

**Abstract**

**Between Peace and Women's Rights. Women Strike for Peace and Second Wave Feminism in the United States (Working Title)**

On November 1, 1961, approximately 50,000 women from over 60 communities in the United States took their anger about nuclear tests to the streets and staged a national "strike for peace." Originally planned as a one-day-event the demonstration sparked the creation of *Women Strike for Peace* (WSP), an organization that would continue to lobby for peace at a national and international level until 1990. The majority of women active in WSP (WSPers) were of a white, middle-class background. They legitimized their protest by claiming that women, especially mothers, had a specific outlook on, and interest in, life and peace. Thus they made reference to an argument well-known from the women's peace movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During the 1960s, WSP activists employed popular means of protest, such as civil disobedience, and worked with a range of organizations that were part of the national movement against the Vietnam War. From 1968 onwards, they further cooperated with advocates for women's liberation.

WSP combined elements of the activism carried out by traditional women's organizations with those of the new social movements. My project is therefore tied to research about peace- and women's movements in the twentieth century. Despite WSP's unique position at the interface of both movements, historians have paid little attention to the group thus far. WSP's connection to second wave feminism, in particular, requires a thorough analysis, which my dissertation will provide. Whether WSP was a feminist organization and in which way it can be considered a part of the contemporary movement for women's rights are questions at the heart of the project. In order to shed light upon them, I analyze internal debates about women's rights and trace WSP's collaboration with representatives of women's liberation groups. I focus on cooperative projects, such as demonstrations and conferences, that WSPers planned and carried out with foreign women's organizations and American feminist activists.

Since it is not possible to include all of WSP's local chapters in this work, I pay particular attention to those at the forefront, namely Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, D.C., as well as the National Office. Biographical outlines of so-called *key women* provide a view from a micro perspective. An intersectional approach ensures that categories such as race, age, class, and sexual identity form part of the analysis. Furthermore it allows an examination of how gender influenced female activists' range of choices and actions. Building on internal communications, WSP

publications and contemporary press records, I will analyze the organization's discourse on peace and women's rights, the image that activists were eager to portray, and the ways in which the public actually perceived them. On this basis, my dissertation situates WSP in the history of second wave feminism, thus adding a fresh perspective to the historiography of interconnections between the peace- and women's movements of the twentieth century. My main thesis is that, while many WSP activists recognized the relevance of equality as a worthwhile goal and began to include it in their demands, peace continuously remained at the top of the organization's agenda.