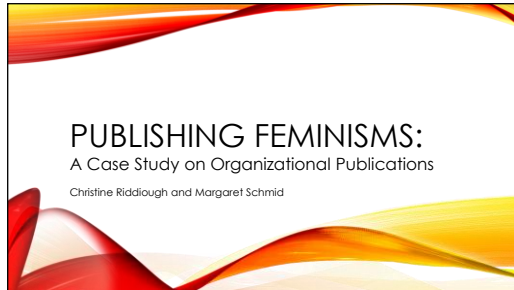


Publishing Feminisms: A Case Study on Organizational Publications

By Christine R. Riddiough and Margaret Schmid



Slide 1 — In the early 1970s the Chicago Women’s Liberation Union (CWLU) published several newspapers and newsletters. These publications –*WOMANKIND*, *Secret Storm* and *Blazing Star*–had as their ultimate goal building the organization and through that the movement for women’s liberation.

I will explore the role these publications played in the dissemination of feminist perspectives as well as in the development of CWLU. The primary focus will be *WOMANKIND*.



Slide 2 — To understand the role of *WOMANKIND* and the other publications, we have to start by looking at the organization they were a part of. The CWLU was formed in 1969 and played a leading role in the women’s liberation movement in Chicago during much of the 1970s.

Throughout its history the CWLU concentrated on organizing women to achieve liberation.

The Political Principles of the CWLU were adopted at the founding conference in 1969 and reflect this vision. They provided the basis for the organization’s theory and action and started with these lines:

The struggle for women's liberation is a revolutionary struggle.

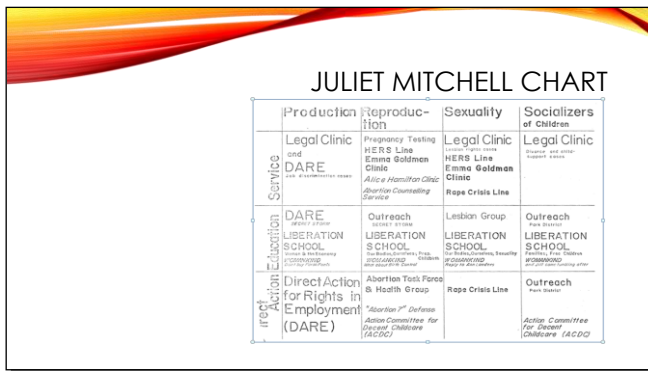
Women's liberation is essential to the liberation of all oppressed people.

Women's liberation will not be achieved until all people are free.



Slide 3 — The theory we developed in CWLU acknowledged that the struggle for women's rights was not isolated from other struggles – we recognized the intersection between gender, race and class and the importance of ensuring that our theory, strategy and actions bridged those intersections. In order to

communicate the liberating potential of the women's movement, our activism had to relate, in a concrete manner, to the conditions facing women.



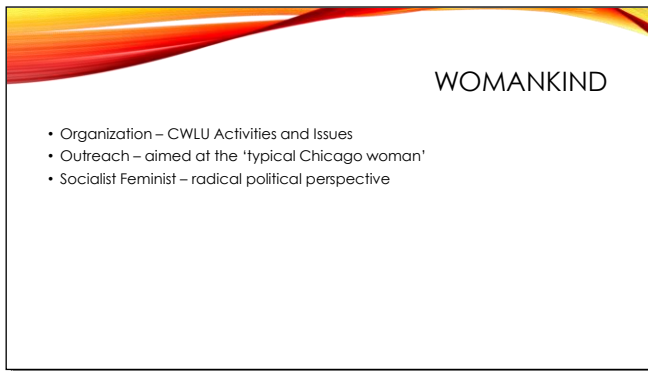
Slide 4 — At the second CWLU conference in 1971 a presentation by the Midwives chapter of CWLU argued for ‘a program and strategy which emphasizes struggle on many different levels, none of which is a clear priority over the others, and none of which is adequate without the development of the others.’ They then

described the visual chart they used to define the areas of struggle. One side of the chart displayed the four major roles into which women are placed in American society - production, reproduction, sexuality, and socializers of children.

These categories are taken from the pamphlet, *The Longest Revolution*, written by Juliet Mitchell, a British socialist feminist and the chart became known as the ‘Juliet Mitchell Chart.’

