

**HISTORY OF *The International Network on Feminist Approaches to Bioethics* (FAB)
GLEANED FROM HER NEWSLETTER
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FAB's tenth birthday offers an opportune moment to revisit the birth of FAB and review the initial impetus that brought FAB into being and the goals envisaged by her founders. Why did feminists Anne Donchin and Helen (Becky) Holmes feel called to create this Network?

It was 1992. Anne Donchin, philosophy professor and women's studies scholar at Indiana University, had been growing increasingly distressed over the tepid agenda and exclusionary practices of the burgeoning field of bioethics. The prevailing theory failed to encompass the standpoints and experiences of women and other marginalized social groups. Despite documentation of numerous instances of physician abuse and neglect of such groups, hidden presuppositions in the dominant discourse continued to endorse the privilege of the powerful. Anne perceived a strong need to create new methodologies and strategies responsive to the disparate conditions of women's lives around the globe. She recruited Helen Bequaert (Becky) Holmes, a biologist and independent women's studies scholar, to help her establish an international network to advance these goals.

Announcement of the creation of the International Association of Bioethics (IAB) opened up just the right organizational opportunity. Anne approached Dan Wikler, one of the IAB's founders, who offered to present to their board her proposal to establish a Network on Feminist Approaches to Bioethics. Following board approval, she and Becky set to work compiling a list of over seventy feminists who were writing and researching in fields related to bioethics. In July 1992, Anne sent invitations to these feminists announcing the formation of a Network and a gathering at the First World Congress of the newly created IAB. Some sixty responded, forming a core group of charter members. At the Congress in Amsterdam in October, Anne met with a small group of feminists at the side of an auditorium (despite a number of responses to the IAB invitation to form networks, facilities were clearly inadequate). FAB was launched! The Dutch women present have been a vital component of the Network ever since.

In November of 1992, Boston area participants met with Anne and Becky. In December Anne sent the core group a brief report of the Congress, an amplification of the aims and scope of FAB, and an outline of its organizational structure. Anne and Becky led the group as co-coordinators for the next four years.

NEWSLETTER

***The Newsletter of the International Network on Feminist Approaches to Bioethics (NIN-FAB)* launched its initial semi-annual issue in July, 1993 with Rosie Tong (philosopher, then at Davidson College) as editor and Hilde Nelson at the Hastings Center as copyeditor and layout manager. Over the course of the newsletter's initial four years, Becky valiantly struggled through the production process, with intermittent help from a few stalwarts. Rosie continued as editor through 1995, then Becky edited a single 1996 issue. For these initial four years, members' voluntary contributions sustained *NIN-FAB's* printing and mailing expenses. Then in 1997, through the intervention of Margaret (Maggie) Little, (Kennedy Institute of Ethics, Georgetown University, Washington, DC) the Newsletter finally acquired much needed institutional support. *NIN-FAB* became more professional, printed on heavier paper with a more artistic layout. Maggie still oversees the editing process and the Kennedy Institute continues to subsidize the cost of publication.**

From the beginning *NIN-FAB's* front page has featured "From the Desk of . . .," a column written by one or both of the coordinators to announce late developments and future events. In subsequent pages *NIN-FAB* often highlights FAB's forthcoming conferences and books in press. Columns in which "approaches" to bioethics have been analyzed include "world"-traveling (1(1):1993); the use of

dilemmas (1(1):1993); a web model of relationships (1(2):1994); teaching medical ethics in the U.S. heartland (2(1):1994; 3(1):1995); treating job candidates as persons (3(1):1995); and managed care and disempowerment (5(2):1997.

FAB's international members have written short pieces on ethics legislation and women's health issues in such countries as France, Austria, Germany, New Zealand, Russia, Argentina, India, Ukraine, and Japan. Several issues contain lively reports from conferences: in Israel, Argentina, China, Brazil, Italy, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as Canada and the United States. *NIN-FAB's* special large issue after the conference in Japan (7(1):1999) includes a section called, "Emerging Voices in Feminist Bioethics," which raises stimulating global issues. It features expanded summaries of papers by authors whose travel from South Africa, Argentina, and The Philippines was funded by the Ford Foundation grant. Brazilian member Debora Diniz with the support of ANIS, the feminist NGO in Brasilia, translated this and subsequent issues into Portuguese.

