

“EVERY WOMAN NEEDS COURAGE”: FEMINIST PERIODICALS IN 1970S WEST GERMANY

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In late 1968, a congress of West German student movement leaders was held in Frankfurt. Helke Sander, a student filmmaker and activist, used the opportunity to give a speech calling out male student activists for their marginalization of women. When the audience booed, Sander's associate Sigrid Rürger rose from the audience and threw tomatoes at high-ranking male students in the front row. With this action, women's groups in several major cities broke away from the male-dominated student movement to begin a new wave of feminist activism known as the *neue Frauenbewegung*, or New Women's Movement.

After Sander's speech to the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) congress, women activists began voicing dissatisfaction with the New Left. Although women had long been involved in West German protest campaigns and organizations, few ever rose to positions of leadership.¹ As in other revolutionary movements, women made coffee,

¹ Nick Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany: A Social History of Democracy* (New York: Berg, 2003), 228.

typed pamphlets, and were available for sex, “the same thing women have always used to comfort tired warriors.”² While the SDS and the student movement preached equality, many women saw it as a “mirror of patriarchal society” in its attitudes towards women.³ Growing tension between men and women within the New Left, largely in relation to sexual practices and the “general treatment of women as second-class citizens,” became “*the* spark igniting the feminists’ own revolution.”⁴

Paralleling other movements in the Western world, German feminists broke away from student politics and declared themselves a separate movement working towards their own vision of liberation. Beginning in the early 1970s, *neue Frauenbewegung* activists organized around issues including reproductive health, “wages for housework,” and social equality. When the *Frauenbewegung* made abortion rights an issue of public debate, it established itself as more than just a New Left splinter group and was recognized as a mass movement. The response to a June 1971 article in the weekly magazine *Stern* demonstrated just how powerful the *Frauenbewegung* had become. “*Wir haben abgetrieben*” (“We have had Abortions”), an article that questioned West Germany’s conservative abortion law and printed the names and photographs of 374 women admitting to have undergone illegal abortions, garnered responses from tens of thousands of men and women who wrote letters and signed petitions

² Hilke Schlaeger and Nancy Vedder-Shults, “The West German Women’s Movement,” *New German Critique* 13 (Winter 1978): 62-63.

³ Ute Kätzel, “Vorwort,” in *Die 68erinnen: Porträt einer Rebellischen Frauengeneration*, ed. Ute Kätzel (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2002), 15.

⁴ Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Mortality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 231; Dagmar Herzog, “Pleasure, Sex and Politics Belong Together: Post-Holocaust Memory and the Sexual Revolution in West Germany,” *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 419.

protesting the BRD's abortion law.⁵ From this point forward, the *Frauenbewegung* asserted itself as a powerful political and cultural force by pioneering new forms of politics, cultural life, and group organization.

Periodicals by and for women played significant roles in the *Frauenbewegung*'s mobilization and consciousness-raising processes. By the late 1970s, a rich collection of thematic journals, lesbian magazines, papers for feminist news, and local newsletters had been generated by women's centres and project groups.⁶ German feminist publishing concentrated in movement hubs including West Berlin, Munich, Cologne, and Frankfurt.⁷ Most early feminist journals, however, did not reach large audiences because of small circulations and concentrated, often regional, focuses.⁸ Many were local publications that lasted only a few issues. Magazines with larger circulations, on the other hand, impacted the women's movement in more noticeable ways because they created journalistic spaces capable of coordinating the movement on a national scale.⁹

The importance of these periodicals to the *neue Frauenbewegung* must be considered in the context of the

⁵ *Stern*, June 6, 1971. See also Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany*, 234.

⁶ Monika Schmid, "Feministischer Blätterwald," *Courage* 2 (1977), 43.

⁷ Frauenforschungs-bildungs-und Informationszentrum e.V. (hereafter FFBIZ), Claudia Weinel, "Die Feministische Presse in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und West Berlin" (MA thesis, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, 1984), 65.