On the second dimension of the chart contains the different levels of struggle which were seen as necessary to build our movement - service, education, and direct action. The chart was adopted by CWLU, and used to guide the organization's work.

An important part of the education dimension was *WOMANKIND* newspaper. It was started by the CWLU in September 1971 because the organization “felt there was a crying need for a paper whose function would be to reach women who were not already in the women's liberation movement.”



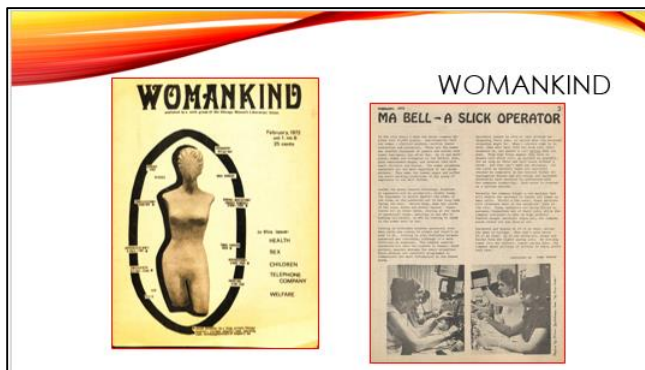
Slide 5 — Because CWLU activists wanted to spread the word about women’s liberation to women not already involved in the movement the members endorsed the idea of a “mass newspaper” to be published by a CWLU work group represented on the Steering Committee and responsive to the Steering Committee for

feedback and direction.

Later in the decade the CWLU work groups published *Secret Storm*, a newspaper focused first on women’s rights on the job and later on women’s rights in sports programs in the Chicago Park District, and *Blazing Star*, a newspaper for the lesbian community.

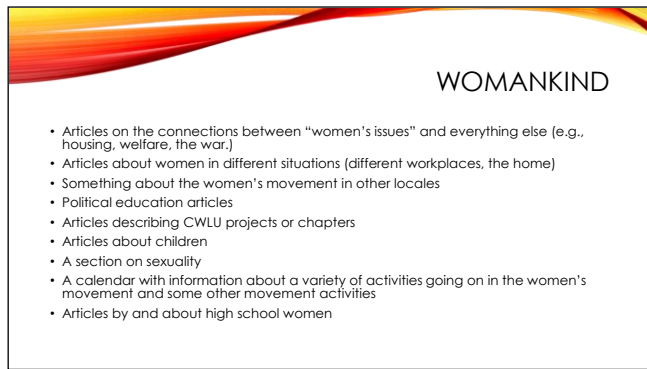
Each of these publications was aimed broadening the audience for women’s liberation. Key differences between *WOMANKIND* and other women’s movement publications included

- Being part of an organization,
- Being an outreach publication rather than a vehicle for internal debate,
- Being socialist feminist in orientation.

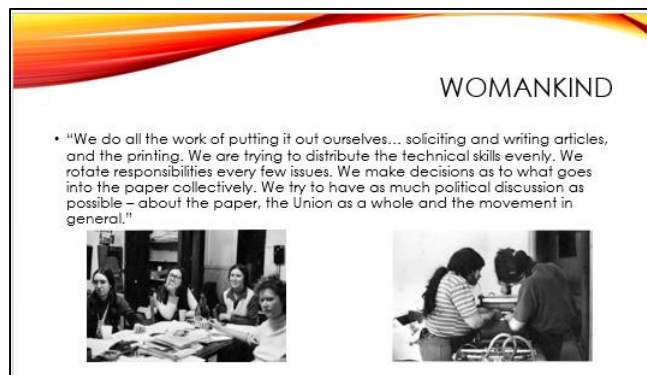


Slide 6 — *WOMANKIND* started in September 1971 as a monthly publication, with women not yet in the women’s movement as its target audience. As an organizational publication it carried articles on activities within CWLU. As an outreach publication it tried to address issues of interest to the typical Chicago woman and as a

socialist feminist publication it included articles on radical political ideas. In this and upcoming slides, are illustrations of issues of *WOMANKIND*.



