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WINTER BROWN BAG SEMINARS INSIDE

WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAM
NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
VOL. 4 No. 1 January-February 1979

ON TEACHING WOMEN'S STUDIES

Feminist education, like feminism itself, is a constantly evolving process, changing and expanding as new insights are developed and experiences are shared. Some of the problems faced by women's studies teachers are those faced by all educators, who are still struggling with basic questions: what should students at various levels be expected to know? how best to facilitate this learning? to what purpose should people be educated? In addition, feminist educators have an added agenda. The constitution of the National Women's Studies Association defines women's studies as "the educational strategy of a breakthrough in consciousness and knowledge." In the classroom, this means helping all of our students to achieve an awareness of the sexism of our society; for the women, our special task is enabling them to gain pride in their female heritage and equipping them to participate in society as whole, productive human beings. But even this is not the full extent of our collective goal. We hope that our students, having had their own consciousness raised, will act as change-agents and activists in the broader society. As the NWSA constitution goes on to say: "The uniqueness of women's studies has been its refusal to accept sterile divisions between academy and community, between the growth of the mind and the health of the body, between intellect and passion, between the individual and society."

This is a tall order, and those who are teaching women's studies are at various stages of understanding these goals and figuring out how to achieve them in the classroom. For a smaller number of us who are teaching interdisciplinary classes in "women's studies" (as opposed to women's history or women's art), there are the added difficulties of defining the goals of the class and working with material which is outside of the discipline in which we were trained. Most women's studies programs have tried to deal with this problem by something called "team teaching," with varying degrees of success. In theory, "interdisciplinarity" can be achieved either by two or more people from different disciplines teaching together, or by one person teaching the course from a broad, interdisciplinary point of view. In practice, my experience has been that both methods have their limitations, and I am still searching for the best way to teach the two courses offered by our program. The "Senior Seminar in Women's Studies," which Jane Hawley and I taught for the first time this year, will spend the entire last evening (over wine and cheese) talking about what went right and what went wrong, and we are counting on our students to help us plan for the next time around. (Incidentally, these ten women, our first group to "graduate" from our program, have been a joy to work with and I am sure I will look back on this experience longingly.)

PROGRAM NOTES

Because I have been actively involved in learning how to teach women's studies, I read everything I can about the subject. Much of it is repetitious and involves examples of what not to do, but recently I read something which I found useful: Ellen Morgan writing "On Teaching Women's Studies" in a special edition of the University of Michigan Papers in Women's Studies (Fall 1978), which is in our Resource Center. The central question she asks is this: given the fact that our classrooms do change and transform the values of a significant number of our students, do we help them then to live in the society ready to participate in social change, or do we merely succeed in alienating them from their culture and then just leave them there? My own experience with students in the introductory women's studies course is that a few feel liberated for the first time in their lives from the conflict and guilt of not having been able to fulfill sexual stereotypes or family expectations. Many of the women feel a new sense of being part of a struggling sisterhood, and see their own problems in a broader, more political context. All of these are positive and strengthening effects, I also have seen the anger and estrangement that Morgan talks about. Indeed, all feminists to some degree live with the tension of trying to lead sane, productive lives by making accommodations with the sexism (and racism and other destructive "isms") of our society while still maintaining our integrity and trying to change that society.

Morgan has specific suggestions as to how we can prepare our students (and ourselves) for this situation, drawing on relevant facts, theories, and perspectives which psychology, sociology, history, literature, and other disciplines can contribute. They need to learn something of the psychology of alienation, she says, so they can gain a better understanding of their own processes and are better able to deal with them. (Speaking from her own years of experience in the women's movement, she talks of people going from alienation into activism without anticipating the psychic toll they will pay, the need to provide opportunities for psychic rest and pleasure in order to prevent burnout, and the necessity to include achievable, short-term goals in their long-range plans.) The sociology and social psychology of role change should be part of the curriculum, so that students can better understand a society in transition. Here, cross-cultural studies can be particularly helpful. They also need to learn about the kinds of behavior oppressed people have historically adopted in trying to change their situation. All of these areas of study will prepare them for the kind of resistance they will meet from today's non-feminists and for the dynamics among today's feminists. Finally, we need to help them learn something about criteria for distinguishing among and wisely selecting types of action, to avoid repeating past mistakes.

In fact, many of these efforts are going on in our various women's studies classes, but Morgan offers a useful interdisciplinary, holistic view that is helpful to me, for example, in thinking about the goals for the introductory class we will offer next fall.

Blanche Hersh

AMONG NEW ADDITIONS TO RESOURCE CENTER:

The Nonsexist Communicator: An Action Guide to Eradicating Sexism in Communication; The Chicana Feminist: A series of essays and public presentations prepared for recent Chicana feminist activities; Ten Notable Women of Latin America by Henderson and Roddy (1978); Job-Sharing Portfolio: A booklet of general information, articles, reports, and bibliography.

Please Post

BROWN BAG SEMINARS FOR WINTER 1979 - TUESDAYS AT 1 PM

Sponsored by the Women's Studies Program at Northeastern Illinois University. Informal discussions will alternate with special programs on women's issues. Men as well as women are invited. Bring a bag lunch and drink; coffee will no longer be available.