Each Newsletter also contains calendars of upcoming events, courses, and calls for papers; information on FAB officers and how to contact them; pleas for contributions; and news about the web site and listserv. For each of the first five issues, Becky prepared a bibliography of pertinent journal articles, but as feminist bioethics burgeoned this became too overwhelming a task.

Throughout *NIN-FAB's* history the book review section has been a strong feature, with Becky as book review editor from 1993 through 1997, then Hilde Nelson until mid-2002, followed by Alison Brookes in Melbourne. Through May 2002, 69 reviews have appeared; 43 of the books were written or edited by FAB members. Fifty-three loyal FAB supporters contributed their time and talents to write these reviews.

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

From her inception, FAB has been committed to a nonhierarchical structure, avoiding the traditional leadership pattern that concentrates power in a few hands. For this reason the term "coordinator" instead of "president" was chosen. Power is shared; FAB works by a web of relationships, which strives to value everyone for their unique contributions to the success of FAB. This rationale is well described by Bruce Weinstein (1994) in "Spinning a Web" in the second issue of *NIN-FAB*. Alas, at times, FAB's founders, Anne and Becky, may have appeared peremptory, particularly in defending the nonhierarchical structure itself!

Anne and Becky served as co-coordinators from 1993 through 1996, when, an election was held at the first International FAB conference. Gwen Anderson was elected co-coordinator to replace Becky and serve with Anne through the end of 1998. These co-coordinators then were replaced with RosieTong (now at the University of North Carolina/ Charlotte) and Laura Shanner (University of Alberta) until 2001, when Sue Sherwin (Dalhousie University) replaced Laura. In keeping with FAB's egalitarian, noncompetitive model, the nominating committee proposes only one candidate for each position but members are free to nominate additional candidates at the Business Meeting of the FAB conference preceding distribution of the ballot. This policy was put in force in 1998 when a nominating committee recruited the team of coordinators and proposed a slate of Advisory Board members and again in 2000 and 2002.

From the inception FAB's leadership has relied heavily on a network (web) of strongly committed members for expertise, critical judgment, and professional skills. But no formal Advisory Board existed until 1997, when Anne and Becky invited some of FAB's long-term and active members to form one. Since then FAB's Board has been of invaluable assistance to the Coordinators both in implementing established policies and formulating new ones. The coordinators are also responsible for recruiting talent for the non-elective offices of Treasurer, Membership Secretary, Coordinator of Country Representatives, Newsletter Editor, Listserv Facilitator, and Web Site Facilitator. In order to facilitate coordination the FAB members who perform these jobs also serve as ex officio board members.

Until 2000 FAB muddled along with no written policies; her administrative decisions relied on personal memory and hearsay, "this is how we did it last time . . . ". Coordinator Rosie Tong has made an outstanding contribution through her insistence that FAB develop an institutional memory by committing policies to writing. Now even the old stalwarts who feared that we were joining the ranks of the bureaucrats are compelled to admit that the process of organizing explicit procedures has been a valuable exercise and absolutely essential to FAB's future.

CONFERENCES

Not content to rely again on IAB's informal network meetings, Anne put together a "Feminist Approaches to Bioethics" panel at the 1994 IAB Congress in Argentina. Then at last FAB decided to hold her own international conference in conjunction with the 1996 IAB Congress in San Francisco. This program, organized by Anne, was a huge success: "For never before has there been such an intense concentration of feminist bioethicists under a single roof" (Donchin 1997). Much strenuous reorganizational work was accomplished in the business meeting during that conference. Revised versions of a number of the papers presented there appeared in the first FAB anthology, *Embodying Bioethics: Recent Feminist Advances*, edited by Anne and Laura Purdy (1998).

A team led by Gwen organized the program for FAB's second international conference in November, 1998, in Tsukuba Science City, Japan, immediately preceding the IAB World Congress in Tokyo. Thanks to the mediation of some of our international members, Anne won a Ford Foundation grant to cover travel and accommodations for 15 delegates from developing countries. Despite annoying logistical problems, the program, with speakers from 12 countries, was an immense success. For the first time, Euro-American speakers found themselves in the minority. Rosie, with Gwen and Aida Santos, edited the conference papers for the second FAB anthology, *Globalizing Feminist Bioethics: Women's Health Concerns Worldwide* (2001).