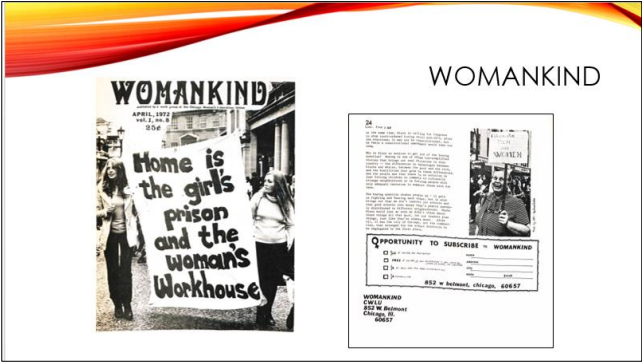
Slide 7 — This early memo from the *WOMANKIND* work group to CWLU activists highlighted types of articles to be published. The ambitious scope of hoped-for content and the sweeping interconnections seen by these CWLU activists between women's liberation and all aspects of society can be seen here.



Slide 8 — *WOMANKIND* was produced by a CWLU work group that held intense, lengthy, participatory discussions of what articles to include rather than having a small editorial staff or single editor determining what would be published. This practice, which characterized the style of other CWLU work groups as well,

resulted from the typical experiences of male supremacy common at the time. Some early CWLU activists had been active in the civil rights or anti-war movements, and had painful memories of being relegated to making coffee or running mimeo machines, while men did the talking and made the decisions.

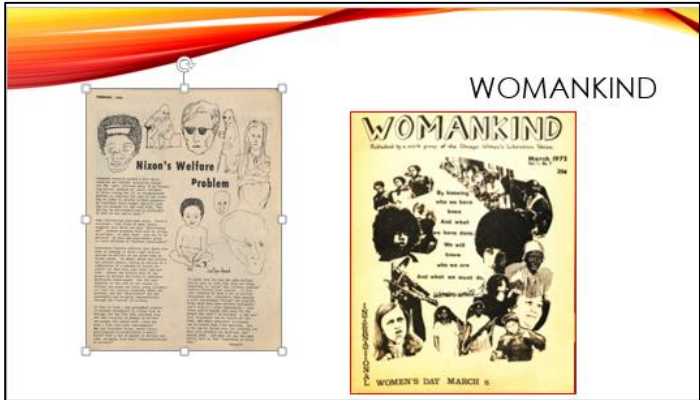
The words of the work group, as shown on this slide, show the scope of the project. In keeping with the initial heady emphasis in the women's movement on expanding skills and knowledge and combatting male supremacy, the *WOMANKIND* work group produced the newspaper in-house from start to finish, including producing the plates and running the press.



Slide 9 — Because *WOMANKIND* was launched to do outreach, issues related to distribution were central. This was underscored by the fact that producing the paper was, of course, not free, even though many hours of free labor went into each issue.

CWLU members and others were urged to subscribe. The work group contacted other women’s groups around the country, offering *WOMANKIND* at bulk rates. It made arrangements with women’s centers around Chicago to offer *WOMANKIND* for sale. Free copies were made available in the Loop YWCA and at two locations run by progressive political groups. The *WOMANKIND* work group wrote to women’s groups on college campuses suggesting that they ask their campus libraries to subscribe.

Further, in that era of still-plentiful local bookstores, the work group was able to arrange for as many as 30 copies of *WOMANKIND* to be offered for sale each month at twenty-four Chicago bookstore locations including several university bookstores, with a fair amount of success in terms of issues sold.

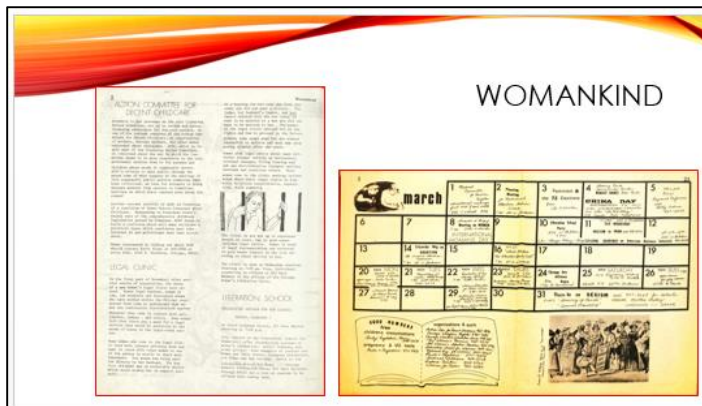


Slide 10 — Several months after *WOMANKIND* was launched, the *WOMANKIND* work group noted that “The CWLU uses the paper in all its outreach: Liberation School, speaking engagements, with women who use our abortion counseling service, at citywide

meetings, citywide conferences, and some of the chapters of the Union use it in their neighborhood and institutional work. Several of the women in the work group have taken papers to their high schools or to their offices. We’ve done street selling downtown to reach secretaries and clerks and we usually ... take it to marches and rallies even [those] sponsored by people that we have political differences with.”

