Curating a Technofeminist Space:
Feminist Practices in Editing Online Publications

Part 3: Feminist Principles for Editing Digital Publications

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To create feminist digital spaces, we want to work in feminist teams, as we do. These are the principles we've learned through our work on *agnès films*:

1. Working Together from Individual Strengths

Feminist publisher Jennie Ruby (2003) asks "What makes a feminist space?" Her response is that "One characteristic is the empowerment of women to work and make decisions in an egalitarian environment" (p. 13). The idea of egalitarian environments is complicated by skill sets because when it comes to making a decision about how to best handle the website's accessibility issues, Hannah is the only member of the team who really understands what each decision means and whether we have the skills to implement it. However, after she has explained the various options to us, we all provide our input, knowing that in the end, she will be the one to make the final decision.

Having a sense of each team member's skill set and allowing for those skills to be utilized as we work is key to having a productive team. However, even the most skilled writer or designer benefits from feedback, so during our weekly meetings we perform group critiques of each team member's current work. Critiques are constructive in nature and often lead to the person with the main misgivings about a project's direction stepping in to help implement changes.

2. Collaboration Instead of Competition

As Ruby (2003) describes *off our back*'s staff relations, she explains that "[i]nstead of a group of people obeying and following one boss's view of things, sometimes against their own better judgment, we incorporate the strength of all of our opinions

in each decision"(p. 14). We take a similar approach. Decision-making is not a singular responsibility, but an open discussion. While we may go to Alex for suggestions first, she asks for the rest of the staffs' opinions before a final decision is made and we work toward consensus together.

Team members with similar skill sets don't compete but rather collaborate and learn from each other. As Jenny Ruby (2003) put it "Feminist and feminist-related values must also be shared by the [staff, including]: fair sharing of workloads and types of work [and] valuing nurturance and cooperation over aggression and competition," (p. 14). Most of our staff study some facet of Professional Writing and have worked with each other in class, making it easier to collaborate, understand ideas, and share responsibilities in overwhelming workloads. For example, I worked on designing Twitter postcards that stretched my knowledge of Adobe Illustrator. With Hannah's help, I was able to design a strong product and I also gained new design skills. Asking for assistance is never a sign of incompetence, but rather an opportunity to learn that drives productiveness. Without this mindset, *agnès films* would not accomplish nearly as much as we do. Being a small staff, we need to pool our resources to make the end product meaningful and effective.

3. Experiential Hierarchies

While we don't impose stringent hierarchies, some flexible ones do form on their own. These hierarchies result from experience with *agnès films* and with the work that we do. As the co-founder, Alex's expertise and network makes her a leader within both the team and the community, and she does the administrative work and grant-writing to keep us running, which means most of our work and ideas will be run by her. She keeps our work in line with the goals of *agnès films* and guides our message if we get off track. We each are given deference in our own areas of expertise, however, as well as in situations where we have previous experience. Sabrina was able to draw on last year's design for our undergraduate research presentation poster when creating the poster for this year. Next year Jessica and I, who will be the elder students on the team, will carry forward our knowledge and lead new members with what we've learned in the past. Because of this experience, we will take on leadership roles at different times.

The lack of an imposed structure encourages team members to be individually motivated towards the goals of *agnès films*. Jennie Ruby (2003) states about *off our backs*, "I experience a work environment where my responsibility is toward the other collective members, toward the success of the magazine, toward the publication of feminist words, and toward the community of women worldwide" (p. 14). *agnès films* functions similarly, and like Ruby, I enjoy the freedom from pressures of a job imbued with patriarchal structures. However, even having a workspace where members are able to contribute their best does not mean that we don't make mistakes.

4. Welcoming Mistakes and Addressing Them Together

It is only fitting that *agnès films* began as a class project with two graduate students, Caitlan Spronk and I, figuring out how to create a publication with little

training and even less free time to dedicate to the project. What we did have was a passionate belief in the power of online environments to share feminist ideas with global audiences. That combination of inexperience, lack of time, and enthusiastic dedication has remained constant throughout our seven years as a publication.

As a faculty member at a Research 1 institution, I can only dedicate a limited amount of time to the publication and I wouldn't want it to be any other way. *agnès films* nourishes my own filmmaking work and puts me in touch with artists and intellectuals whose work resonates with my own. As a result, it can only function as a side project to my own research, which is already only a portion of my professional life. Similarly for the students who make up our staff, this job, which is variable and amounts to a few hours a week, is also a small, yet exciting focus. Moreover, students rotate as they graduate, working with the publication for one-to-two years.

As a publication, we understand that, given our setup, mistakes are bound to happen. Our response is to not assign blame but rather to work together to resolve the issue. In the fall of 2016, for example, I was overwhelmed with a plethora of deadlines. As a result, my usually orderly inbox spiraled out of control and I either failed to respond to filmmakers requesting coverage or responded and then failed to find reviewers and interviewers for their work. It wasn't until January of 2017 that I had time to face my inbox. I explained what had happened to the team and proceeded to write to each filmmaker, apologizing and asking if they still wanted to pursue coverage. They all did and months later we finally published the reviews and interviews. Just as important, however, we brainstormed ways of preventing this issue from ever happening again. Sabrina created a spreadsheet that keeps track of all current pieces, noting their various stages of completion. Elena worked on a two new pages of our website, titled "Write for us" for film critics and "Share your work" for filmmakers that lead to Google forms that provide the information we need for the spreadsheet.

If handled appropriately, mistakes can lead to improving editorial processes, so they should not be a cause of shame or shaming. If I hadn't gotten overwhelmed, we wouldn't have figured out that we needed a better system to deal with requests from filmmakers and we would have continued to miss requests. Mistakes are also better addressed when everyone in the team puts their expertise together and finds the way forward, as our team did.

Although these principles have been tailored to the needs and strengths of our particular team, we know that versions of them can help turn other Technofeminist projects, emerging or already in full flight, into initiatives that will continue the longheld and much needed battle against sexism online and in our own lives.

Credits

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Cinematography by
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Acknowledgements
Thank you to NCTE and to participants at 2016 Conference on College Composition and Communication and at the 2017 University Undergraduate Research and Arts Forum. We filmed footage featured here at that events.

Thank you also Michigan State University's College of Arts and Letters and Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures for their sustained support of the work we do at *agnès films*.

Soundtrack
"Blue" and "Silk"
By Podington Bear
Downloaded from
Soundofpicture.com

Ambient Sound
"The Sound of Deep Forest"
By craftport
Downloaded from
freesound.org

References
Ruby, J. (2003). Women-Only And Feminist Spaces: Important Alternatives to Patriarchy. *off our backs, 33*(5/6), 13-15.

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2018