

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER AND POLITICS

Studying Women's Movements

Introduction

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How should we study women's movements? Are the methodologies developed for other social movements, such as protest event analysis, appropriate for our purposes? Have social movements been too identified with certain repertoires of collective action, overlooking the ways in which women's movements sustain themselves over time? While social movement scholars have begun to question whether they are defining social movement activity too narrowly, feminist scholars are taking a lead in this discussion.

What does the concept of institutionalization, often used in social movement studies, really mean in relation to women's movements and the ways they seek to preserve women-centered values? Why do studies of women's movement institutionalization focus more on relationships with the state than on the full gamut of institutional legacies deriving from women's movements, including community-based women's services, discursive communities, or separate institution building inside vocational bodies or unions? Theory and methodology need to catch up with the strange new world in which women's movements, instead of disappearing, are reflecting on their new life forms.