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# Lonely Hearts and Imagined Communities, or, The Politics of Loneliness in Feminist Magazines

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## Abstract

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In this paper I frame loneliness as a political emotion that has played a crucial role in the formation of feminist networks and print culture, generating new ideas about collectivity and communality. Loneliness, unlike anger or hope, is not one of the obviously ‘active’ affects that we may associate with political organising; but the formation of women’s movement collectives, groups and networks was catalysed, as feminist magazines of the 1970s-80s repeatedly demonstrate, by loneliness. Drawing on an emergent body of scholarship that uses affect theory as a lens through which to analyse the circulation of feeling in feminist periodicals, as well as in feminist movements more generally, I explore the mediation of gendered forms of loneliness in British feminist publications such as *Spare Rib*, *Shrew*, *Mukti* and *Red Rag*. Specifically, I examine how the uniquely polyvocal, composite and messy form of the magazine alchemizes diverse experiences of gendered loneliness and alienation into collectivity. Through close readings of feminist media and the ‘paper archipelagos’ created by these magazine networks, my paper will ask: what role does loneliness play in forging fantasies of belonging or imagined communities? How is loneliness mediated and mobilised within, between and beyond different periodical networks? How might loneliness simultaneously generate, draw together and push apart different constituencies of readers and contributors? And, following the work of Denise Riley, how might a recognition of the political valences of loneliness enable us to think beyond the binary division between singleness and sociality?

Eleanor Careless is a Research Fellow for the AHRC-funded project *Liberating Histories: Women’s Movement Magazines, Media Activism and Periodical Pedagogies* based at Northumbria University and partnered with the Women’s Library, LSE. She is currently working on her first monograph, *The Poetry of Anna Mendelssohn* (Bloomsbury), and a co-authored monograph, *Feminist Periodicals, the Women’s Movement and Networks of Feeling, 1968–Today* (with Victoria Bazin and Melanie Waters; EUP).

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