

Mid-American Review of Sociology

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WOMEN AND MEN FROM MARS:
EDITORS OF THE *MID-AMERICAN REVIEW OF SOCIOLOGY**

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As we celebrate the centennial of the department of sociology at the University of Kansas, it seems appropriate to remember not only the faculty of the past, but the students as well. A graduate student run journal (first entitled the Kansas Journal of Sociology and later the Mid-American Review of Sociology) has existed since 1964. As far as we know, it is the only current graduate-student run sociology journal, other than the Berkeley Journal of Sociology, which makes the endeavor here at the University of Kansas unique. This article relays the impressions of former editors about their experiences with the journal.

In 1976 the *Kansas Journal of Sociology* became the *Mid-American Journal of Sociology* with the efforts of Wayne Derx as Managing Editor and Cynthia Flynn as the faculty advisor. Since then the journal has had ten other editors: Prudence O' Keefe, Alan Johnson, Herbert Haines, Michael G. Lacy, Renee M. Zimmerman, Robert John, Patrick Akard, Christopher Bohling, Tracy X. Karner, and Mary E. Kelly. The authors were able to interview ten of the eleven editors through letters or phone conversations, to find out what their experiences as *MARS* editors were like.

THE BIRTH OF MARS

Many of the editors of *MARS* have emphasized the importance of Flynn to its beginnings. Lacy credits her for many of the defining features of the journal (many of which have subsequently been changed by current editors, much to the chagrin of past ones).

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They would also like to express their gratitude to Alan Sica for showing them the beauty of archival research.

As the new assistant professor, at a time when *KJS* (*The Kansas Journal of Sociology*) had gone into cardiac arrest (1974-5), she had the idea to model *MARS* after the *Inter-Mountain Economic Review* (which was a graduate-student produced, consortium supported journal edited by her brother-in-law). Cindy was the organizing force during the resuscitation, and was the origin of the consortium idea.

Derx agreed that Flynn was instrumental in obtaining higher status and more subscriptions for *MARS* than the *KJS* ever had.

Flynn also helped create the format of the journal. The practice was to have a lead article written by a faculty member with all other articles written by graduate students. In the words of Haines, the purpose of the "lead articles by big names was to lend an air of legitimacy and 'class' to the journal." According to Johnson, the focus of the journal was to provide a forum for graduate student publication, particularly first time efforts. The student authors, however, could only be from one of the consortium schools in the *MARS* network.

Haines found this somewhat limiting, as did subsequent editors. To get around this limitation, according to Lacy, John developed a "Notes and Comments" section which included submissions from students attending non-consortium schools.

TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

MARS continues as a unique journal because its articles are mainly written by graduate students. Many of the editors have spent a great deal of time helping authors rewrite their papers. In fact, that help has sometimes been more extensive than the editors would have liked. Haines recalls having to accept a paper which was in need of substantial revisions,

Unfortunately for me, the author was not good at using an editor's general comments to do most of the work himself. With the deadline pressing down, I had to do most of the work on the paper myself. I almost felt entitled to co-author status!

Lacy also remembers having to substantially rewrite articles, "I thought it greatly ironic that I was essentially *giving* a publication to someone who was incompetent, but I had an august sense of self."

Bohling recalls problems with his editorship, as well. One problem was that commitment to the journal took away from other academic duties. Bohling, as well as other editors incurred problems with the actual printing of the journal. Some of these problems ranged from a discontinuation of the type-setting services, to printing services mistakenly delivering journals to the *MARS* office. Meanwhile, Bohling and Kelly went to pick them up as they had

pre-arranged. Then printing services tried to charge *MARS* for their delivery services!

There has often been a problem trying to solicit enough publishable submissions, as well as trying to raise sustaining funds. With the exception of Lacy and Haines, who received quarter-time pay for their efforts, none of the other editors received monetary compensation for their work. The difficulty in finding adequate articles is best expressed by Lacy, Johnson, Haines, and Akard, respectively: "Hell, we felt lucky to get anything publishable;" "We didn't have the luxury of choosing from too many articles;" "My problem at the time was simply coming up with enough good articles to fill an issue;" as well as a desire for "any publishable article." However, Bohling and Knapp solved this dilemma by having thematic issues, a solution that Karner and Kelly also utilized. More recent editors accept publications outside of the consortium, but charge a processing fee.

ANECDOTES AND MEMORIES

Many of the editors had a difficult time remembering any particular anecdotes from their tenures. One of Lacy's memories, however, led to the title of this essay. He recounted how a previous editor (he couldn't remember who) "had a torn *MARS* candy wrapper for a sign on the door for a whole year, which led to John Harms coining the moniker 'the man from *MARS*' for the editor".

