

Introduction

Because we have participated in feminist scholarship and collaborative activities for many years, we were drawn to the idea of pursuing collaboration as a subject of discussion and research. Our experiences previous to the development of this anthology were dissimilar, yet taken together, they cover much of the spectrum of collaborative activities within academe. As a graduate student, Liz team taught courses and in the professorial track, she has codirected conferences with colleagues at her institution and in another state and coplanned activities with community members as well. This is the fourth published collection of essays JoAnna has coedited; she has also team taught courses and coauthored an article and a conference presentation.

When we began to share our own experiences, as women and as academics, we realized how complex and intricate the collaborative process actually is. In fact, as we surveyed our various endeavors and accomplishments, we discovered that we were raising more questions about collaboration than we could answer. Individually, we had worked with both women and men, but our experiences suggested that successful collaboration was not necessarily guaranteed by the collaborative partner's being either a female or a male. As we analyzed more carefully the activities which had come, more or less, naturally to us in our professional careers, we became more aware that an anthology on this topic was pertinent and necessary.

Consequently, one of our first questions as we began to discuss working together on an anthology about feminist collaboration was, Is collaboration between women the same or different from collaboration between men, or collaboration between women and men?

Other important questions were, How and why do collaborative projects get under way? How do collaborators “find” each other, and once the partnership is established, what accounts for the particular dynamics of their relationship? What processes, if any, do all collaborative projects have in common? We turned to our own experiences for possible answers.

Liz has codirected Women’s Studies conferences, cochaired conference sessions, and, during her two-year term as Director of Women’s Studies, coordinated the activities of the Women’s Studies Advisory Council, which includes faculty representatives from all four colleges on her campus. In order to ensure inclusiveness in these activities, she encouraged the participation of students, faculty, and administrators at all levels of planning. In the case of JoAnna’s two coauthored pieces, one was literally a cut-and-paste blending of two separate manuscripts written by herself and by a colleague with whom she had never before collaborated and hasn’t since this temporary partnership; the other, a conference presentation, was written from beginning brainstorming ideas to the final copy during long-distance telephone calls with her long-time friend and coeditor of three anthologies. Additionally, JoAnna has team taught with three other professors—two men in her field of specialization and a woman from a related discipline.

Of course, not all of our separate professional accomplishments have been collaborative endeavors. But certainly, the reception on the part of university administrators who evaluate for promotion and tenure decisions was a factor when we made individual decisions about when and how to invest our academic energies. We were acutely aware of the tradition of rewarding individual scholarship and knew that collaboration was risky business, indeed. Such risk taking is inherent in our decisions and, as our contributors attest, to theirs. Thus, we identified other questions: What benefits and risks do such projects pose to professional advancement? How do they enhance personal and social relationships? Why is collaboration often viewed suspiciously by members of the academy, particularly by colleagues and administrators in the humanities?

Not all of these questions were fully articulated at the outset of our project, nor, in its initial stages, could we have been able to explain why we immediately felt that we could congenially work together. We met for the first time at the 1991 Midwest Modern

Language Association conference, where JoAnna and her coeditor Janet Doubler Ward were members of the session on collaboration cochaired by Liz and Susan Koppelman. Our prior professional contact, conducted solely by correspondence, had been relatively brief and limited to the details of our panel discussion. The day following the conference session, we got to know each other somewhat better over a chance meeting in the hotel coffee shop, but this occasion was coincidental rather than planned and no project was in the offing at the moment. Nonetheless, we began to develop a sense of the one ingredient upon which collaboration depends: mutual trust. Consequently, when JoAnna wrote about a month later to suggest working together on an anthology on feminist collaboration, Liz responded without hesitation.

What followed were an exchange of ideas for a call for abstracts and advertisements of the call, frequent correspondence between us and with our respondents, and a series of telephone meetings during which the project was more fully outlined, deadlines were set, and the criteria for selecting essays were developed. We increasingly strengthened our trust in each other's judgments and, about two years into the project, without any dissention, we regretfully decided that we had to extend our project. While some of the essays received in response to our "first round" were excellent, we simply did not have enough for what we considered to be a full discussion of the topic of feminist collaboration. Thus, this project was delayed by over a year. A second call for abstracts, another round of selections, a steady stream of correspondence (this time, much facilitated by e-mail) and additional telephone meetings followed. As we learned—and as many of our contributors point out—collaboration is time consuming. Moreover, collaborators' schedules often have to be reconciled with other academic, scholarly, and family responsibilities, as well as different academic calendars.

We always remained goal oriented and faithful to our deadlines, but we never approached our work as though it were a "fight to the finish." Indeed, our lack of competition with each other was apparent in our individual first drafts of the call for abstracts. Although we had not discussed name placement, we each put the other's name first. While this occasioned much laughter when we discovered what the other had done, a more important hypothesis was considered: Is this the way in which two women, with different backgrounds in

collaboration but who both subscribe to feminist principles of cooperation, work together? Similarly, in our selection of abstracts and essays, rather than engaging in arguments and negotiations, we found our ratings and our selections seldom varied. Even more uncanny was the fact that the comments we wrote on our criteria sheets—while we were hundreds of miles apart—were often comparable, even to identical word choice.

