

Work in Progress

THE ECOLOGY OF SEX ROLES

My own research and that of others tells us that girls and boys, women and men conceptualize and use their homes, neighborhoods, cities and suburbs differently. Girls are kept in or near the home; they have more trouble finding their way in the outdoor environment and frequently score lower on a variety of measures of spatial ability. Boys explore more, build more, and experience less parental control as they learn about their environment. As adults, women have been found to be more affected by the opportunities and constraints provided by the environment near their homes, while men seem to feel freer to use and construct the world outside the home, and thereby obtain a higher level of immunity to its restrictions. Of course, this is more true for men with money and status, but it tends to be a characteristic difference between men and women in many classes and cultures.

As an environmental psychologist I am examining how assumptions about sex roles are reified in physical environments and how these environments, in turn, reinforce such assumptions. I am working on two projects that attack these issues quite differently. Jerry Maltz and I are analyzing a study of sixth grade girls' and boys' (1) conceptualizations and uses of their home, school and neighborhood environments; (2) their own and their parents' expectations and preferences for their use of environments; (3) their cognitive representations of the environment and (4) their performances on tests of spatial ability. In addition, we are trying to discover whether the girls' physical/spatial knowledge of their homes differs in any systematic way from that of boys, and whether this is related to differential modal uses and conceptualizations of the home. In this and future work, I hope to examine in social/physical context the dominant belief that females' frequently lesser abilities in spatial cognition have a biological origin. (A paper co-authored with Roger Hart presents the background of this research in detail: "The Development of Environmental Competence in Girls and Boys," Center for Human Environments publication, 1977).

My second project has a much less academic base. I have been acting as a consultant for an architecture and planning firm commissioned by the Denver Housing Authority to suggest strategies for developing housing in downtown Denver. My job has been to determine what new demands on residential planning might arise from women's increased participation in the labor force. My previous research disclosed negative qualities of existing urban and suburban environments that particularly affected women; differential needs and preferences for residential environments of men and women in both city and suburb, and generally greater satisfaction with housing among suburban men, compared to all other groups. I found that women generally prefer urban locations and place less value on single-family homes and ownership. (An article in Signs, Spring, 1980, elaborates this theme.)

In Denver I have focused on trying to understand the needs of women for housing and services. Demographic data indicates that the two groups most in need of public housing assistance are predominantly female: single parents

and elderly people living alone. The next phase will be to conduct a housing survey among people working in downtown Denver. We are bringing together community leaders and agents from the public and private sectors to determine strategies for further development and financing of downtown housing.

At an early point in the project, I began with other women to organize discussions with women in Denver about their needs for housing and services. Representatives of this group have begun to define roles for themselves in the development process. At this point I have several questions: (1) to what extent can this particular city respond to the physical environment and service needs of women, particularly working women? (2) will working parents come to define their needs as political demands, as the elderly have? (3) if women are more dependent upon their environments, how can they become more significant in shaping them? (4) why were so few women involved initially in this planning project?

During the course of this work I am repeatedly reminded that housing is not a "women's issue." However, I would argue that the homemaking and care-taking roles women traditionally play have made up for what otherwise might have been very inhumane environments and policies. Women's labor force participation and any real equality in political participation of women and men raises questions about the future willingness and ability of women to thus cushion the effects of the environment. These and other questions are among the topics I will cover in a course on "The Ecology of Sex Roles" in the Environmental Psychology Program, Fall, 1980.

Susan Saegert
Ph.D. Program in Environmental Psychology

New Projects

A new project involving Professors Emeritae and other retired CUNY staff in the work of the Center for the Study of Women and Sex Roles has been initiated. Rita Guttman, recently retired from the Biology Department of Brooklyn College, is acting as coordinator.

The project aims to recruit from a pool of untapped talent and energy those who would be interested in creative, productive work of a feminist character. Such work might be scholarly or activist, and based on the individual's expertise and experience. The participants will enjoy complete freedom in the choice of topic and methodology. The Center is ready to aid with advice on applications for funding and possible affiliation with the Center, if the project is accepted by the Center. The response so far from women of rich and varied background and experience has been enthusiastic. For further details, phone Rita Guttman at 855-0841.

