

[Women's Bodies, Women's Rights. Health Feminism, Reproductive Knowledge and Women's Activism Across Europe in the long 20th Century](#)

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Type:

Conference

Date:

October 19, 2023 to October 21, 2023

Location:

Germany

Subject Fields:

Eastern Europe History / Studies, Health and Health Care, Public Health, Women's & Gender History / Studies, European History / Studies

Conveners: Anne Kwaschik (University of Konstanz), Isabel Heinemann (University of Bayreuth), Emeline Fourment (University of Rouen), Heidi Hein-Kircher (Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe)

19.-21. October 2023

University of Konstanz

Over the course of the 20th century, the idea of women's rights transformed both the gender order and the concept of civil society: Therein, "health" proved a crucial issue, as it combined reproductive decision-making bodily integrity and access to medical knowledge. Drawing inspiration from both social protest movements and the feminist movement that started in the US and swept across Europe in the late 1960s, women started to organize for legal abortion, safe contraceptives, and women's centers. Emphasizing self-help as key approach, they sought to counter a largely patriarchal society and protest the male-dominated fields of obstetrics and gynecology. In doing so, they elaborated their own body knowledge, a knowledge on *and* from the body, wrote their own health books and developed an expertise based on women's experience. Knowledge appropriation and production became their main mode of action.

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<https://networks.h-net.org/node/73374/announcements/12323822/women%E2%80%99s-bodies-women%E2%80%99s-rights-health-feminism-reproductive>

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This conference aims at exploring health feminism and women's activism from the perspective of the history of knowledge. It intends to interrogate the homogeneity of the existing Western European narratives focusing on the 1970s and on the argument that North America was the hub of knowledge transfer to the rest of the world. Against this background, this conference focuses on other transnational transfers, from Europe to the US, or within Europe and asks participants to reconsider periodization. Health feminists were already active in the 1920s and 1930s in socialist and anarchist political groups, and also in the eugenics movement. They elaborated and communicated contraceptive knowledge and sometimes even fought for abortion rights which leads us the following questions: How did these early women activists link health issues with claims of women's emancipation? Was feminist knowledge affected by socialist, anarchist or eugenicist thought? And can we trace continuities between women's activism around reproduction from the 1920s and 1930s and health feminism of the 1970s?

With its broader regional focus, the conference aims at decentering the history of Western European health feminism. Including Eastern European (and Eastern German) trajectories and constellations helps to reconsider key issues of current research: Can we trace elements of health feminism - understood here as a women's social movement that framed women's physical and reproductive health as a central component of individual rights - also in socialist countries of the 1970s and 1980s? How important was the transformation of 1989/90 in this respect? And how can we approach health feminism in (post)socialist countries that at least formally guaranteed their female citizens equal rights, legal abortion and free healthcare by women professionals?

In sum, this international conference examines how women acquired, produced and communicated health knowledge throughout the 20th century and investigates links to demands for civil rights, political agency, and grass-root activism.

Papers and contributions are welcome which seek

1. to identify the sources of health knowledge women across Europe turned to (Western feminist texts and press, writings of health reform authors before 1945) and discuss elements of travelling knowledge, between both Western European countries and East and West and vice versa >> **transfer of health knowledge**
2. to carve out important turning points in the (trans-)national discussions on

women's health, women's rights and women's agency all along the 20th century
>> **(trans)national turning points**

3. to analyze whether and how women attempted to protest or even challenge state-implemented social engineering in the course of the 20th century and specifically political repression and infiltration methods used by the state's police apparatus in the post-1945 Eastern bloc in the field of health and reproduction >> **social engineering, oppression and resilience.**

The conference will be held at the University of Konstanz from October 19 to October 21, 2023. Travel and accommodation will be covered for invited participants. We plan to publish the findings of the conference with an international publisher. Papers will be due for publication by January 2024 and have to go through peer review.

We warmly invite your abstract of 500 words and a short CV by **February 28, 2023** at Baasandulam Strube, Sekretariat Kwaschik <sekretariat.kwaschik@uni-konstanz.de>

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