After nearly a year of publication, the work group indicated initial success in a written report:

“Feedback we have gotten indicates that *WOMANKIND* interests many kinds of women – office workers, junior college women, youth culture women, other movement women, four year college women, housewives. From what we can tell, we feel that the paper is successful in its basic aim of being an outreach, educational paper about the women’s movement, coming out of a political perspective which emphasizes the relationships between sexism, capitalism, racism, and imperialism.”



Slide 11 — Despite these initial positive signs, distribution was always a problem. It continued to lag far behind work group (and CWLU) hopes. Work group members’ vows to spend more efforts on distribution did not produce significant results.



- Ceasing Publication
 - Tensions over resources
 - Tensions over political direction

Slide 12 — Because CWLU was by its political principles a socialist organization, a variety of small, left-wing, sectarian groups identified CWLU as a target for either infiltration or take-over starting in the early 1970s. They began to send women members to CWLU functions, in particular major membership meetings, or to

participate in CWLU work groups. In these settings, enabled by CWLU’s emphasis on democracy and open participation, these women began to criticize the CWLU as being bourgeois and insufficiently revolutionary.

These tensions were reflected in the *WOMANKIND* work group itself. The *WOMANKIND* work group proposed a six month suspension of the paper. New activists, new priorities and new ideas brought new issues to the fore, with new demands for CWLU time and energy. With these changes came new decisions: November 1973 saw the publication of the last issue of CWLU's *WOMANKIND* outreach newspaper.



Slide 13 — *WOMANKIND*, however, was not the only publication of CWLU. In the mid-1970s the work group Direct Action for Rights in Employment began to publish its own outreach newspaper and called it *Secret Storm*.

DARE worked on issues related to women in the workplace. Its most successful activity was its support of the Chicago City Hall janitresses. The women made less than men in similar positions and were subjected to demeaning racial and gender discrimination. The janitresses worked with DARE and the CWLU to bring suit under the Fair Employment Practices Act. After a long and difficult struggle, the City Hall janitresses won the campaign. DARE's *Secret Storm* also publicized struggles at Stewart-Warner, Campbell's Soup, and other Chicago workplaces where women were fighting for their rights.



Slide 14 — Later in the 1970s the CWLU outreach group published *Secret Storm*. In 1972, the Outreach workgroup began an ambitious program of organizing in Chicago's white working class neighborhoods. They made contacts at high schools and community colleges, arranged speaking engagements,

organized rap groups, and provided support for students trying to set up their own feminist organizations.



Slide 15 — In 1974, Outreach began to focus on women's sports. Outreach believed that sports could build women's confidence, create a sense of team effort and help women break out of narrow constricting roles. Because of discrimination by the Chicago Park District,

the battle to get a place to play became a political issue. There were angry confrontations with Park District bosses and sexist park users, but slowly women's sports became a fixture in Chicago's parks. The group used their newspaper to raise issues with the women they met through neighborhood organizing. *Secret Storm* focused heavily on neighborhood and workplace struggles, but also covered a variety of other feminist issues in a straightforward easily understandable way.



Slide 16 — A third publication of CWLU was *Blazing Star*, a newspaper aimed at the lesbian community. The gay liberation movement began almost simultaneously with the women's liberation movement. In the summer and fall of 1970, there were discussions between CWLU women and the Gay Women's Caucus,

including a CWLU citywide meeting on the subject of gay liberation. A Gay Group – later the Lesbian Group – was formed as a CWLU work group with regular meetings and a Steering Committee representative.



