

Gender & Society

<http://gas.sagepub.com/>

Book Review: *Taking Risks: Feminist Activism and Research in the Americas* edited by Julie Shayne

Elizabeth Borland

Gender & Society published online 17 November 2014

DOI: 10.1177/0891243214559512

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://gas.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/11/14/0891243214559512>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



Sociologists for Women in Society

Additional services and information for *Gender & Society* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://gas.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://gas.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

>> [OnlineFirst Version of Record](#) - Nov 17, 2014

[What is This?](#)

Taking Risks: Feminist Activism and Research in the Americas. Edited by Julie Shayne. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2014, 335 pp., \$95.00 (hardcover), \$29.95 (electronic).

DOI: 10.1177/0891243214559512

It is a common experience for U.S.-based academics to face questions and critiques about their motives when they do research in Latin America, ranging from the garden variety “Yankee, Go Home!” to gentler queries about postcolonial biases and how research will benefit Latin American communities. For feminist scholars, such ethical concerns are front and center—as they should be. This interdisciplinary volume considers these challenges and the associated risks feminist activist-researchers face. The foreword by Margaret Randall, a pioneer in merging feminist activism with scholarship in Latin America, introduces the volume as subversive in the sense that it brings together diverse political viewpoints and demands and reinforces rigorous scholarship with meaningful activism. Editor Julie Shayne makes a strong case that reflections of feminist risk-taking of varying kinds and degrees help us recognize both the challenges and benefits that can result. For this reason, the reflexive volume will be helpful to scholars engaging in feminist research in Latin America and other Southern/non-Western contexts.

The book’s 10 chapters originated in a seminar on social justice and activist scholarship held in September 2010. In their introduction, Shane and Kristy Leissle point out that activist scholarship has diverse labels, including “feminist methods; indigenous methodologies; participatory action research or action research; public scholarship; community-based research; engaged or critical engaged research, and emancipatory, antiracist, or antioppressive research” (p. xviii). They argue that the volume serves as an umbrella to cover all these “passion-driven” scholarly approaches (p. xxxi) and call the authors storytellers and story listeners in the tradition of Latin American *testimonios*, a way to document, foster, and advance activism. With this wide umbrella, the volume brings

together the work of artists, writers, poets, social scientists, literary critics and activist academics of various stripes.

Shayne has divided the book into three parts: visual and literary stories and analysis (Part I), performed stories (Part II), and stories of grassroots activism (Part II). By starting with photographs of art by Argentine Nora Patrich (whose wonderful mural is reproduced on the book's cover) and including poetry and fiction by Chilean Carmen Rodríguez, the volume sets the stage for the reader to consider personal stories, and to recognize the nexus between art and activism. The first part also contains chapters that offer critical reflection on storytelling: Mahala Lettvin's piece on learning about collective memories of repression in Argentina as activism, editor Shayne's own research on a feminist magazine produced by Chilean exiles in Canada, and powerful reflections on research on the Independent Libraries Movement in Cuba by Marisela Fleites-Lear, a Cuban immigrant scholar who has encountered challenges "from both sides of the strait of Florida" (p. 93).

The second part of the book will be of particular interest to those engaging in collaborative and community-based projects. It contains a piece on community media in Venezuela (Robin Garcia), reflections on theater projects on femicide in Ciudad Juárez (Christina Marín), and an outstanding chapter by Tamera Marko, who coordinated a large "feminist archival activism" project to document the histories of people displaced by violence in Colombia. The diverse approaches—and challenges—encountered by the authors give the reader a sense for the different forms this work can take as well as the enormous payoff that is possible when scholars are able to organize resources that can sustain community-based projects.

The final part of the book presents grassroots activism from the perspective of academics who worked with grassroots groups. Roberta Villalón's chapter on activist research with a Texas organization helping Latina battered immigrants documents the difficulties faced by the most marginalized, alongside the frustrations Villalón felt as she tried to use her findings to improve the staff's practices. Erica Lorraine Williams' chapter highlights the tensions and methodological challenges she experienced as an African American feminist anthropologist doing ethnographic research with a group of sex workers in Bahía, Brazil. Williams describes how she wrestled with critiques from other feminists and tenure demands, at the same time that she faced risks as a black woman in a "sexualized field site and research topic" (p. 237).

Overall, the volume's interdisciplinary and diverse voices demonstrate that feminist "passion-driven" projects can be found almost anywhere.

The book will be particularly useful to graduate students and others embarking on feminist research projects, for it can help inspire us not to leave our politics aside as we work. The authors' personal reflections provide the reader with the sorts of details you might hear when you talk with another scholar, but seldom read about in an article or monograph. In this way, the editor and authors have also taken risks to tell these stories; as readers, we benefit from their candor.

ELIZABETH BORLAND
The College of New Jersey, USA