⁸ For average circulations, see Weinel, "die Feministische Presse in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und West Berlin," 71.

⁹ Myra Marx Ferree, "Equality and Autonomy: Feminist Politics in the United States and West Germany" in *The Women's Movements of the United States and Western Europe: Consciousness, Political Opportunity, and Public Policy*, ed. Mary Fainsod Katzenstein and Carol McClurg Mueller (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 174.

movement's concentration on "autonomy." In relation to the German women's movement, the most basic definition of autonomy was political and economic independence from men, the state, and male- or state-dominated institutions.¹⁰ A powerful anti-hierarchical consciousness was expressed through the central goal of autonomy. In a 1982 essay, activist Dagmar Schultz explained that, in West Germany, the Nazi past contributed to a "deep mistrust of possible personality cults, hierarchies, stifling bureaucracies, and rigid programmatic lines."¹¹ These tendencies were reflected in the grassroots approach championed by the autonomous feminists. The BRD's feminist movement, for example, never developed any mass organization comparable to the American National Organization for Women (NOW).¹² Rather, the *Frauenbewegung* was a decentralized movement composed of an "informal network" of women's groups, centres, publications, and projects.¹³ Sociologists have fittingly

¹⁰ Ute Gerhard, "Westdeutsche Frauenbewegung: Zwischen Autonomie und dem Recht auf Gleichheit," *Feministische Studien* 2 (1992): 42; Ursula Nienhaus, "Autonomie und Frauenprojektebewegung," in *der Widerspenstigen Lähmung? Frauenprojekte zwischen Autonomie und Anpassung*, ed. Renate Rieger (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1993), 39-40; Reinhild Schäfer, "Politik der Autonomie: Das Verhältnis der neuen Frauenbewegung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland zum Staat," *Feministische Studien* 15, no. 2 (1997): 120-123.

¹¹ Dagmar Schultz, "The German Women's Movement in 1982," in *German Feminism: Readings in Politics and Literature*, ed. Edith Hoshino Altbach et al. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 374.

¹² For a study of the American women's movement of the same period see Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000).

¹³ Ferree, "Equality and Autonomy," 174.

characterized this structure as “networks of networks” in which no dominant voice was supposed to exist.¹⁴

In their organization and administration, German feminists rejected the traditional politics that they associated with the hierarchical, patriarchal parliamentary system.¹⁵ Instead of fighting for inclusion in the male-identified state, German feminist activists worked to create an alternative female sphere. The rejection of traditional administrative structures meant, however, that autonomous feminists needed new ways to organize and manage projects. To understand how these feminist ideas of autonomy were imagined, perceived, and applied in actual practice, this paper examines the organization and administration of *Courage* and *Emma*, two *Frauenbewegung* publishing projects founded in the later 1970s. Beginning in late 1976, the radical monthly *Courage* was produced by an autonomous collective in West Berlin. In early 1977, the Alice Schwarzer-led *Emma* introduced a professional glossy to feminist readers. The ways in which women chose to organize themselves and respond to each other through these projects articulated an anti-hierarchical consciousness expressed through an emphasis on individual thought and the subversion of a dominant viewpoint.

“Every woman needs *Courage*”

In 1976, ten women from the Lesbian Action Center and the Hornstrasse women’s centre gathered in West Berlin.¹⁶ Mostly students and academics, the young feminists had no journalistic experience or access to funding beyond

¹⁴ Brigitte Young, *Triumph of the Fatherland: German Unification and the Marginalization of Women* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 53.

¹⁵ Young, *Triumph of the Fatherland*, 53.

