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AN ANALYSIS OF FEMINIST CARE NETWORKS IN THE EDITORIAL INTERN
POSITION AT WOMEN'S STUDIES QUARTERLY

by

ANGELA BOSCARINO

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Women's and Gender Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts,
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APPROVAL

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Quarterly

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in
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ABSTRACT

An Analysis of Feminist Care Networks in the Editorial Intern Position at Women's Studies Quarterly

by

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Advisor: Dr. Red Washburn

This paper will detail my experience working as an Editorial Intern at Women's Studies Quarterly from September 2022 to December 2022. I will begin by examining my onboarding process as a new member of an already-established team. This exploration will allow for my observation of how Women's Studies Quarterly has been forced to adapt to the challenges of the persistent pandemic, and more specifically the challenges brought by grief in the mourning of the late general editor Dr. Brianne Waychoff. This intervention will be an analysis of how care networks are mobilized in the workplace as an essential element in feminist spaces.

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Introduction:

The summer before I began graduate school, I started my first full-time job working at a domestic violence shelter I wasn't aware existed despite being a few towns over from where I grew up. I was first hired as a part-time childcare worker to relieve mothers of their parental duties while they tended to other obligations such as counseling sessions or court appointments; and as a part-time house manager which consisted of overseeing the safe house and its residents on weekends and a few weeknights. I thought I had learned everything I could about feminist care work and emotional labor over that first summer; but since then, I have learned that my naivety is constantly being tangled up, pulled apart, and undone repeatedly. I was reminded of this more clearly when I began my internship work at Women's Studies Quarterly in the fall of 2022 and navigating care networks took on an entirely new shape. I joined the WSQ (Women Studies Quarterly) team at a particularly unique and emotional time as the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic persisted and even more sensitively, just a few short weeks after the passing of co-editor Dr. Brianne Waychoff.

I did not know Dr. Waychoff personally and the purpose of my paper is not to speak about an experience that is not my own or on behalf of anyone affected by their tragic loss. But rather, the goal of this paper is to examine my experience as an editorial intern and as an external figure removed from the direct pain of Dr. Waychoff's passing through the lens of observed mourning, and grief in the workplace and quietly mobilizing feminist care networks with others and with the self. I am interested in unpacking how loss and sorrow have informed work specifically at WSQ. I will draw on themes from Premilla Nadasen's "Rethinking Care: Arlie Hochschild and the Global Care Chain," published in the Precarious Work issue of WSQ to help frame this conversation connecting my personal experience as an

editorial intern and the experience of being part of a collective spanning far beyond my own work/labor.

On-boarding Experience:

My semester at WSQ bridged the gap between my professional work in the domestic violence sphere and my academic pursuits in feminist knowledge and theory as it forced me to examine how care networking- which is at the center of my work at a domestic violence shelter- is absolutely imperative to any strong feminist space e.g., Women's Studies Quarterly. Before starting my internship, my familiarity with WSQ was limited. In brief research to prepare myself I read the WSQ mission statement, noting that it "has been an interdisciplinary forum for the exchange of emerging perspectives on women, gender, and sexuality," (WSQ Website*need proper citation). As I reflect on the work that I have done, what stands out the most is the word "exchange," as it is pivotal to both the mission of developing and distributing feminist knowledge as well as care-networking within feminist spaces. I am chiefly concerned with how care was exchanged through various sites at WSQ including my observed witness of care for the self, care for others, and care for the journal at large.

The onboarding to Women's Studies Quarterly came at an especially critical moment; a time of new beginnings, anticipated endings, and unexpected mourning. From what I gathered while reading email chains I had been looped in on and sitting in on my first virtual meeting, there was a blanket of desperation to put so many scattered pieces back together again to make for a smooth semester of tackling various projects for the journal. There was a palpable desire to make sense of things that did not make sense, and a sorrowful effort to control the few things

that could be controlled. This came on the heels of the loss of Dr. Waychoff, something that did not make sense, nor could have been controlled by anyone affected by it. The questions that were never actually uttered but ever present throughout all the work was: What do we do? How do we move forward?

Some of the answers were rooted in our tangible work, our labour guided by things like meetings, deadlines, and production schedules. At the start of the semester, we (i.e., general editors, editorial assistants, interns, etc.) prioritized defining roles and outlining expectations of work for the preceding several months to tackle several ongoing projects most efficiently. We identified our various projects including but not limited to updating our website and social media presence, completing the rollout of the “50!” issue, planning a launch event in junction with the issue to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Women's Studies Quarterly, beginning the submission process for the forthcoming “Non-binary” issue, appointing new general co-editors of the journal, connecting with Feminist Press to strengthen our professional networking, collaborating with the Mina Rees library to digitize prior issues for accessibility and open access education purposes, and brainstorming plans for the future of the journal at large.

