goal of the conference come together to discuss issues that had proved puzzling so that many heads together might find solutions to common problems. The interest in this format and the community it engendered was so great that Faye then organized a series, first on Martha’s Vineyard and later in Amherst. The first year Faye hosted two, the following year, five conferences. Here is Faye again:

At one of the meetings, Louise Kidder opined that the organization needed a name and proposed that we call the conferences Nag’s Heart. . . Ellen Kimmel and Stacy Blake-Beard helped keep the enterprise afloat.

Nag’s Heart has hosted nearly 80 conferences since the first in summer 1993.

Conclusion

There is much we can take away from even this tip-of-the-iceberg sample of unsung transformational moments: The importance of critical mass and coalitions; how quickly a change can be effected once initial barriers are broken; how much we rely on one another as exemplars, goads, cheerleaders, co-conspirators, and visionaries—not only peer to peer, but across status, position, and age.

Although I’ve focused on transformational moments from what seems the distant past, transformational moments are not just a 60s thing. That said, the geographies of communication, popular culture, and the field of psychology, are vastly different today than in the narratives I’ve shared. And my younger colleagues probably travel a different path to feminist consciousness than I and my cohort did. Still, the political tensions in the US and abroad resonate as vividly now as then, as does the joy of feminist collaboration.

Leeat Granek, for example, prefaced her account with the observation that

For my generation of women, things were very different. I don’t need to explain to you what feminism looked like in the eighties and nineties, but I think you need to take into consideration that the answers we will give to you about these turning points will differ radically by age and era, and that ‘turning points’ as a paradigm means different things to different generations which makes understanding and answering your question challenging.

Leeat then goes on to describe a transformative moment at the 2004 “March for Women’s Lives” in Washington D.C which she attended with her advisor, Alex Rutherford.

Covered in face glitter and protest stickers, we marched among one million other people holding our own banner that said “Psychologists For Social Justice”. As we walked, we overheard two young women behind us remarking excitedly about the visibility of Psychologists at the march. This moment was transformative for me. . . I believe my experience at this March shaped much of my (and perhaps those young women behind us) thinking as a feminist psychologist/academic. Certainly, it influenced the way I teach the next generation of students who I am nurturing to become feminist psychologists themselves.

Although “transformational moment” is to some degree a culture-bound, time-sensitive construct, at its core—at least in my view—transformation is about finding and using social spaces where we can be disruptive *and* constructive.

I’ll conclude with one brief observation about an aspect of our work that I believe is ripe for transformational moments.

Since feminist psychology was revitalized in the 1960s and 70s, feminist psychologists have worried about whether our research was having a sufficient impact on the larger field, and whether “mainstream” research conventions are compatible with a feminist agenda (see Rutherford et al., 2011, and Remer, in preparation, for recent examples). Indeed, in her 1979 chapter *Bias in Psychology*, Carolyn Sherif critiqued the hierarchy of methods that drives what counts and what doesn’t count as valuable scientific science. Meanwhile, over the past two decades a generative and vital feminist psychology has become broadly and less apologetically interdisciplinary in perspective, theory, and method (Morawski, 1994; Stewart & Dottolo, 2006). The hunger is as strong today as in 1993 (p. ***) when Naomi Weisstein called for a revitalized “activist, challenging, badass feminist psychology.” We are clearly ready for transformational action!