¹⁶ FFBIZ, BRD 20.11d 1976 (1), Selbstdarstellung, *Courage Frauen*, Juni 1977.

their personal savings.¹⁷ The group responded to perceptions of a need for new forums for women's public discussion.¹⁸ The *Courage* collective wanted to create a journal that would critically report on topics such as advertising, culture, and the women's movement.¹⁹ To keep contributions "diverse and authentic," the collective decided to publish writing by untrained writers as well as professional journalists.²⁰

The project began by filling two rooms with office supplies and coffee cups. Despite their lack of publishing experience and money, the women sold ads, edited articles, and designed layouts to create *Courage's* first issue.²¹ They sold out of the premier issue's first 5000 copies at a *Frauenfest* held in a Berlin pub in June 1976.²² *Courage* appeared in West Berlin kiosks the following September. Mostly black and white, the magazine contained articles about Berlin's Summer University for Women, the Lesbian Action Centre, and Ulrike Meinhof.²³ 12,000 copies were initially printed, but circulation was increased to 22,000 by the third monthly issue.²⁴ *Courage* expanded to national circulation in

¹⁷ FFBIZ, BRD 20.11d 1976 (1), Selbstdarstellung, *Courage Frauen*, Juni 1977.

¹⁸ Gisela Notz, "Courage - Wie es began, was daraus wurde und was geblieben ist," in *Als die Frauenbewegung noch Courage hatte: die 'Berliner Frauenzeitschrift Courage' und die autonomen Frauenbewegungen der 1970er und 1980er Jahre*, ed. Gisela Notz (Bonn: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2007), 25.

¹⁹ Notz, "Courage," 26.

²⁰ FFBIZ, BRD 20.11d 1976 (1), "Mutige Courage," *Basler Magazin (der Basler Zeitung)*, 17 September 1977. AT.

²¹ FFBIZ, BRD 20.11d 1976 (1), Selbstdarstellung, *Courage Frauen*, Juni 1977.

²² Notz, "Courage," 27.

²³ *Courage* 0, June 1976.

²⁴ "Dossier 1976," *Frauenmediaturm*, accessed 20 September 2009, <http://frauenmediaturm.de/sechsuundsiebzig.html>.

January 1977.²⁵ One year after the magazine's first issue, monthly circulation had grown to 60,000 in the BRD, Austria, and Switzerland.²⁶

The *Courage* women wanted to create an alternative magazine for women active in and outside of the women's movement.²⁷ A range of opinions and ideas were expressed through *Courage's* regular reports on culture, society, the women's movement, and careers. Features provided information about topics such as home birth and prostitution. Classified advertisements, letters from readers, and information about upcoming events contextualized the body of *Courage's* content.

The *Courage* collective's autonomous organizational strategy meant that the women rotated through the jobs associated with the magazine's production. They took turns in layout, editing, advertising, accounting, and office work.²⁸ This method gave all women involved an opportunity to learn and participate in all publishing tasks. The collective chose this method because, they argued, when an individual held skills and knowledge that others did not, that knowledge brought authority, and experts gained power. The rotation system was therefore meant to prevent the development of hierarchical power structures based in expertise.²⁹

The collective's choice not to work exclusively with professional writers also reflected their anti-hierarchical consciousness. In 1979, 66 percent of *Courage's* articles were

²⁵ FFBIZ, A Rep 400 Berlin 20 von Brot und Rosen ca 1970-Sommeruni 1980, "Courage jetzt bundesweite," *tsp* 30 January 1977.

²⁶ FFBIZ, BRD 20.11d 1976 (1), Presseerklärung, die Courage Frauen.

²⁷ Notz, "Courage," 26.

²⁸ FFBIZ, BRD 20.11d 1976 (1), Selbstdarstellung, Courage Frauen, Juni 1977.

²⁹ "In eigener Sache," *Courage* 3, March 1977.

written by readers.³⁰ They were not selected according to political position, as the collective did not have a rigid political program. Instead, the magazine was intended to function as an “exchange of thoughts” between editors and readers.³¹ Occasionally, articles taking unpopular positions were published.³² The editors, however, did not necessarily support all ideas they published, and articles were selected based on “background, experience, knowledge, or curiosity” rather than political alignment. The group did not indicate whether articles were “right” or “wrong” because they saw this as a “bourgeois” tactic. Instead, ideas were shared so readers could decide for themselves whether or not to agree with them.³³

An anti-hierarchical consciousness was expressed through the collective’s rejection of expertise and carried over into many areas of the magazine. The rotating duties of collective members applied a fluid form of administration to subvert internal hierarchies. By publishing articles by nonprofessional writers, journalistic experience became less important than discussion. In these ways, the autonomous organizational strategies applied by the *Courage* collective created a journal whose variable editorship worked to subvert hierarchical power structures and promote individual thought.