Cynthia Flynn was responsible not only for the creation of *MARS*, but for the cover as well. Flynn decided to sponsor a contest in the design school and give a small monetary award to the winner. The *MARS* staff selected the design of a vaguely humanoid creature with arrows emanating from its body. This was enclosed in a circle, which in turn, was enclosed in a square. Derx maintains that at one time the design had a meaning, but he has forgotten it. None of the other editors could remember it having any special meaning either.

The cover of *MARS* was changed in 1990. Several of the editors were displeased with the change in cover because they believed that tradition was being tampered with. Karner and Kelly changed the cover because they thought the journal needed a more contemporary look, little suspecting that they would receive such a strong reaction. This time, however, the cover was designed in house by Karner.

Bohling recalls a special issue on the American farm crisis. It combined articles from academics as well as rural activists. While he is proud of that issue, he regrets that they couldn't include all of the articles sent in. He would like to see more issues like that one, as well as a concentration on critical sociology. Bohling fears that the journal may become too mainline. Since there are plenty of mainline journals, he believes *MARS* should be a journal for critical midwestern sociology.

John remembers an incident when *MARS* printed a translation of a piece by Max Weber. This angered Guenther Roth, the translator of most of

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Weber's works, because he believed that he was the only person capable of translating Weber. Although John invited him to criticize the translation publicly in *MARS*, he never did.

Lacy recalls a decision to start charging extra for foreign subscriptions because at least one-third of the surface-mailed issues were "being turned into the subscription agencies as 'failed to arrive.'" Surface-mail took months, "so, we [Lacy and the staff] just decided to bite the bullet and go air-mail-only for foreign subscribers. (This cost an extra \$3.00 per issue mailed.) The subscription increases to cover this seemed a momentous and risky decision at the time." Today, *MARS* still charges extra for air-mail foreign subscriptions and there has yet to be a protest.

THE RISE AND FALL OF *MARS*

Renee Zimmerman has been credited for initially getting *MARS* on its feet financially, and for helping to institutionalize the journal. During her tenure, five sponsoring institutions were recruited. She produced brochures describing *MARS* and printed flyers soliciting additional articles.

Although Derx could not decide if his tenure as *MARS* editor was a beneficial experience, he wanted to support the journal because he thought it was an important way to encourage publications. All of the other editors interviewed, however, deemed it as a beneficial experience. Many expressed the belief that it not only provided experience in editing and publishing articles, but that it also gave one a sense of the publication process, improved organizational skills, and was a justification for making editorial remarks. Lacy, for example, uses his editorial background when he has "a joint project with someone who is a weak writer and is uptight about it [because he] can always preface [his] comments with a remark like 'I hope you don't mind, I used to be a journal editor.'"

John expressed his pleasure in retaining the job of Editor-and-Chief longer than any of the other editors. Graduate student interest began waning at this time, and John, Akard, and Bohling found it increasingly difficult to elicit work from both the graduate students at KU and the consortium members.

In 1989, Bohling, then Editor-in-Chief, and Tim Knapp, Managing Editor, decided that staff interest in keeping the journal going had diminished beyond their capacities to continue publishing it. In an attempt to relocate the journal, they sent letters to all the consortium members. Unfortunately, no one wanted the responsibility of producing *MARS*. Bohling and Knapp decided to cease publication due to lack of time and interest of other departmental members. (Certainly more than two people are needed in order to produce a journal!)

At this time, a new cohort of graduate students joined the department. Several of them dedicated their time to enable *MARS* to continue publishing. Among those students were Kelly and Karner. They convinced the department to donate office space and a used computer. Karner came up with a centennial theme for the renewed journal. She and Kelly solicited articles from former

members of the KU department, to commemorate its centennial. Reviving *MARS* was important to both Karner and Kelly as they felt they were keeping a vital part of the graduate student tradition alive.

Currently, Kelly is the editor of *MARS*. She expressed her concern over the continuation of the journal. She plans on completing her Ph.D. by 1993, and is hopeful that by then *MARS* will be able to attract a new editor by providing a stipend. Kelly believes that increased pressures for graduate students to publish has made students less ready to commit the time and effort to publishing the journal. However, she feels that a graduate-student run journal can only benefit students by providing them an opportunity to write, edit, and publish articles in a supportive atmosphere. She agrees with Pat Akard that *MARS* is as good as any other regional journal and that, with support, it could become even better.

In reading these experiences from the past editors of *MARS*, the difficulties in publishing a journal have come forth. The most evident problem has been the time commitment necessary to publish each issue. The *MARS* staff do not receive pay for their services. Without this type of incentive, finding people to commit their time will remain difficult. The beauty, however, of seeing the journal completely published will always outweigh the challenges incurred in getting it there. Hopefully, this will be enough to maintain the commitment to publishing it.