In September 2000, Rosie organized the program for FAB's third international conference, again to precede an IAB Congress, this time at Imperial College in London. Mary Rorty, aided by Gwen, produced program text, and Laura Shanner provided preconference and on-site leadership. Some 140 attenders from 23 countries heard papers presented by speakers from 18 countries. Thanks to the superb IAB organization the conference functioned smoothly and generated dynamic momentum even though it was more 'anglo' than the Japan conference since roughly half the registrants were from English-speaking countries. Anne was invited by the editor of the journal *Bioethics* to guest-edit an issue comprised of a selection of papers based on presentations at this conference. Plans were also set in motion for another anthology based on conference papers, but complications compelled the officers to defer this project until after the 2002 FAB conference.

FAB continues to maintain its original connection with the IAB, and one of our own, Sue Sherwin, has just completed two terms on the IAB board 1995-2000, now replaced by another long-time FAB member, Florencia Luna. In order to facilitate communication between FAB and the IAB, the FAB/IAB board member serves as an ex officio member of FAB's Advisory Board. Of course, anyone may join FAB without joining IAB, and FAB's structure and policies are not affected by this loose affiliation -- although without IAB membership it is not possible to vote in their board elections. FAB has benefited tremendously from conference logistic arrangements negotiated by IAB in San Francisco, Tokyo, and London.

Over the years FAB has also sought to have a definitive presence at non-IAB conferences. Such get-togethers include affinity group meetings and shared meals at sessions of various bioethics conferences including the Canadian Society for Bioethics, the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities (ASBH), its various precursor societies, and the "megameeting" of four associations in Pittsburgh in 1994. This latter event included a non-FAB "Women's Networking Luncheon" and a more successful informal FAB meeting Saturday evening (Holmes and Rorty 1995). In that same city, the previous year, the Feminist Ethics and Social Policy Conference included fifteen FAB member

presenters with Selma Sevenhuijsen from The Netherlands as a plenary speaker (Perlman et al. 1994). FAB's informal dinner and lunch meetings recruited some new members and thanks to Corinne Bekker's generous offer, the FAB e-mail listserv was inaugurated at the University of Utrecht. Corinne continued to function as listserv manager until Hilde Nelson took on the job in 1999.

FAB has also organized panels with FAB members and explicit FAB themes at four non-bioethics conferences. In August, 1994, the FAB session at the Tenth World Congress on Medical Law in Jerusalem, included speakers from FAB's Canadian and Japanese membership (Boetzkes 1995). FAB was honored when a Canadian member, Elisabeth Boetzkes, was awarded the Maccabi Prize for one of the 20 outstanding papers at the Congress. Following elaborate preparation, FAB panels were mounted at the meetings of the American Public Health Association in 1997 (Indianapolis) and 1998 (Washington, DC). In August, 1998, in Boston, Massachusetts, FAB's panel at the Eighth Symposium of the International Association of Women Philosophers (IAPh) was entitled, "Genetics, Ethics, and Society: Feminist Approaches." It was chaired by Mary Briody Mahowald and comprised Anne and Becky (U.S.A.) and Barbara Nicholas and Sylvia Nagl (New Zealand)

MEMBERSHIP AND FINANCES

From the start, no "dues" were required to join FAB, only completion of a written form that specifies FAB's purpose. Men who identify as feminists have always been welcome. Male membership currently comprises some nine percent. The original intent of the policy to waive dues was to encourage membership of low-income scholars and avoid the expense of international exchange for members around the globe. Of course, despite our nonelitist goals we recognized the need for funding and in the fall of 1992 to encourage donations we applied for tax-exempt status (in the U.S.). A generous anonymous donation of \$6000 provided seed money. But we needed a name too. After groping for a fitting image we decided on "The Audre Lorde Memorial Fund for Bioethics Research." Why Audre Lorde? Because she taught us so much through her courageous struggle to come to terms with her affliction, and she so fully embodied the feminist ideal: to make one's work continuous with her lived world.