Emma: A Magazine by Women, for Women

On 29 September 1976, a group of Cologne women mailed an open letter to women’s centres across the BRD

³⁰ Sandra Abelson Zagarell, “Courage, Emma: You Can Read Two Feminist Magazines Each Month in the Federal Republic of Germany!” *Women’s Studies Newsletter* 7, no. 1 (1979): 26.

³¹ FFBIZ, BRD 20.11d 1976 (1), Selbstdarstellung, Courage Frauen, Juni 1977.

³² Notz, “Courage,” 35.

³³ “In eigener Sache,” *Courage* 12, 1977.

announcing their plans for a new feminist monthly scheduled to appear that December. They were led by Alice Schwarzer, a high-profile German feminist activist, journalist, and bestselling author, whose book profits made up two-thirds of the magazine's starting capital. The periodical, to be called *Emma*, would focus on "women's themes" and act as a forum for women. *Emma* was to be run by a group of female editors and have fewer advertisements than most commercial magazines.³⁴

On 26 January 1977, 200,000 copies of the first issue of *Emma: A Magazine by Women, for Women* appeared in kiosks across the BRD.³⁵ The full-colour magazine could be bought for 3 DM, and within hours, it had been sold out of many newsstands.³⁶ *Emma*'s first issue featured an interview with actress Romy Schneider, television reviews, and profiles of historical feminist figures.³⁷ Due to the first issue's success, circulation increased to 300,000, 83 percent of which sold, for the second issue in March.³⁸

In direct contrast to *Courage*'s emphasis on debate, *Emma* cultivated "mass acceptability with an interest in reformist politics."³⁹ This push to make feminism widely acceptable prompted *Emma*'s organizers to create a publishing structure compatible with established methods. *Emma* was organized traditionally in that a staff of professional journalists worked under Schwarzer's leadership. The *Emma* group justified this decidedly hierarchical

³⁴ FFBIZ, A Rep 400 BRD 20.11d 1976 (1), Brief von der Emma Frauen, 29 September 1976.

³⁵ FFBIZ, A Rep 400 BRD 20.11d 1976 (1), "Neu an der Frauenfront: Emma," *die Zeit*, 28 January 1977.

³⁶ "Emma über Emma," *Emma* 2, March 1977.

³⁷ *Emma* 1, February 1977.

³⁸ Die Emma-Frauen, "Emma über Emma," *Emma* 5, May 1977.

³⁹ Miriam Frank, "Feminist Publications in West Germany Today," *West German Critique* 13 (Winter 1978): 182.

organization by arguing that that it was made necessary by their desire to be competitive with established commercial magazines in a male-dominated market. In order to prove themselves and gain respect, they argued, *Emma* would “have to be better” than magazines run by men.⁴⁰

In a women’s movement that championed anti-hierarchalism, it is interestesting to note the degree of Schwarzer’s influence over *Emma*. Her financial contributions gave Schwarzer a significant stake in the project from its earliest stages, of course, but her influence extended beyond a financial interest.⁴¹ In addition to acting as the head editor, Schwarzer was also *Emma*’s leader and public face. She appeared on the cover of the premier issue, and she was featured in most media coverage.

Schwarzer’s position let her use the magazine as a vehicle for her views. In stark contrast to *Courage*, little reader opposition was reproduced in *Emma*. While exceptions certainly existed, the great majority of the published feedback took a “lachrymose, uncritical tone” and did not criticize or question *Emma* or Schwarzer.⁴² These editorial tactics worked to construct a fixed perspective and the appearance of a consensus within the women’s movement when, in reality, a commitment to autonomy and its associated values of anti-hierarchicalism and individual thought had built the movement on a foundation of debate and differing ideas.