Barbara Katz-Rothman has received a National Endowment for the Humanities summer stipend for her study of "Models and Ideologies in Maternity Nursing".

Judith Lorber was awarded \$7,000 from the American Association of University Women under the Fellowships to American Women program to support her research on female and male physician's careers.

Graduate Students' Activities

The Feminist Students Organization (FSO) is sponsoring a meeting on "Women's Words: A Workshop on Feminist Publishing" on Monday, May 12, in room 207. At the workshop representatives from Signs, Feminist Studies, Heresies and other journals will discuss the aims of their publications and their criteria for acceptance of articles. The event will run from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. with a reception following. On Thursday, May 15, the FSO will present Elly Bulkin, a co-editor of Amazon Poetry: An Anthology and an editor of Conditions magazine. She will speak on contemporary feminist poetry at 2 p.m.

The Feminist Students Organization was established this spring for students from all disciplines who are interested in feminist scholarship at CUNY and who are concerned about the needs of women students. Listed below are some of the current research projects on women being conducted by members of the FSO and other graduate students. The list is certainly not inclusive, but gives some idea of the range and scope of graduate student interest in research on women.

Elizabeth Brusco, a doctoral student in Anthropology, is a founding member of the Feminist Students Organization and a member of the Steering Committee of the Center for the Study of Women and Sex Roles. She is interested in women in religion, especially the study of how religious movements reveal women as active agents in social/ideological change. She plans to do dissertation work on women in the Pentecostal movement in Latin America.

Joan M. Gerver is a doctoral student in the Department of Social-Personality Psychology, who is writing her dissertation on "Multiple Role Behavior and Perception of Ambiguity in Middle-Aged Women: Satisfaction, Flexibility and Control." She was awarded a Grant in Aid of Research by Sigma Xi to support her work.

Faye Ginsburg is a doctoral student in Anthropology, interested in studying women and religion. Under a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities she recently completed a videotape documentary concerning ritual practice among Syrian Jewish women living in Brooklyn. Currently she is working on a project on women in the clergy.

Eve Hochwald, also a doctoral student in Anthropology, is studying the consequences of increasing computerization in the newspaper industry, and specifically how women are affected. Her work centers on three occupational groups: printers, journalists, and computer-related workers. She is trying to discover whether women are entering new kinds of jobs, and to what extent these jobs present real opportunities for them.

Rachel Ovryn, of the Sociology Doctoral Program, is doing research on women in surgical residencies. The research, being conducted in several metropolitan areas, investigates (1) discrimination during residency programs, and later discrimination and problems in the job market; (2) problems involved for women in combining a surgical career and family (given that the years in which residencies and families are most often started coincide). She is also interested in policy research, with the possibility of half-time residencies as a solution to the work/family conflict.

Claire Riley, a doctoral student in Anthropology, a founding member of the Feminist Students Organization and a CSWSR Steering Committee member, is interested in models of social organization used to study New Guinea Highland societies. Most ethnographers have tended to define women's status only in relation to groups of men, thus viewing women as peripheral. Riley is suggesting that we redefine the concept of social organization in the New Guinea Highlands to include the organization of men, the organization of women, and gender organization.

Toni Ross, of the Psychology Doctoral Program, is developing a research project designed to investigate social and psychological factors influencing the breast self-examination behavior of women. The project proposes a self-

help alternative to traditional public education programs on breast self-examination. It will provide an empirical test of the notion that health education is best served by giving women control over their own health care.

Susan Taylor is a student in Clinical Psychology, whose research is on women's adult development. She is working with Levinson's model of "life structure evolution" (Seasons of a Man's Life, 1979) and using retrospective life-history interviews to study patterns in the early adulthoods of women between 35 and 40. Since Levinson based his model on men only, contrasts between genders are an explicit concern in her research.

Susan Taylor has also been working with other graduate students from the Clinical Psychology Program (Marcia Bogdanoff, Danielle Brown, Linda Hillman, Cheryl Kurash, Julie Spain, Barbara Thacher and Lissa Weinstein) on the topic of women in authority. Together they have published an article titled "By Women, for Women: A Group Relations Conference" in W. Gordon Lawrence, ed., Exploring Individual and Organizational Boundaries: A Tavistock Open Systems Approach. N.Y.: John Wiley & Sons, 1979.

