

<b>Institution:</b> University of Sussex		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 34 – Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Changing Institutional Practice and Transforming Attitudes: <i>Sisterhood and After</i> at the British Library and Beyond		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2010 – 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Prof Margaretta Jolly	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Professor of Cultural Studies	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> 2007 – present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 1 Aug 2013 – 31 July 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>  <p>When the British Library launched Margaretta Jolly's <i>Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project</i> in 2013, it showcased the first sustained and substantial collection of oral testimony of the (post-1968) Women's Liberation Movement in the UK. The popularity of this collection has had a significant impact on the British Library, and has led them to expand their commitment to women's history by procuring new acquisitions and by devoting new resources to making feminist artefacts more accessible. The extensive and effective dissemination of the research has changed the attitudes and actions of its vast audience, and the research project has become the model of what feminist oral history looks and sounds like around the world.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>  <p>Professor Jolly has been at the forefront of oral history research since setting up the Centre for Life History and Life Writing Research in 1999. She is an award-winning feminist historian (with recognition from the American Libraries Association and the UK's Feminist and Women's Studies Association) and is internationally known for her innovations in oral history which produce complex, nuanced and 'lived' accounts of women's lives. Jolly designed and was the PI for the Leverhulme Trust funded <i>Sisterhood and After (S&amp;A)</i> project (2010-2013), which was conceived to redress the lack of an oral history of the (post-1968) UK Women's Liberation Movement (WLM). The research set out to avoid the over-schematic and ideological approach that has limited previous accounts of second wave feminism. Through attention to the musicality and texture of oral history (an active listening to the tones, rhythms and pauses of testimony) and by paying close attention to the details of everyday life and themes such as housing, relationships, business, shopping, health, faith, and feminist death, the research humanised forms of activism that had previously been known primarily for political positioning. Jolly's account of the WLM also moved beyond previous memoirs and biographies to situate the movement in wider social and political contexts, and to suggest that organisational and collaborative skills – rather than experience alone – drove the best parts of the movement [R3]. The resultant monograph, <i>Sisterhood and After: An Oral History of the UK Women's Liberation Movement, 1968-present</i> [R3], solely authored by Jolly, offers a unique contribution to WLM history by describing the 'mixed emotions' of feminist activism, by tracing the networks of care that supported lived sisterhood, and by analysing the structures of feeling of WLM. It was described by the <i>London Review of Books</i> as "a new, fresh and extremely readable history of [...] the 'long' Women's Liberation Movement."</p> <p>The basis of the research was a series of extensive life interviews (on average each interview was seven hours long) with sixty feminist activists [R1]. The interviews illuminated the circumstances</p>		

and consequences of activism, including economic impacts across different sectors and classes, personal sacrifices and the complexities of enhanced lifestyle choices for women [R2]. Jolly's research revealed a greater range of networks, political positions and campaigns than had previously been acknowledged in the literature. The research drew out the complex struggles of white and Black British feminists, working class trade union women's campaigns, and the variations across London, the regions and Northern Ireland. Combining social movement studies with cultural analysis, Jolly's scholarship demonstrated the critical role of educational opportunity, early moral guidance, experiences of leadership, sexual rights, and the support of men, as well as opportunities afforded by post-war economies and governance.

Analysis of methodologies and findings were presented in public and in academic conferences and publications in a way designed to support future researchers – including community historians beyond academia who were interested in questions of representativeness and oral history practice [R4, R5]. The research was synthesised and consolidated in Jolly's 2019 monograph [R3]. The research materials informed the major exhibition 'Unfinished Business: The Fight for Women's Rights' at the British Library (October 2020-February 2021) [R6]. The research also led to a four-year relationship with China Women's University in Beijing (supported by a British Academy Grant) for which Jolly was hired as a consultant to advise on a major oral history of Chinese women [R5 and G1].

### 3. References to the research

R1. BL Collection C1420: *Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project* (60 audio interviews and verbatim transcripts; 10 documentary films – in electronic form).

Catalogue entry URL:

<http://cadensa.bl.uk/uhtbin/cgiisirs/x/0/0/5?searchdata1=CKEY7375945%20&library=ALL>.

120 audio clips from the collection are accessible online, alongside the 10 films, and thematic analyses at the BL Learning Programme website 'Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project', URL: <http://bl.uk/sisterhood>

R2. Jolly, M. (2017) 'After the Protest: Biographical Consequences of Movement Activism in an Oral History of Women's Liberation in Britain.' In *The Women's Liberation Movement: Impacts and Outcomes* ed. Kristina Schulz: 298-321. New York: Berghahn. Available on request.

R3. Jolly, M. (2019) *Sisterhood and After: An Oral History of the UK Women's Liberation Movement, 1968-present* (Oxford and New York; Oxford University Press). Submitted to REF2.

R4. Jolly, M., Russell, P. and Cohen, R. (2012) 'Sisterhood and After: Individualism, Ethics and an Oral History of the Women's Liberation Movement', *Social Movement Studies*, 11(2): 211–226. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2012.664902>. Republished as book chapter (2014) and e-book chapter (2016), in *Research Ethics and Social Movements: Scholarship, Activism & Knowledge Production* (ed. Gillan, K. and J. Pickerill).