Emma encountered resistance from movement activists even before the first issue appeared. Since *Emma* was traditionally organized and used professional journalists, the

⁴⁰ FFBIZ, A Rep 400 BRD 20.11d 1976 (1): Brief von der Emma Frauen, 29 September 1976. AT.

⁴¹ FFBIZ, A Rep 400 BRD 20.11d (1), Barbara Veit, “Gegenfront aus den eignen Reihen” *die Süddeutsche Zeitung*, October 1979. AT.

⁴² Frank, “Feminist Publications in West Germany Today,” 183. For the reader debate about wages for housework, see “Lohn für Hausarbeit,” *Emma* 7, July 1977, 42-43.

responses of autonomous feminists were a reflection of their anti-hierarchical attitudes. Autonomous feminist publishing projects were some of the first to protest. In late 1976, the *Courage* collective criticized Schwarzer's financial domination and work with journalists. Contrasting *Emma*'s organization to their own, they emphasized their organization as best suited to feminist publishing projects.⁴³ The *Courage* collective continued to challenge *Emma*, publishing a slew of critical articles in 1977.⁴⁴ By characterizing *Emma* as a different, less desirable type of project, *Courage* worked to reinforce the association of anti-hierarchical strategies with feminist publishing projects.

Schwarzer visited the Berlin women's centre in October 1977 to address these tensions. At a meeting of 300-400 women, Schwarzer was attacked for her perceived commercialization of the women's movement, her work with male publishers, and for her resistance to working with *Courage*.⁴⁵ Several autonomous groups instigated a widely-supported boycott of *Emma* the same year.⁴⁶ The *Emma* women responded by denying the accusations and characterizing the campaign against them as defamatory and motivated by personal rivalries and political positions.⁴⁷

Although many feminist activists criticized Schwarzer's organization, *Emma*'s all-women staff represented a strong political statement against the male-

⁴³ "In eigener Sache," *Courage* 2, October 1976

⁴⁴ See *Courage* 2 1977, *Courage* 6/7, June/July 1977, and *Courage* 8, August 1977 for some examples.

⁴⁵ FFBIZ, A Rep 400 Berlin 20 FZ (4&5) & 6, Berlin 20 Frauenzentrum Interne Diskussion (1974-1976) Sammlung Ursula Haseche, Renate Richter, Ursula Nienhaus, Brief von die Emma-Frauen, 27 November 1976.

⁴⁶ FFBIZ, A Rep 400 BRD 20.11d (1), Anruf zum Boycott!!! AT.

⁴⁷ FFBIZ, A Rep 400 Berlin 20 FZ (4&5) & 6, Brief von die Emma-Frauen, 27 November 1976.

dominated commercial press of the later 1970s. The importance of the *Emma*'s commitment to being "by women, for women" was demonstrated in July 1978, when the magazine announced its plans to release an issue written completely by men. The idea was not well received. By October, readers' protests were powerful enough to postpone the male-written issue indefinitely.⁴⁸ Although gender exclusivity alone does not constitute an autonomous organizational strategy, reactions to this proposal strongly suggest that, for many readers, *Emma*'s women-only staff was a feminist political statement. The editors' decision to cancel the male-directed issue demonstrated that they too were concerned with maintaining *Emma*'s image as a publication supported by the feminist movement. Despite *Emma*'s disconnection from the anti-hierarchical ethos characteristic of autonomous approaches, the commitment to a women-only journalistic space distinguished the decidedly feminist magazine in the male-dominated mainstream market.