We hasten to point out that our collaboration was not a “perfect two-step.” On a few occasions, we quibbled about a word choice, we assured the other that she was not “sloughing off,” we listened politely to the other’s description of ever-higher piles of ungraded student papers and ever-increasing demands of academic committees. But, these occasions were very few indeed. That we complemented each other so well was a fortuitous happenstance in that we “found” each other at the hotel coffee shop. From our coeditorship has developed a firm friendship. While this relationship has been a gift, it is not unique; many of the contributors to *Common Ground* provide similar testimonials.

Might we assume, then, that collaboration is a magical merging of hearts and minds? And that women, because of their other-directed socialization, are likely to be able to work together without conflict? We think not. Instead, we recall the time and effort we devoted to listening to each other, discussing the problems and complications we envisioned, describing our hopes and expectations of the project, and admitting our possible shortfalls. All of this communication—whether by letter, phone and e-mail, or occasionally in person—constituted an ongoing dialogue that created consensus and often resolved potential disputes before they arose. In short, our verbal interactions weren’t “just talk”; they were idea exchanges through which we discovered our shared identities as coeditors and collaborators.

Why—given the difficulties of coordination, especially over long distances—would academic professionals choose to collaborate? In addition to the clichéd response of two heads are better than one, the reasons are probably best summed up in the complex dynamic of the shared responsibilities, respect, and reciprocal enjoyment that grows out of the relationship itself. For the compensations of such a relationship extend well beyond the objective goal of creating a finished “product.” Our prior collaborative activities may have shaped

our expectations of each other and recognition that in order to be successful, this relationship needed to be a complementary one. The coediting of this anthology was still a unique enterprise in our individual professional lives. We began as collaborators; now we are friends as well. But, as the following chapters discuss, in many ways our experiences reflect the broad range of experiences and feelings which many collaborators share.

This collection begins with a historical overview of women's collaborative efforts. Melodie Andrews locates "nascent feminism" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and shows how early feminist activities prepared the way for women's collaborative participation in nineteenth- and twentieth-century political activism and social reform. Building on Gerda Lerner's analysis of feminism, Andrews demonstrates that women's challenges to patriarchal authority depended upon their passage through successive stages of feminist consciousness. Though feminist collaboration has at times suffered setbacks and never fully resolved problems of race and class, early feminists created models for education, organization, and agitation that continue to serve as common ground for feminists today. Paula D. Nesbitt and Linda E. Thomas address many of the unresolved problems of race and marginalization as they argue for collaboration that produces *solid scholarship* that is thoroughly pluralistic. They point out that undertaking such research requires risk taking because it has the revolutionary potential of upsetting traditional academic norms; nonetheless, those who engage in authentic collaboration provide the hope and direction for a paradigm shift in which mutually negotiated differences will be valued, resulting in a creative opportunity to explore our shared human reality.

Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner return to a historical viewpoint insofar as their chapter was inspired by the canonical exclusion of women, which led them to question traditional assumptions about solitary male genius and Romantic ideas of singular authorship, or the "writer-writes-alone," as Linda Brodkey calls it. Their chapter reveals how, by working together on *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776-1837*, they directly addressed questions of gender within the collaborative writing and editing project, particularly those raised by Lisa Ede and Andrea Lundsford in *Singular Texts/Plural Authors*. Carol J. Singley and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney also challenge traditional notions of single

authorship and beliefs about knowledge as individually acquired and owned. By bringing together the insights of composition theory, literary theory, liberation politics, and feminist theory, they argue for the interdisciplinary nature of collaboration and for collaboration as a means of building women's confidence and enhancing their performance in the competitive academic environment.

Collaborative editing and writing is further explored in Helen Cafferty and Jeanette Clausen's description of their three-year tenure as coeditors of the *Women in German Yearbook*, as well as in their discussion of how their experience led to the formulation of a working definition of feminist collaboration. By examining the relationship between product and process, they reveal that feminist politics of egalitarianism, inclusion, power sharing, and consensus provide a "dialogic" space in which *process* is privileged to the extent that it may become as important as *goal*. A dialogue of creative processes also frames Kimberly A. McCarthy and Sandra Steingraber's chapter, which exemplifies the possibilities inherent in the merger of content and form by juxtaposing the traditional, linear presentation of shared ideas with dual, parallel columns or "duologues." This bivocal text allows the reader to experience the simultaneous presentation of multiple ideas in both form and content. Moreover, the description of the performance in which McCarthy's music was merged with Steingraber's poetry serves as an example of the multilayered processes of collaboration that occur among performers, composers and audience members.