R5. Jolly, M., Li, H and Ding, Z. (2018) 'Hearing Her: Comparing Feminist Oral History in the UK and China.' *Oral History Review* 45(1): 48-67. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ohr/ohx074>

R6. Russell, P and Jolly, M. (2020) *Unfinished Business: The Fight for Women's Rights*, London, British Library Publishing. Available on request.

G1. British Academy International Partnership and Mobility Grant: 'Hearing her: Oral histories of women's liberation in China and the United Kingdom' (Ref PM120142); 01/02/2013-01/02/2014 £9720.

### 4. Details of the impact

#### Changing Institutional Practice at the British Library

For the British Library (BL), *Sisterhood and After* has been an unalloyed success. As [text removed for publication] at the BL argues, the richness and variety of the research "is a great means of encouraging our users to explore a range of our collections and it creates new entry points for library users thereby widening engagement across a broader range of our collections

than otherwise might happen" [S1]. For [text removed for publication], this fits precisely with the BL's corporate strategy of building capacity as a research organisation. He also notes that Jolly's project has now become "a great example of how productive collaborations can work" and has been deployed as a model to support staff development at the BL [S1].

The success of the S&A research has been deeply significant in determining the direction of the BL as well as in the allocation of its resources. The "accumulated impressive user figures" [S4, S6, S11] noted by Rob Perk, Lead Curator and Director of National Life Stories (BL), are part of the way that "the project impacts on popular historical understandings of the period as well as the history of gender relations" [S4]. But as well as impacting on perceptions it has led to more material changes within the BL. BL curator [text removed for publication] explains this impact as a consequence of both the research activity itself and S&A's standing within BL as a model of success. New archival acquisitions have come about as a direct result of Jolly's activity: "as a consequence of the S&A project, Ann Oakley's archive has come to the British Library" [S2]. And the status of S&A has acted as a more general "catalyst" for curators interested in women's history to successfully petition for resources; thus, as well as the Oakley papers, BL have found resources for the Una Kroll papers and for digitising the entire run of *Spare Rib*. For [text removed for publication], then, it is the fact that S&A is well-used and that this use has been diligently documented which means she has more power to ask for (and get) resources for women's history: "the popularity of the S&A material and its well documented use as a curator gives me leverage for such acquisitions" [S3].

### **Altering Attitudes, Changing Lives**

As well as its obvious importance within BL, S&A has become a central resource for a number of educational endeavours, for instance as a resource for AQA's AS and A-level Sociology [S5]. With a research project as extensive as S&A, and one that has been disseminated so widely, impact has percolated over time. Thus Dr Alice Mukaka can remember being inspired "by the research strategies I learned" from attending an S&A event. She went on to undertake doctoral research using her own oral history to document "women organizing for migrant rights in the United Kingdom", and now teaches the lesson she learnt at the BL: "the importance of documenting the legacy of feminist leaders in our society" [S7].

A central plank of the BL's use of S&A has been to engage with school students. School workshops between 2015-2019 have been attended by 1,400 students [S6]. Feedback collected from participants always note enthusiastic engagement, but they also indicate significant impact. One teacher from Heston Community School commented that: "As a result of the session [featuring a S&A oral history clip with footballer Sue Lopez] Year 10 girls have set up a football team, which I think is amazing!" [S8]. Due to their popularity and success, the BL has made the S&A workshops a permanent offer from the Learning Department, with an increase in their frequency from two to three a month from 2019 (currently paused due to Covid-19) [S3]. Curator [text removed for publication] asserts that the workshops are significant in that they "give students the opportunity to debate a subject which is largely absent from the curriculum" [S3].

### **Establishing a Model for Feminist Oral History Internationally**

Outside of the BL the organisational legacy of *Sisterhood and After* is its impact as a go-to best-practice model of feminist oral history. Thus when Kristina Schulz and her team established a national oral history archive of the women's movement in Switzerland they used S&A as their model, copying S&A in their interview method, selection criteria, and in the construction of their website. As they happily acknowledge, "New Women's Movement 2.0 is based on the British Library's 'Sisterhood and After' project" [S10]. Similarly when Li HuiBo and her team started conducting their work at the Research Center for Chinese Women's Oral History (at Chinese Women's University, Beijing) they looked to S&A to guide their collection and display, including engaging Jolly as consultant. As Li says, S&A also acted as a comparison to "further understand each other's idea of gender and of oral history's political purpose, particularly as institutionalized

through state funded universities and libraries" [S9]. S&A was the inspiration for these new endeavours and it has also provided a vital model for a feminist-oriented oral history methodology.

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

S1. [text removed for publication], British Library Research Department (Letter) (15 May 2020)

S2. [text removed for publication], British Library Curator (Letter) (28 May 2020).

S3. [text removed for publication], British Library Curator (Interview) (August 2019).

S4. Rob Perks, Director of National Life Stories, BL (Letter) (14 October 2019).

S5. AQA A Level use of Sisterhood and After (August 2016).

S6. British Library Schools Workshops Numbers (3 July 2019).

S7. Email from Alice Mukaka (27 August 2019).

S8. British Library feedback from three Schools Workshops (June/July 2018).

S9. Blog Li HuiBo China Women and Gender Library (18 September 2018).

S10. Neue Frauen Bewegung 2.0 (New Women's Movement 2.0) Switzerland

<https://neuefrauenbewegung.sozialarchiv.ch/index.php/about>

S11. Analytics of web traffic for Sisterhood and After October 2017 – June 2019 for homepage and articles – total: 318,839 views.