

NEWSLETTER

The Center for the Study of Women and Sex Roles

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FAIR SCIENCE, FEMINISM AND THE REIGNING TRUTH

On February 28th, Naomi Weisstein, Professor of Psychology at SUNY, Buffalo, spoke on "Fair Science, Feminism and the Reigning Truth -- 'How Can a Little Girl Like You Teach a Great Big Class of Men?' the Chairman Asked -- Adventures and Further Adventures of a Woman in Science". The first portion of her talk was a personal and humorous account of the obstacles she encountered as a woman in science. The second portion, illustrated with slides, dealt with her current research on the neural basis of vision. Her work points to the active role played by the brain in structuring visual input and to the hitherto unsuspected sensitivity of single neurons to context. In her concluding remarks, printed here, Weisstein discussed the general relationship of feminism to science.

"...What does scientific 'wonderland' have to do with feminism?

That's a question a lot of people have asked me since the new wave of feminism. Since the sixties.

In the sixties, the question sounded like this:

'Yeah, well, science is boring but if you're studying women, well, I guess, that's something. I hear they have no left hemispheres in their brains, just right hemispheres, non-verbal, intuitive, you know, isn't that right?'

In the seventies, the question sounds like this:

We understand you want women to be able to enter science; you want all people to have access to their human inheritance. That's clear. But the science itself? How can that be feminist if it's not about women? Science is science, man. Er, woman.

Here, very briefly, is how my science can be feminist even though I'm not directly studying women.

First, my feminism leads me to treasure diversity and to respect pluralism. Women suffer from exclusion in science; so do many men. Science is a profession that tends to shroud itself in obscurity and then to relish the exclusion that results. It's another way of maintaining power. But to the extent that science excludes, it is in jeopardy. Diversity, difference, deviance: we won't have good science until we have these. Not just because exclusion causes such suffering; also, because diversity and deviance and difference is the only way our knowledge of the brain will be advanced.

I'm convinced of that.

Brain science is frontier science: we don't know yet what kind of scientific imagination is needed to grapple with the kind of complex problems presented by intelligent systems. Excluding anyone on the basis of the old conceptions of what makes a good scientist is perilous.

But there's an even closer connection between my feminism and my science: the idea of human agency. A humanist assumption about humans is that they attempt to shape and control their world, that they actively search, cope, battle, strive, look hope, see. The connection between this and my science isn't straightforward, but it is clearly there: I suspected that I wasn't the only activist in the family. I suspected that the single brain cell was an activist, too.

It didn't seem right to me that all those nerve cells would just sit around and wait. There's too much going on out there. Too much to figure out, too much to understand. Neither nerve cells nor people just sit around and wait: We're in there figuring out why, how, what to do next.

So the idea of active nerve cells is one way my feminism influences my science. There's another way. My feminism reminded me that if I assumed that the single nerve cell was stupid, it would be stupid. If I didn't assume intelligence in an intelligent, active system, I wouldn't find out anything useful about that system. I would not only insult the system: I wouldn't learn what it can do. How can a little nerve cell like you teach a great big class of men? I had to ask the nerve cell better questions than that.

So, ultimately, 'wonderland' is part of my feminist humanist vision. Part of my conviction that our need to understand our world in a better and more complete way than it's been understood before lies at the essence of our humanity--in the very structure of our brains--and it is a trait that we have which seems to give us some glimpse of what we might be and what we might do in a better world. In my vision of a just and generous society, along with love and joy and honor and dignity, science will be there. Leeuwenhoek with his lenses, Franklin with her x-rays. They will be there.

And we will be there, too. We will train a generation of women scientists to enter that 'wonderland', to find their welcome in it, to call it theirs. For so long, women have been denied this treasure. For so long, women have been marginal to science. For so long, women have not been allowed to be scholars, scientists, movers, makers of change. Never again.

We will be there. You will find us in that wonderland, women as movers, wonderers, truth seekers, makers of change. We will make our presence known. It is our human inheritance and it is our joy. It will not be denied."

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Announcements

Ruby Rohrllich, Faculty Associate of the Center, and Diane Lewis of the University of California, Santa Cruz, have received an NEH grant to direct a seminar in the Summer of 1980 at the University of Santa Cruz on "Historical and Conceptual Linkages Between Gender Roles and Race Relations". The participants will be teachers at two-year colleges.