Multiple layers of collaboration and the importance of process over product are also evident in Mary Alm's chapter. Alm's interviews with women engaged in the process of intimate collaboration reveal that their talk enables them to create and test ideas, judge the effectiveness of their written presentations, and nurture intellectual and social friendships that support them as scholars in often hostile academic environments. Mutual support and empowerment are also key issues in Constance L. Russell, Rachel Plotkin, and Anne C. Bell's "Merge/Emerge: Collaboration in Graduate School." As women and fledgling scholars engaged in "negotiating the patriarchal terrain of graduate school," this trio of ecofeminists credits collaboration with broadening their learning opportunities, increasing their willingness to support unpopular positions, and helping to affirm their "commitment to honouring a multiplicity of voices."

“Lesbian Collaboration and the Choreography of Desire” offers yet another perspective on the emotional benefits and liberatory value of transcending boundaries through collaboration. In this chapter Angela M. Estes and Kathleen Margaret Lant describe how their collaborative efforts (publishing critical articles, writing a book, teaching classes, and giving conference papers together) have been made possible and have been enriched by their former relationship as lovers. Their present relationship is based upon a powerful bond, strengthened by the fact that their same-sex interaction is not compromised by the resentments and competition of the heterosexist culture in which women must compete for men and for heterosexual privilege.

Problems of identity, issues of classism, heterosexism and homophobia, ableism, anti-Semitism, and other forms of oppression are at the forefront of Mary Ann Leiby and Leslie J. Henson’s theoretical/practical model for recognizing and resolving differences through collaboration. “Common Ground, Difficult Terrain” reveals how Leiby and Henson’s own struggles with complex political and cultural determinants of “subjectivity” taught them to encourage students to engage with one another collaboratively, in hopes of creating what Kenneth Bruffee calls an “unending conversation.” Rather than downplaying the significance of difference, Henson and Leiby argue for the “head-on collisions” that Cherrie Maraga claims are necessary for building coalition.

Consensus and coalition building are approached from a different perspective in Diane Lichtenstein and Virginia Powell’s chapter on their collaborative administration of the Women’s Studies Program at Beloit College. While conceding that their inclusive strategies at times became tedious and frustrating, they also find that small bureaucratic decisions sparked important debates about the nature of their collective identity and group work. Their analysis clarifies the distinction between managing a program and providing it with leadership.

Anne O’Meara and Nancy MacKenzie likewise delve into the tensions and rewards of arriving at consensus, in this case, the consensus a single text requires. Using their own experience to expand upon the insights of other researchers, O’Meara and MacKenzie address five central concerns: (1) the influence of context on collaborative processes, (2) the benefits of maintaining dual perspectives,

(3) the importance of collaborative talking, (4) the insights to be gained by examining what distinguishes collaborative invention and research, and (5) drafting procedures particularly suited to collaborative writing. Their analysis of collaborative processes highlights the importance “of studying collaboration in a variety of contexts.”

Context is similarly important to Sally Barr Ebest who challenges assumptions about solitary male writers and collaborative female writers by moving questions about gender and writing into the classroom to examine the effects of collaborative learning on female graduate students. From her observations of these students’ interactions in group discussions and close analysis of their writing, she concludes that collaboration may not come naturally to all women. She posits that rather than delineating the differences between male and female behaviors and learning styles, one must look at their similarities in order to promote collaboration in the classroom.

Assumptions about male and female behaviors are further investigated by Elaine Allen Karls and Roslyn Z. Weedman as they humorously record the choice they faced as new, nontenured hires forced to share an office “smaller than most federal prison cells.” Rather than resorting to the masculine mode of staking out their own private territory, they responded by reimagining the space as the nexus of a symbiotic, synergistic partnership that galvanized their creativity. During two years, this collaborative space yielded numerous joint projects. The most intriguing of these—their first learning community on Race, Class, and Gender in Popular Culture—is detailed to show how noncompetitive space can create a positive environment for learning, critical thinking, and intellectual enrichment. As feminist teachers and scholars, Jamie Barlowe and Ruth Hottell also view the classroom as “a collaborative community.” By foregrounding multiple perspectives on feminism, they disrupt the polarity of subject/object dyads and create a space in which students and teachers collaborate with each other recursively. This environment is not entirely free of “all pedantic authoritarianism,” but it is a space that encourages the development of critical consciousness and a form of learning designed to foster the creation of “other inclusive environments.”

In many ways, all of these chapters reinforce the ideas presented in our first in that they extend the discussion of the ways in which feminist collaborators have continued to work together. In addition,

they echo our hope that members of the academy eventually will value collaborative accomplishments as much as individual ones. As we have tried to indicate briefly here, the experiences of our contributors provide a continuing dialogue about the importance of collaboration and ensuing professional and personal benefits. Regardless of the mode of the collaborative activity, certain principles remain constant. This common ground opens vistas for revision and reevaluation of the importance of feminist collaborative activities in the academy.