Emma occupied, and continues to occupy, an important and complex place in the development of feminism in the BRD. Despite facing continued criticism from its target audience, *Emma* was a successful publication. Through the late 1970s, autonomous feminist criticisms of Schwarzer and her magazine continued, focusing on her leadership and administration. *Emma*'s consistent, moderate feminist viewpoint, its detractors argued, discouraged individual thought in favor of an imagined consensus. Autonomous feminists, who were working to cultivate an anti-hierarchical consciousness and embrace the complexity of individual opinion, rejected Schwarzer's message and position and what those represented.

Despite these criticisms, *Emma*'s readership remained high, and stabilized at about 130,000 per month by August

⁴⁸ Zagarell, "Courage, Emma," 25.

1977. This level, although lower than the first few issues, was still more than double *Courage's* September 1977 circulation of 60,000.⁴⁹ Just as important as the circulation numbers, however, was the differences in the ages of *Emma* readers and *Courage* readers. A 1984 study of the West German feminist press found that, in inverse patterns to those seen with traditional women's magazines *Brigitte* and *Freundin*, more than 80 percent of *Courage* readers were younger than 29, 56 percent were active in women's centres and/or groups, and another 43 percent reported "some form" of participation in the *Frauenbewegung*. 62 percent of *Emma* readers were younger than 30 and a further 25 percent were between the ages of 30 and 39.⁵⁰ While *Courage* readers were more likely to be 20-something activists, more *Emma* readers were in their 30s and were less likely to be active in the women's movement. Levels of exposure to feminist ideas and arguments stand out as another difference between these two audiences. Whereas readers with less experience participating in feminist politics might not have developed the consciousness to engage *Courage's* critiques, *Emma's* less confrontational approach was more accessible.⁵¹ *Emma's* accessibility was important to its success, but it also revealed the ironic position of the magazine within the feminist movement: its success was built upon the rejection of the complexity of individual choice, the belief upon which the feminist movement was founded.

In contrast to *Emma*, despite its many early successes, *Courage* never managed to become financially sustainable. In

⁴⁹ In addition, a 1984 study found that 45 percent of *Emma* readers read *Courage* and 70 percent of *Courage* readers read *Emma*. Weinel, *die feministische Presse in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und West Berlin*, 59.

⁵⁰ Weinel, "Die Feministische Presse in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und West Berlin," 59.

⁵¹ Frank, "Feminist Publications in West Germany Today," 183.

the 1980s, persistent underfunding and escalating debts were not resolved by appeals to readers.⁵² After two and a half months as a weekly publication, financial conflicts led to the collapse of *Courage* in late May 1984.⁵³ *Emma*, on the other hand, remains in print with a circulation of about 120,000 readers bimonthly.⁵⁴ With *Emma* as her vehicle, Schwarzer continued to gain prominence through campaigns and public appearances. Despite the many early attacks, *Emma*'s longevity and circulation demonstrates the relatively long-lasting appeal of Schwarzer's feminist message.

In the cases of *Emma* and *Courage*, feminist concerns about the rise of a dominant faction express the centrality of independent thought and choice. The *Courage* collective prevented a single viewpoint from becoming dominant by publishing a wide spectrum of opinions. The representation of unpopular ideas led to rich discussion and debate that encouraged readers to choose their own positions for themselves. In the case of *Emma*, it was the *neue Frauenbewegung* activists' opposition to Schwarzer's editorial and financial dominance that reinforced the centrality of autonomy. Unfavorable responses to professionalism and hierarchical management reveal autonomous feminist anxieties over the limitation of individual agency through prescriptive viewpoints. By enforcing the idea that women's spaces should be both independent and organized in new ways, *Courage* and *Emma* demonstrate a powerful connection between anti-hierarchical organizational methods and autonomous organizational principles in the *Frauenbewegung* during the later 1970s.

⁵² Notz, "Courage," 46-7.

⁵³ Notz, "Courage," 46-7. See also *Die wöchentliche Courage* 21, 25 May 1984.

⁵⁴ Ricarda Strobel, "Die neue Frauenbewegung," in *Die Kultur der 70er Jahre*, ed. Werner Faulstich (Germany: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2004), 269.