The Conference on Women Composers, to be held at the Graduate Center on May 2, has been funded in part by "Meet the Composer". The conference, sponsored by the Center for the Study of Women and Sex Roles, is being co-ordinated by Adrienne Fried Block.

Nan Bauer Maglin, Borough of Manhattan Community College, Department of English, received an NEH fellowship for 1979-80. She is attending the NEH seminar at Columbia University, "Minorities and Community", and working on ethnic women's literature about cities.

"Women and Writing: Getting To It" is a seminar designed for women who want to write but have a difficult time beginning. The cost of the four week course is \$25.00; the instructor is Judy Sandra. For information, call 646-6800.

Aids for Grant Writers

The Women's Action Alliance and Women and Foundations/Corporate Philanthropy have developed a network of volunteer professionals from private philanthropic organizations, to provide proposal critiques and professional grants advice. The volunteers offer written critiques and in some cases, meet with members of the organization to provide follow-up advice. Additional information is available in the Center, or from Women's Action Alliance, Fundraising Technical Assistance, 370 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017. The service is provided only for groups and organizations, so you must have a sponsoring organization for any individual projects. If you lack a sponsoring organization, and are interested in becoming affiliated with the Center for the Study of Women and Sex Roles, please call or stop by the Center.

The Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor provides free single copies of their publication "Looking for a Grant: A Kit for Groups Seeking Financial Assistance". Write to: Women's Bureau Regional Office, U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1515 Broadway, Room 3575, New York, New York, 10036.

Grant writing workshops on Women's Educational Equity will be held in Camden, New Jersey and in Boston this spring. The Camden workshop will take place on April 13-17; the Boston one on May 20-22. The workshops are tuition-free; but participants must provide their own housing and transportation. Information and applications are available in the Center, or from Far West Laboratory, 1855 Folsom Street, San Francisco, 94103.

Announcements

"Women: Public and Private Spaces" is the theme of a special double issue of Centerpoint (Summer/Fall, 1979). The issue includes the edited transcripts of the conference on "Women and the Arts: Public and Private Spaces", which was sponsored by the Center for the Study of Women and Sex Roles. Contributors include Elizabeth Hardwick, Catharine Stimpson, Elizabeth Janeway, Anne Southerland Harris, Louise Bourgeois, Flora Kaplan and Maria Irene Fornes. Edited by Rosette Lamont, Susan Saegert and Flora Kaplan, the issue also contains articles by Mariam Slater and Andree Chedid. Individual copies of the special issue are available from Centerpoint, 33 West 42nd Street, New York, 10036, for \$3.50; subscriptions for individuals are \$12.00.

Charlotte Delbo, French author and playwright, will speak on April 10 on "European Literature of the Holocaust" in room 207. Her work, "Kalavrita's Thousand Antigones," translated by Rosette Lamont, will appear in the special issue of Centerpoint, "Women: Public and Private Spaces".

The National Women's Studies Association will hold its second annual conference at Indiana University, May 16-20, 1980. The conference, titled "Women: Educating for Change", will bring together women from around the country to address the issues of feminist education. Women from a variety of backgrounds, lifestyles and professions are expected to attend. The New York Women's Studies Association meeting will be held on March 21-23 at Ulster County Community College, and will be titled "Bridges and Barriers to Women's Networking". For more information, write to Edith Serles, Dean of Faculty Office, Ulster County Community College, Stoneridge, New York 12484.

Employment Opportunities

Wellesley College invites applications for the position of Director of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. The position requires a creative and enterprising social scientist with a distinguished record that includes research on issues of significance to women, scholarly publications, administrative skills, and experience with sponsored research. The Director should have the capacity to develop and sustain innovative programs, the ability to present the Center's program to a wide variety of audiences, and a personal style that inspires and supports colleagues. A letter of application, accompanied by a curriculum vitae should be sent to Search Committee for the Director, Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College, Wellesley Massachusetts 02131. The deadline for applications is March 7, 1980.

The Southwest Institute for Research on Women seeks an Associate Director. She/he is charged with developing research projects and grants involving scholars in the Southwest Region. She/he will also assist the director in all SIROW activities including research seminars, maintaining a regional research clearinghouse, and writing a newsletter. The candidate should have a doctorate in social sciences or humanities, with a strong evidence of emphasis on women. Send a letter of application, resume and three letters of recommendation to: Myra Dinnerstein, Director, SIROW, 209 Mathematics Building, The University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, 85721. The deadline for applications is April 1, 1980.