The work was certainly cut out for everyone in varying positions, and I will spend some time discussing my particular role as an editorial intern later in this paper. In some ways, it was noticeably clear that the journal was being motivated by the very concrete tasks and projects. In other ways, the work was informed and motivated by other factors which were less obvious but equally important to our progress. And although there was a common consensus that completion of the various tasks and projects were necessary for the sake of upholding the legacy of the journal for the last 50 years, there was another, perhaps less evident motivating factor to the *naked eye* which was rooted in desperation to make sense of that which made no sense.

Care Networking:

Beneath the surface level of things like due dates, and scheduling obligations was a layer of labour motivated by mourning. A struggling attempt to put the work necessary for Women's Studies Quarterly success ahead of the grief of losing co-editor Dr. Waychoff. What I may conclude after observing the work of the Fall '22 semester is that this deeply rooted mourning was an effort to honor Dr. Waychoff for the projects they contributed to in the time prior to their passing, to carry out not just the legacy of the journal but to also carry out *their* legacy. It is in this argument of upholding and honoring a life lost that I would like to examine furthermore an additional layer of labor which would constitute as emotional labour through general, yet limitedly spoken (in my experience witnessing conversations and interactions among the Women's Studies Quarterly team) feminist care networking. The questions WSQ faced were yet again: What do we do? *How* do we do it? And our answers this time were in this context were in mobilizing care networks. I turn to an article included in the Fall/Winter issue of 2017, Precarious Work, titled "Rethinking Care: Arlie Hochschild and the Global Care Chain," written by Premilla Nadasen to help unpack how care is understood across different contexts. Nadasen writes,

Care can account for the efforts by families, friends, neighbors, and fictive kinship to step in to show support because of love, emotion, or obligation as the welfare state atrophies, the public sector is whittled away, and wages and benefits fall. Such labour can strain but can also strengthen communities. Recognizing how communities care for one another and revaluing that labour may be a way to reimagine and forge a different kind of future.

There are several valuable points to unpack in this text, beginning with an emphasis on fictive kinship. This is especially relevant in queer and feminist spaces as the relationships between those with shared identities and struggles and allies alike are imperative to the overall wellbeing of the individual. This also requires an awareness that just because identities are shared, experiences may not be. The people I worked with at WSQ took on the roles of friends, neighbours, kins as we over the course of the semester not just because we collaborated on projects and attended meetings together, but because we allowed ourselves to be strengthened by the community care, we showed for each other. The hardship of losing not just a co-editor, but a friend and WSQ family member continues to pose struggles for the existing team. In the wake of this tragedy, I witnessed care in several ways. Sometimes care would show up in a brief check in at the start of each meeting, extending a hand (across a screen) to create space for folks to be vulnerable and safe in their emotions. Other times, it looked like taking on an extra task or two during the week to relieve other members of overwhelming work. The care at WSQ is communicative without being demanding, appreciated without being expected, and inherently feminist in its care and concern for the people who make the publication of each issue possible.

Sometimes it is challenging to explain why we care about the livelihood and longevity of WSQ because preserving feminist knowledge feels like an obvious element in the mission of women's studies in general. I would argue there is a common interest in knowledge production and the study of how we learn from and among each other which calls us to this work (us being myself and my peers at WSQ). But beyond this is a longing to care and be cared for and by something larger than us, in our case, the something larger being the journal itself. Sara Ahmed asks: "Where did we find feminism, or where did feminism find us?" For me, a layer of my

feminism was founded in Women's Studies Quarterly as it strengthened how I situate myself in relation to care. Although I had some experience in connecting my feminism to care in my professional endeavors, WSQ forced me to re-evaluate my position as someone a part of a larger care network.

Personal Experience:

I contributed to a few projects during my time as an editorial intern. Towards the back end of the semester, I worked closely with the editorial assistants, Googie Karrass and Maya von-Zeiger, to support in the initial stages of the submission process for the forthcoming WSQ Issue, "Non-binary." This process was multi-layered and tedious and required a good deal of learning as we went through the steps together as a team. It was in these weeks of concentrated work that I noticed again how our care networking took another shape. Something I have noticed about care networks and sensitive emotional labour is that often in particularly feminist spaces, we are not always aware that we are practicing care because it is part of our understanding of what good and active feminism looks like.

We practiced both self-care and community care by creating a space among ourselves to be honest about our bandwidth, both an act of self-preservation and an effort to ensure the work we were accomplishing was of quality and satisfaction. Among the three of us, we decided to meet in person every week of the semester to tackle shared projects and progress with individual ones. We agreed that it would benefit us to connect in person if we were able to, considering our other connections to WSQ primarily took place remotely, either via email or phone/video call. Our in-person meetings called for a certain level of discipline and communication, both of which I believe to be imperative to effective care networking. We were disciplined in the sense that we

were not required to meet in person but despite a lack of ordered demand by a hierarchical force we still decided to carve the time into our busy schedules, arrange for our transport to a mutual site at the Graduate Center and spend a minimum of two hours working collectively. Most weeks this was in our best interest and made our work easier in the end because many of our tasks were ones completed most effectively together and without the worry of spotty internet connection, malfunctioning technological devices among other mishaps caused by remote work, we were able to make strong progress even in our short amount of time together.