Initially, FAB relied primarily on the in-kind contributions of our officers and members. Until 1997, when the Kennedy Institute began to subsidize *NIN-FAB*, the bulk of our expenses went for printing and mailing that Newsletter. More recently the Fund covers out-of-pocket expenses for officers who lack adequate institutional support, student assistance for web site construction, database maintenance expenses and, most important, travel grants to supplement other sources of support for members who are presenting papers at international conferences. Unfortunately, FAB's coffers are slim, since only some 29 percent of her (currently 385) members have ever contributed.

With limited financing and volunteer workers, keeping an accurate membership roster has been a challenge. In 1994 FAB had 100 members in 14 countries. By 2000 FAB had grown to 385 members. In the early years students at Indiana University, Indianapolis, helped Anne maintain the list. It languished at Harvard for one year in 1996 and then moved to the Kennedy Institute. However, keeping membership records added too heavy a burden to *NIN-FAB* production, so in early 1999 the roster moved to Becky in Amherst, Massachusetts, where student assistants maintained it. Currently the job is handled by Membership Secretary Lenore Kuo and a database-maintenance firm. From mid-1999 to late 2001, the directory of members was posted on the web.

INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH

In founding FAB, Anne and Becky were determined that it should have a global reach. To implement that vision, members were recruited to act as "country representatives." The initial group included The Netherlands (Selma Sevenhuijsen); Canada (Abby Lippman and Sue Sherwin); and Australia (Susan Dodds and Gail Tulloch). One year later, representatives from Austria, India, New Zealand, and the UK were added. The list has increased apace: in May 2002, nine years after the first reps enlisted, FAB boasts representa-tives from 20 countries. Clearly, keeping in touch with

reps and soliciting their input on FAB policies is a formidable task for the coordinators. So the position of Coordinator of Country Representatives was created in early 1999 and is carried out with dedicated zeal by Wendy Rogers from Australia, now in Scotland.

THE ELECTRONIC FAB

In early 1994 Corinne Bekker set up the listserv at the University of Utrecht to stimulate cyberspace conversation. In 1999, Hilde Nelson facilitated its move to the University of Tennessee. When she moved to Michigan State University in mid-2000, it moved with her; its URL is <fablist@list.msu.edu>. The list is monitored to eliminate spam and petitions. Though the listserv has not been heavily used, it has prompted some good interchanges. FAB's web site was set up at the Kennedy Institute in 1998 under Maggie's tutelage and moved in 1999 to Charlotte, North Carolina, under Rosie's care. Since mid-2000, it is at Michigan State University, facilitated by Hilde and webmistress Alison Crane: its URL is <www.fabnet.org>.

FEMINIST ANALYSES OVER THE YEARS

The idea that feminists could and should produce a distinctly feminist analysis of issues in bioethics had its genesis in the late 1970s with two anthologies produced by Becky Holmes, Betty Hoskins, and Michael Gross (1980; 1981) from the proceedings of a conference funded by the National Science Foundation, "Ethical Issues in Reproductive Technology: Analysis by Women." These books were followed in 1984 with *Test-Tube Women*, edited by Rita Arditti and colleagues. Both projects rested on the foundation laid by the Women's Health Movement, especially the innovative and fruitful work of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective. The Movement and the Collective had been spurring feminist ethical analysis since the 1960s, particularly in areas where women are vulnerable to a patriarchal health care system (Dresser 1996)

In 1989 feminist bioethics took a more systematic and philosophically grounded turn with the publication of two issues of the feminist philosophy journal *Hypatia*, guest-edited by Becky Holmes and Laura Purdy. These essays were reorganized to become the 1992 book, *Feminist Perspectives in Bioethics*. Concurrently, Sue Sherwin published her groundbreaking volume, *No Longer Patient: Feminist Ethics and Health Care* (1992). In this classic work, Sue developed feminist bioethical theory and methodology in new directions that circumvented the dominant utilitarian and deontological approaches and clearly illustrated major shortcomings of mainstream bioethics. An important thread throughout her book is the ethical imperative that bioethicists recognize oppressive practices and devise strategies to alleviate them.

