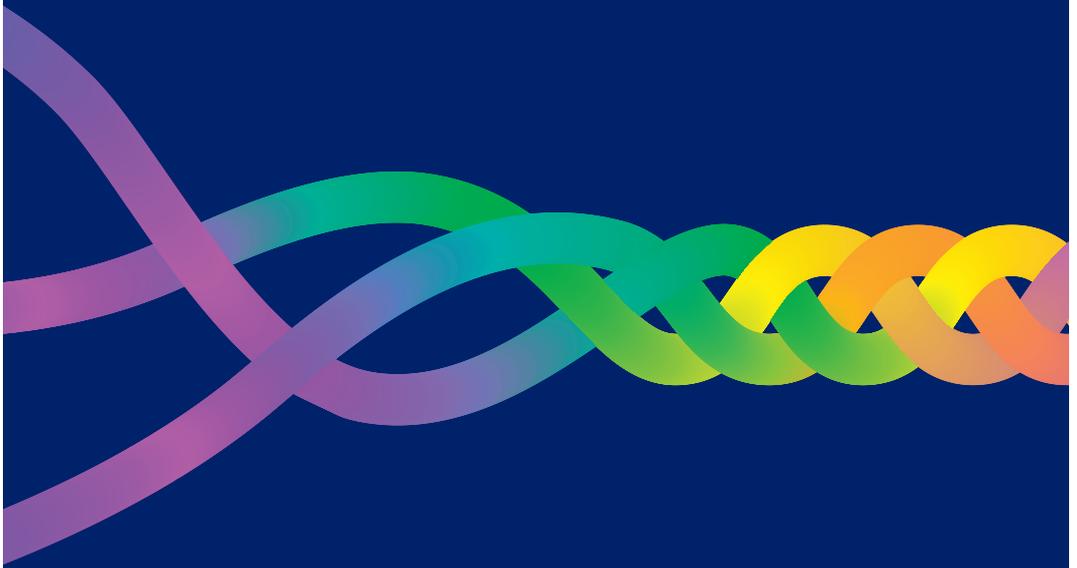


Section 3

Feminist Collaboration in Action



The pieces in this section share not only common themes, but also a common format. Eschewing the conventional single-authored, monovocal form of standard academic writing, they present a multi-authored dialogue in different voices. Rather than simply talking about “feminist collaboration in action,” we, the authors of this section, demonstrate through our choice of form what such collaboration *looks* like, how it *feels*, what it *does*. Feminist collaboration, these pieces show us, entails a particular approach to work: one that involves speaking with and to one another; listening, not just holding forth. Feminist collaboration means sharing authority across a range of different positions: valuing the process, not just the product. These written dialogues also theorize theory, while demonstrating a healthy skepticism toward its potential to distill, and thereby simplify, women’s lives and feminism—things that are highly complex, politically subversive, and inescapably real. In the multiplicity of voices that emerges here, we theorize in order to create a framework for understanding feminist practice and, perhaps more explicitly, feminist collaboration.

Integral to this process is female friendship. Revealing how friendships emerge out of shared work and intensive dialogue, the dialogic approach modeled here both reflects and participates in the process of building relationships. Female friendships, we affirm, are central to feminist practice. They create a sense of community to help overcome the experience of isolation that hobbles so much academic work. They allow us to be honest with one another, to share rather than hide our vulnerabilities. They build trust that we will be listened to and the hope that we will be heard. The relationships we create with one another—as teachers, scholars, and individuals—are an essential element of feminist practice. As we illustrate, they shape everything we do: how we teach, how we write, and how we conduct administrative business. At the same time, the feminist practices that bring us together now also connect us, transhistorically, to other traditions in women’s writing: the *Briefwechsel* of the eighteenth century is linked to and recreated in the email and videoconferencing of the twenty-first century.

While friendship is central to all three pieces, competition is a fascinating undercurrent that runs through them as well, one that cuts at least two ways: feminist work has the potential to resist negative forms of competition while it also participates, sometimes unconsciously, in it. These pieces nod to the institutional and structural forces that create (and, some would argue, demand) competitive dynamics, and raise questions about how competition intersects with feminist practice. Is competition anti-feminist per se? Does or can feminism—or at least feminist work—contravene in the neoliberal structures that enforce competition? What could or would *feminist competition* look like?

Feminist collaboration, we argue, reconfigures how we understand work. However, as we make evident, it doesn't just mean that our work is different. It also means that the demands on us increase. Attending to needs and commitments in our personal lives (as parents, spouses, domestic partners, friends, and as caretakers of parents, other relatives, or household pets) in addition to needs and commitments in our professional lives (as teachers, mentors, supervisors, colleagues); finding consensus instead of decreeing top-down; engaging in dialogue instead of submitting a monologue—all of this extends the boundaries of what we take as “our work.” The cost is evident. Reconfiguring work in this way demands more time, energy, and attention. Why do we do it, then? Is the effort worth it? The answer, in all three pieces, is an unequivocal and passionate: yes! We find community to counter isolation and to support the search for a meaningful work-life balance. Incorporating pleasure into our work renews our energy; being able to laugh—and yes, cry—together sustains us emotionally. In all these ways, feminist collaboration is literally transformative, as a practice and as a promise: it changes the very forms of our work. It imbues us, as Liz/Lisa so beautifully put it, with “a sense of invention, of newness, of possibility” (159).