On the weeks where we couldn't make it in person for a myriad of reasons, from sickness to travel to plainly a lack of bandwidth our care networking shined the most. In practice it looked a few ways and asked us to be communicative without feeling the need to divulge too much and expecting understanding from the others. A straightforward text message or email stating that we would not be able to meet in person was more than sufficient. It wasn't always necessary to provide an explanation, although in my experience I felt comfortable enough with my peers to offer one, often being honest in my reasoning, even when it felt personal such as when I mentally and/or emotionally could not handle the expected workload that week. Frequently we would check in with one another, which is how we comfortably fabricated a safe space, by asking how we were feeling in our progress with our work, helping with tasks, and respecting when we were not able to offer all 100% of our energy.

It is also important to note that I was "hired" as an editorial intern, while Googie and Maya were editorial assistants. My labour was being compensated with credit for fulfilment of my degree. In an unpaid position, the expectation for work I tackled each week was smaller than that of my peers. In moments of guilt, I felt I wasn't contributing enough to the various projects we were working on. I was shown such kindness and care by both Googie and Maya who both

continually reminded me that it was not expected for me to do the same amount of work as they were doing. They showed me grace and care in these moments and taught me so much about reassurance and boundaries. Their respect for my labour is a model example of how they cared for me during our time working together. This navigation of trust in communicating our emotions and positions each week, respecting ourselves and each other for the fluctuating levels of work we were able to do and adapting to these changes is what I would consider to be effective and strong care networking in the workplace.

By establishing this relationship early on in our work as editorial assistants we were well equipped to extend our practices beyond our immediate care-web when we began the submission process for the forthcoming WSQ issue, “Non-binary.” The work was tedious and time consuming, but we approached it with patience and organization. Part of the work required us to contact guest editors who could review the selected articles for the issue. While in theory this process was straightforward (sending an email asking for an article to be reviewed and awaiting a response) it proved to be quite laborious in practice (reviewers declining and needing to begin the process over again). Care work presented itself in these spaces too and I would argue I observed a great deal of healthy boundary communication. A typical response from a reviewer who was unable to accept our offer said something along the lines of “Thank you for considering me. Unfortunately, currently, I am not able to review this article [insert reasoning, e.g. This article does not fall within my expertise. I have too many other outstanding commitments etc].” It was particularly the responses that honestly communicated an inability to commit to this project due to an overwhelm with other work to offer a quality review.

Although not much, this honesty and communication is a prime example of care work, not only for the individual at hand for their assessment of their bandwidth but also extending care

for the journal at large to preserve the quality of the work produced by Women's Studies Quarterly. I was able to witness this small but mighty act of care across something as simple as an email but effective, nevertheless.

Proceeding my first semester at WSQ and entering the second where I am spending most of my time drafting this paper, I am reflecting on the ways the care I have witnessed can be turned inward and practiced in my own life. My feminist studies and practices have affirmed my rejection of the capitalist narrative that self-care is an act of taking bubble baths with face masks and candles that smell of freshly baked cookies is a narrative as anyone that has ever tried to manage their mental health by investing in such practices has been met with disappointment and frustration.

Caring for your own self is arguably one of the most challenging journeys with no clear end in sight. The three major elements of my life at this point in time are work, school, and home (in no particular order). My professional work at a domestic violence agency is rooted in caring for others in the face of abuse. My schoolwork, specifically at WSQ, was built on the foundation of caring for my peers navigating such sudden death. And at home, I assume a caregiving role for an ill parent. Creating space to care for myself is something I am constantly trying to do without feeling like I am being selfish- a societal implementation I feel the weight of especially as a young woman with an expectation for inherent maternal care. I can point to a few ways I have tried to care for myself but in the context of WSQ, the clearest has been my decision to take a step back from the work I am doing for the journal in my final semester of graduate school. At first, I felt an obligation to continue to invest several hours every week to the roles I assumed in my first semester at the journal when I was interning for credit for partial fulfillment of my degree. Because the intern position is unpaid and no longer for credit, I decided to practice self-

care by only offering my labor in smaller capacities to create a more balanced life that is not dominated by my studies. I have put forth my labor by taking small steps to create a newsletter for Women's Studies Quarterly this semester. I am trying to approach this project with care for myself in the sense that I will forgive myself if it is not executed perfectly before the end of my time as a graduate student. Instead, I am approaching it with patience and consistent check-ins with myself about how much labor I can offer each week. Adopting some of the methods of care I have been able to practice with and for others are like those which I am trying to honor for myself.

Care networking looks several ways; it shows up unexpectedly and is often already in action before you even know it. I was reminded of this after spending several months interning at Women's Studies Quarterly when I entered a space of unexpected grief and watched as the smallest gestures molded together to make a real impact. The smallest actions of checking in with peers, establishing healthy boundaries, and practicing intentional communication set an overwhelming example of what an incredibly strong feminist care space looks like. Unfortunately, there is no blueprint for how to practice care for others and for the self, but there are small efforts that manifest in substantial ways.

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