January 23 SEXISM IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE CC216

Dr. Sandra Styer of Early Childhood Education will show some of the slides she has prepared for her new course, "Non-Sexist Strategies for Parents and Teachers of Young Children," to be offered May-June, and talk about what to look for in choosing children's books.

February 6 ABORTION COUNSELING: A VIEW FROM INSIDE CC216

Arlene Williams, wife of President Ron Williams, has been working for several years as a counselor at Park Medical Center, the abortion clinic chosen as a model in the recent Sun-Times-B.G.A. investigation. She will talk about her experiences there and answer questions.

February 20 MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS CC216

This discussion will be led by Dr. Carol Becker of the School of the Art Institute, who taught "Political Autobiographies of Women" here last year. She will talk about the recent literature on the complex mother-daughter relationship, and how it has added a new dimension to the women's movement and given women an important new focus for exploring their psychological and cultural identity. She will be teaching a PIE/WSP course on this subject in May-June.

March 6 "SALLY GARCIA AND FAMILY" CC217

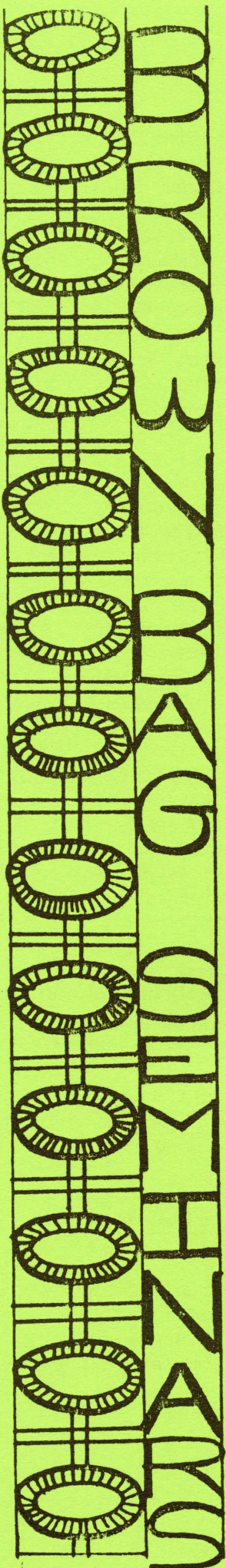
This is a new film by Joyce Chopra about the ambivalence felt by a middle-aged woman who has happily raised a large family and now decides to go back to work.

March 20 THE PROBLEMS OF WORKING WOMEN CC216

Discussion leaders will be Dr. Mary Ann Schwartz, President of the AFT union on campus, and Ms. Bronwen Zwirner of the executive board of the Coalition of Labor Union Women, who works for the education department of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union. This discussion will be of special interest to women on the civil service staff.

WINTER HOURS FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES RESOURCE CENTER, CLS0-041

Monday 9:30-12:30, Tuesday 11-1, Wednesday 4-7,
Thursday 9-11.



DOCUMENTING SEXIST PRACTICES ON CAMPUS

On October 27th, the first meeting of all the women's programs on campus was held: the Women's Studies Board, the Women's Services Board, and the Feminist Club. They decided that as their first priority, they would attempt to document the various sexist practices that occur on campus, both institutional and individual. Examples of these are sexual exploitation of women, sexual coercion of women, and language or jokes that defame women. The subcommittee charged with collecting evidence has prepared a form to allow women to document their experiences of sexist practices. Copies of this form are available from the Women's Studies Office, C-523, the Women's Services Office, B-114, and from Sherry Bell, in the Special Education Department Office, 4-058, who chairs the subcommittee with Ellen Jergens. These forms should be filed by 30 January 1979, and may be submitted anonymously.

WOMEN'S STUDIES BOARD

The board has always been an active one, but this year has taken on an even larger number of projects. Of the three standing committees, only the Elections Committee will operate routinely. The Academic Committee, chaired by Paula Wolf, has taken on the task of considering all new courses before they go to the board for cross-listing. The closely-related Evaluations Committee, chaired by Sandra Styer, will consider the evaluations that come back from our classes, and prepare for the five-year evaluation of our program in early spring. Several ad hoc committees are also active. The Committee for Nonsexist Communication, chaired by Martha Thompson, is planning a research project to determine the extent to which the textbooks used on campus are sexist. The Committee on Sexism in Education, chaired by Nancy Green, has acquired a set of six tape cassettes on Sex Stereotyping in Education, accompanied by instructional materials, and will publicize their use in the College of Education. Other activities are outreach to civil service staff (Shirley Rovner) and to Third World Women (Sarah Hoagland and Amalia Monterroso). The students on the board have also been meeting as a committee to present their concerns to the board (Carolyn Bieszczat and Julie Foreman). The Feminist Study Group has developed a life of its own and is meeting twice monthly with Edith Couturier as convener. Anyone interested in any of these areas can contact the persons mentioned.

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PROGRAM NOTES
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