

# THE WOMEN'S PROJECT WEB EXHIBIT

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

In the spirit of the Women's Project's commitment to continuous and collective growth, we invite you to use the following questions for your individual journaling, classroom, or community gathering. A set of overall questions bookend chapter-specific questions. Please feel free to pull out the questions that are most relevant to your life, work, and communities.

### Big Picture

1. What are the parallels or throughlines between the political environment that the Women's Project encountered in the 1980s and 1990s and the politics of today? What has stayed the same? What has come back around? What is different?
2. How would you describe the world the Women's Project wanted to create? What are three ways the organization worked toward that future?
3. How would you define "solidarity"? How did members of the Women's Project act in solidarity with each other? In what ways did they fall short?

### Chapter 1: Violence and Control

1. What were the Women's Project's criticisms of the battered women's movement as it grew and changed through the 1980s and early 1990s? How do you think the Women's Project would react to the movement now?
2. What do the terms "intimate partner violence," "domestic violence," and "violence against women" each communicate about the relationship between interpersonal harm and structural harm, if anything? Why did the Women's Project choose to use "violence against women"?
3. Rural organizing has historically been challenging. What difficulties did Women's Project organizers face when working in a rural context? How did they try to overcome them?

### Chapter 2: Flexing Rural-Urban Power

1. What was effective about the Women's Watchcare Network's approach in Arkansas specifically? What possible limitations do you see?
2. The Women's Project initially prioritized recruiting Women's Watchcare Network members through churches. Why did they see that as a key approach?
3. The Women's Project used the Watchcare reports to show the scope of violence. But the use of statistics to highlight violence has also faced criticism. In what contexts have you seen statistics used in ways that felt politically effective? In what contexts have statistics felt ineffective?

4. What other strategies have you seen used to fight hate group activity? What do you see as the pros and cons of these different strategies and how do those shift based on place, political landscape, and time period?

### Chapter 3: Taking Unpopular Stands

1. The Women's Project intervened in public debates about a 1991 rape at the University of Arkansas because they saw people choosing sides in a way that erased the complex forces of oppression at play. Where do you see the need for more complexity in today's work and conversations—personally and societally—around racial and sexual violence?
2. What is the connection between storytelling and changing the conditions of daily life? Who do you see effectively shifting narratives today? What strategies and tactics make that work transformative?
3. The Women's Project's graveyard demonstration was meant to get people talking about the systemic nature of violence against women, instead of individualizing abuse. At the time, they faced a lot of pushback on that idea even within social justice movement spaces. How have conversations changed around intimate partner violence, if at all?
4. What are some other creative visual or theatrical ways people have brought attention to issues? How effective have these tactics been as a method of protest?

### Chapter 4: Until Everybody's Free

1. What were some of the economic and political conditions of the 1980s and 1990s that led to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and mass incarceration? How were the two crises related?
2. How did Women's Project members address the HIV/AIDS epidemic with joy and care? What current work resembles these approaches? What makes it effective?
3. The Women's Project used the non-traditional jobs program to help women access a living wage so they were better able to escape other forms of violence in their lives. What strategies would you love to see your community try out at the intersection of economic justice and gender liberation?

### Chapter 5: Imagining a New World

1. What creative strategies did the Women's Project use for political education? What strategies have you seen more recently that go beyond reading and speeches? What others can you imagine?
2. What was made possible by the African American Women's Conference that might not have occurred in a multiracial space? How did this strategy fit within the Women's Project's commitment to multiracial struggle?

3. Newsletters and books were important tools for growing political consciousness within the Women's Project before the rise of the internet. When it comes to political education, what are the pros and cons of the way our information ecosystem has evolved?

## Chapter 6: Building Collective Culture

1. What is culture? What does it take to build culture?
2. What strategies did the Women's Project use to create an organizational structure and culture where people could work well together across race, class, age, ability, etc.? What other strategies and principles have you seen work well in building strong organizations?
3. What was the relationship between the Women's Project's internal culture and their external work?

## Moving Forward

1. Understandings of gender, and the language to talk about it, have expanded since the 1980s and 1990s. How can we talk about sexism and historical movements to uproot it without reinforcing the gender binary?
2. What stands out to you from the Women's Project mission statement below that might be useful in your own life and work?

### Women's Project Mission Statement

*Our goal is social change or, as the poet Adrienne Rich writes, "the transformation of the world." We believe this world can be changed to become a place of peace and justice for all women. We take risks in our work; we take unpopular stands. We work for all women and against all forms of discrimination and oppression. We believe that we cannot work for all women and against sexism unless we also work against racism, classism, ageism, anti-Semitism, heterosexism and homophobia. We see the connection among these oppressions as the context for violence against women in this society. We are concerned about particular issues of importance to traditionally underrepresented women: poor women, aged women, women of color, teenage mothers, lesbians, women with disabilities, women in prison, etc. All are women who experience discrimination and violence against their lives. We are committed to working multi-culturally, multi-racially, and to making our work and cultural events accessible to low-income women. We believe that women will not know equality until they know economic justice. We believe that a few committed women working in coalition and consensus with other women can make significant change in the quality of life for all women.*

We'd love to hear your reflections, feedback, and questions! Email us at [arpeopleshistory@gmail.com](mailto:arpeopleshistory@gmail.com).