Also in the early 90s The Hastings Center (currently in Garrison, New York) undertook a project in feminist ethics, coordinated by FAB member Susan Wolf. Though it was not devised explicitly as a FAB project -- The Hastings Center chose the participants --, some did happen to be FAB members. Susan's edited book from that project, *Feminism and Bioethics: Beyond Reproduction*, appeared in 1996. Susan, like many other FAB members, was concerned that, although mainstream bioethics acknowledged women's analyses of reproductive issues (where direct experience could not be disregarded), it neglected women's voices on other topics. In her introduction to the book, Susan presented a strong argument to show that mainstream bioethics had been impoverished by ignoring feminist theory and perspectives.

By 1995 the wider bioethics community began to recognize the existence of (and perhaps the importance of) feminist approaches. In March, 1995, The Kennedy Institute of Ethics at Georgetown University entitled its annual Advanced Bioethics Course, "Feminist Perspectives on Bioethics." Again by chance, the faculty included five FAB members. The large attendance involved participants from 14 countries (deRenzo 1995). In 1996 mainstream journals took some notice of feminist approaches: two issues of *The Journal of Clinical Ethics* had sections edited by Rosie Tong (volume 7, #1 and #2). Maggie Little edited volume 6 #1 of *The Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*. And *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* set plans for two special issues (which appeared in 1996 and

2001). Finally, bioethics conferences in Canada and the United States, which were not officially organized by FAB, began to include sessions with "feminist bioethics" in their titles.

In this time span two charter FAB members published collections of their previous work: Laura Purdy (1996) and Julien Murphy (1995); member Susan Wendell (1996) produced a groundbreaking feminist analysis of disability issues. In 1997 Rosie Tong published a detailed book-length analysis comparing feminist approaches to nonfeminist ones with regard to both theory and specific applications. And more recently feminist analysis has been extended globally via the two edited FAB anthologies and the *NIN-FAB* section in 1999 (7(1):4-18), which featured abstracts of presentations given in Japan by participants who were funded by the Ford Foundation grant. More recently the journal *Health Care Analysis* published a special issue "Feminism and Bioethics," edited by Mary Mahowald, which included articles by eight FAB members (volume 9 #2, 2001).

Canadian feminists have probably gone further than feminists in other countries in both ethical analysis of and activist proposals to advance women's health status. Two interdisciplinary groups, which included FAB members, obtained grants from the Social Science and Research Council of Canada: the Feminist Health Care Ethics Research Network and the Canadian Working Group on Women and the New Genetics. The excellent report from the first group (Sherwin et al 1998) examines the medical problem-solving model, critiques its disregard of social conditions, and clarifies two key concepts of women's empowerment -- agency and autonomy. Looking back over their efforts to influence government policy, they reflect on the obstacles to implementation of published reports, noting how rarely they lead to policy reforms and amended practices.

In sum, between 1990 and 2001, FAB members published some 80 books on bioethics topics that took account of feminist perspectives (either directly or indirectly). They are listed under "bibliography" on the FAB web site, and 43 of them have been reviewed in *NIN-FAB*. These books and their authors have brought the topic of feminist bioethics to center stage.

ADVANCING OUR MISSION?

So what has FAB accomplished in its first ten years? Is the recognition of feminist bioethics in journals and conference sessions a development that might have come about without FAB's influence? Certainly many who consider that they're doing feminist work have not joined FAB. But the really crucial question is whether the word 'feminist' may not sometimes be used as a device for silencing new approaches by seemingly admitting them to the mainstream. Do editors and conference organizers see feminist bioethics as merely another "special interest" to be politely acknowledged and then ignored? Surely, FAB has the potential to counteract such evasion and it is her clear mandate to do so. We should take heart in the influence we have had on the projects of graduate students and young scholars in many related disciplines but stay ever vigilant lest we be misunderstood to be promoting merely "a special ethics for women." As feminist bioethics matures we need always to be mindful of our central mission: to encompass perspectives and experiences of women and other socially marginalized groups with a view to examining existing premises in the prevailing bioethics discourse that benefit those in positions of social power.

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