May 17th, 12:00 PM - 3:00 PM

From Bra-Burners to Bureaucracy: The Evolution of Second-Wave Feminism through NOW Newsletters

Alexandria Baker  
Western Washington University

Follow this and additional works at: https://cedar.wwu.edu/scholwk

Part of the Higher Education Commons

https://cedar.wwu.edu/scholwk/2017/Day_one/49

This Event is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences and Events at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scholars Week by an authorized administrator of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact westerncedar@wwu.edu.
FROM BRA-BURNERS TO BUREAUCRACY: THE EVOLUTION OF SECOND-WAVE FEMINISM THROUGH NOW NEWSLETTERS

By Alexandria Baker

Abstract: The National Organization for Women (NOW) was an influential organization in the 1960s for furthering the agenda of second-wave feminists. The organization had many strategies for developing and controlling the national agenda for feminism, one of which was the production and dissemination of newsletters by local chapters of the group. This research paper analyzes the techniques used for legitimizing second-wave feminism to women who were uninformed with NOW and the ways in which these newsletters interpolated new members into the group. The research involved conducting a textual analysis on a representative archival newsletter from the time period. This paper concludes that the use of local chapters of the organization and the publishing of local newsletters that contained information about the national goals of NOW created a streamlined national agenda that was able to legitimize second-wave feminism to new members.

Methods: The primary method for this research was a qualitative textual analysis of a representative archival newsletter sample. The sample being used is an issue of the Women’s Newsletter published for the Whatcom County NOW chapter in May 1974. This was shortly before NOW’s bureaucratic restructure in 1975. At the time of publication, NOW was still mostly reliant on chapter newsletters to disseminate information, and this is evident in the number of contributors and the information included in the letter. The method for the textual analysis included examining both the content of the included articles, and the layout of the paper itself. Then, the underlying ideologies were extrapolated and synthesized into cohesive findings.

Research question: how did NOW’s use of newsletters legitimize second-wave feminism?

Thesis: Through the use of local chapters that were accessible to women across the country, and the publishing of a regular newsletter that provided individual members with a sense of the organization’s ultimate purpose, NOW created a streamlined national agenda and was able to legitimize second-wave feminism for new members.

Page 1

Page 2

Page 3

Page 4