The National Women's Studies Association will host a job information exchange at the National Conference on May 16-20. The exchange will help employers and job seekers share information on positions and qualifications. Further information on the project, and a form for employers, can be obtained from Job Information Exchange, Women's Studies Program, Hohmann House, SUNY, New Paltz, New York 12562.

The Newberry Library will offer the Monticello College Foundation Fellowship for Women, for work in residence at the Newberry Library in Chicago. The application deadline is March 15, and **preference** will be given to those whose work is concerned with women. For information, contact the Committee on Awards, Newberry Library, 60 West Walton Street, Chicago, Illinois, 60610.

The Environmental Psychology Program at the Graduate Center is looking for a part-time secretary (20-25 hours per week). If interested, please call Maddy (Administrative Assistant), 790-4551.

In honor of International Women's Day, March 8, the CSWSR will sponsor a book exhibit in the display case on the 18th floor of the Graduate School. The exhibit will feature works by authors associated with the Center or the Graduate School which pertain to women and sex roles. Authors represented include: Barbara Berg; Adrienne Fried Block; Renate Bridenthal; Jan Clausen; Florence Denmark; Cynthia Epstein; Laura Gordon; Jane Lazarre; Eleanor Leacock; June Nash; Katherine Rogers; Ethel Tobach; Gaye Tuchman.

HEIDI HARTMANN

Thursday, March 20, 4 p.m.

Room 207

"Housework as an Example of Gender, Class and Political Struggle"

Heidi Hartmann is a Research Associate at the National Academy of Science, working on women and employment discrimination. Formerly of the New School for Social Research, Political Economy Program, she has been active in the Union of Radical Political Economists and in the women's movement for many years. She is the author of "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism" and other articles in Marxist-Feminist theory.

RAYNA RAPP

Thursday, April 24, 4 p.m.

3rd Floor Studio

"Thinking About Sex as a Social Relationship"

Rayna Rapp is an Associate Professor on the Graduate Faculty at the New School for Social Research. She is the editor of Toward an Anthropology of Women and the author of numerous articles on feminism and family history. Rayna Rapp is also active in the Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse.

MARCH 1980

All events take place in Room 1400 of the Graduate Center, unless otherwise noted.

- Tuesday, March 4 11:45-1:15: Tuesday Noon Lunch, 18th Floor Dining Room.
Meet in Room 1400 before going upstairs.
- Tuesday, March 11 11:45-1:15: Tuesday Noon Lunch, 18th Floor Dining Room.
Meet in Room 1400 before going upstairs.
- Thursday, March 13 4:00: Conversation Hour. Ellen Ross will speak on "The Love Crisis: Couples' Advice Literature of the Late '70's." Presentation and informal discussion in Room 1401.
- Friday, March 14 3:00: Seminar on Feminist Methods of Inquiry. Doris Meyer of Brooklyn College will present work from her new biography of Victoria Ocampo. New members are welcome.
- Friday, March 14 5:30: Opening Reception for the Conference on Asian/Pacific American Women's Educational Equity, at the First Women's Bank.
- Saturday, March 15 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.: Asian Pacific Women on the Move: Strategies for Educational Equity Conference. Speakers, and
Sunday, March 16 General Sessions, and Workshops. For more information, and registration, write or call the Center, attention Angie Cruz.
- Tuesday, March 18 11:45-1:15: Tuesday Noon Lunch, 18th Floor Dining Room.
Meet in Room 1400 before going upstairs.
- Wednesday, March 19 7:30: Rosalyn Yalow, Nobel Laureate, will speak in the Auditorium on the uses of radioactivity in the service of humanity.
- Thursday, March 20 4:00: Heidi Hartmann will speak on "Housework as an Example of Gender, Class and Political Struggle" in Room 207. Reception follows.
- Tuesday, March 25 11:45-1:15: Tuesday Noon Lunch, 18th Floor Dining Room.
Meet in Room 1400 before going upstairs.
- Thursday, March 27 4:00: Women and Health Research Seminar. Topic: menstruation. Faye Ginsburg will show a videotape on menstrual rituals among Orthodox women in a Syrian Jewish community in Brooklyn; Mary Parlee will discuss psychological research on the menstrual cycle. Room 1401.

The Seminar on Multinationals and Women's Health will also meet in March. Call Ruby Rohrlich, 874-6884, for information.