BLAZING STAR

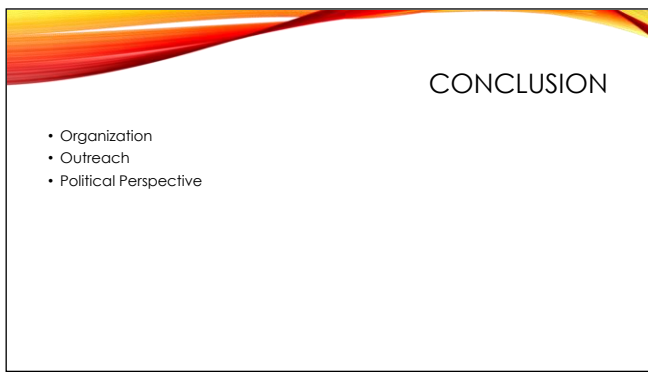
Slide 17 — The group began publishing a newsletter called *Blazing Star* which continued, even after the CWLU disbanded. The newspaper published article on topics related to feminism, such as abortion rights and ERA, as well as articles specifically on gay and lesbian rights. It included updates on lesbian sports

teams and profiles of women bar owners.



BLAZING STAR

Slide 18 — It was distributed at women’s and gay bars, at lesbian events and bookstores. Like its precursor publications its aim was to encourage women to get involved in the women’s movement and in the fight for gay and lesbian liberation. In 1980 it became an insert into *Chicago Gay Life*.



CONCLUSION

- Organization
- Outreach
- Political Perspective

Slide 19 — Those of us in the Chicago Women's Liberation Union were united for a purpose - we were working toward a goal of women's liberation in a way that meant that all our interactions, social, political and cultural contributed to that effort. There were debates and differences of opinion but those were

combined with a commitment to long-term struggle.

We believed we were in a war against the patriarchy, against capitalism. We undertook many bold actions and programs, but no action was too small if it made a difference. The publications we produced were an important part of that struggle, a way to reach out beyond our core group to women across the

city of Chicago. Our publications were shaped by being part of an organization – they were responsible to that organization and were tools all members could use to build the movement.

The papers were aimed at women not yet part of the movement, but who were looking for something more in their lives. Women faced with discrimination in their jobs and their homes, challenged by economic insecurity and injustice. In their paper ‘Leading the CWLU into Outreach’ Jenny Rohrer and Judy Sayad describe outreach this way:

Outreach means getting to know a lot of people; it means bringing women's consciousness and politics into the everyday lives of people.

We also had a clear political perspective. In *Socialist Feminism: A Strategy for the Women's Movement*, we stated:

We choose to identify ourselves with the heritage and future of feminism and socialism in our struggle for revolution. From feminism we have learned the fullness of our own potential as women, the strength of women. ...

From feminism we have come to understand an institutionalized system of oppression based on the domination of men over women: sexism. ... We see capitalism as an institutionalized form of oppression based on profit for private owners of publicly-worked-for wealth.

We put forward that perspective in our publications.

Like CWLU itself, these publications lasted a relatively short time. Through the course of the 1970s the right gained ascendancy. At the beginning of the decade measures like the ERA and the Comprehensive Child Care Law passed Congress with very little opposition. By the end of the decade Phyllis Schlafly and Anita Bryant became the most notorious voices of women and in 1980 Ronald Reagan was elected president. As a socialist feminist group the CWLU was also subject to pressures from ultra-left groups vying to formulate a ‘correct line’ and manipulate the direction of the women’s movement.

Nonetheless CWLU and its publications positively affected the lives of women in Chicago and around the United States. In today’s world there is no need for mimeographs or printing presses. We can easily send PDF’s of newsletters via email. We can blog about these issues at little or no expense to ourselves or others and we can Tweet simple messages of events and activities. Is there a need for a *WOMANKIND* today? Perhaps not, but if we want to reach women who are not a part of our email network, who are not our Facebook friends, who do not already follow our blogs, then we need some way of taking our message, our consciousness and our politics into the everyday lives of people.

And to do that we may need to reexamine some of the tools of the past.



This paper was presented at the Publishing Feminisms Symposium held in Banff, Alberta, Canada, May 17-20, 2015.

Biography

Christine R. Riddiough was active in CWLU in the 1970s, a major author of Lesbianism and Socialist Feminism and leader in Blazing Star. She later worked for NOW and the Gay and Lesbian Democrats of America. She currently teaches computer programming and statistics and lives in Washington DC.

Margaret Schmid was a member of the Midwives Chapter, the Womankind Work Group, the Speakers Bureau, and co-chair of CWLU steering committee. After working as a college professor and subsequently a public sector labor union leader, she is retired and lives in Chicago.

Acknowledgements

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