Announcements

The Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Kent at Canterbury, England has announced the first degree program in Women's Studies in England. Candidates may register for a full-time program for one year, or a part-time program for two years, leading to an MA in Women's Studies. For information on the program, write to The Senior Assistant Registrar, Faculty of Social Sciences, The Registry, The University, Canterbury, Kent, CT2 7NZ, England.

The Association for Women in Psychology will meet on Sunday, May 18 at Gerrie Nussdorf's, 305 West 13 Street, New York. There will be a potluck buffet at the meeting; future plans and programs will be discussed.

"Entitled to IX" is the newsletter of the National Student Educational Fund project designed to educate post-secondary students about Title IX and to provide them with information on activating a campus toward compliance with the law. The Newsletter is available from NSEF, 2000 P Street NW, Suite 305, Washington, D.C., 20036.

The film "Simone de Beauvoir", which was sold out during its run at Film Forum, will be shown at 12 noon on May 7 at the Carnegie Hall Cinema.

New Day Films has recently released two new films about women artists: They Are Their Own Gifts, a biographical trilogy about poet Muriel Rukeyser, painter Alice Neel, and choreographer Ann Sokolow; and Love It Like A Fool, a portrait of songwriter and folk singer Malvina Reynolds. The films are available from New Day Films, P.O. Box 315, Franklin Lakes, New Jersey, 07417.

The editors of the Sarah Eisenstein Series are planning a book on The Politics of Sexuality to be edited by Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson. Please submit three copies of 1) an outline of your contribution; 2) a reprint of your work; and 3) suggestions for other articles for the book, to Sharon Thompson, P.O. Box 1161, Stuyvesant Station, New York, New York, 10009. The editors are interested in including analytical articles, poems, picture essays, journal excerpts and stories in the book.

Conference Report: "Poison Ivy"

Is the Poison Ivy of academia fatal -- or merely clinging? The Poison Ivy Conference, organized by anthropologists Paula Webster (a Research Associate at the Center) and Linda Marks, gathered about 60 women on Saturday, February 23, 1980. We were all white, most of us in our thirties, still part of academia and ambivalent about it, from students to tenured faculty, with many in the ABD category.

Linda Marks opened the conference by describing it as the result of her wanting to make public and shared, hence political, what has so far been an individual, private, between-friends-and-shrink matter. Paula read excerpts from individual statements that captured both the discontent and the fear that many of the participants seemed to feel. As someone who has been doing research outside of institutions of higher education since drifting away from a doctorate in 1964, I was surprised by the high expectations and the sense of betrayal of faith expressed in the statements.

For the second part of the conference, "Our Lives Within the Walls," we broke up into small groups to discuss our individual situations: what drew us to academia, what happened to us there, how do we feel about ourselves as a result, what does it mean to be a feminist intellectual, how do we define "our work" in relation to academic institutions, do our politics enlarge our visions or restrict them?

After lunch, the whole group discussed alternative ways to survive, particularly consulting, getting down to the nitty-gritty: how much, getting a foot in the door, what you say when you do. I found this kind of information-sharing one of the most valuable parts of the conference because it was from peers who had started with the same doubts and nonetheless had taken the plunge. The academy seems to leave many women feeling incapacitated for survival elsewhere.

The last part of the conference, "Taking Our Visions Seriously," was a time when we could share our larger visions of what our lives could be, and dreams of how to make them happen, so that we could work outside current academic institutions but with each other, rather than in isolation.

People who are interested in follow-up activities, especially in a workshop on consulting, or in planning a similar conference, can write "Poison Ivy", Apt. 5H, 123 West 93rd Street, New York, New York, 10025 or call 622-7074.

Frances Doughty

WOMEN IN THE ARTS: COMPOSERS

On May 2 from 12 noon to 3 p.m., a concert and panel discussion featuring women composers will take place in the Third Floor Studio. Participating composers include Vivian Fine (contemporary); Meredith Monk (mixed media); and Amina Claudine Myers (jazz). Three musicologists and a psychoanalyst will join the composers for a discussion of the experience of being a woman composer, the place of women composers in music history, and the creative process. Adrienne Fried Block will chair the discussion. Rosette C. Lamont is general chair for the series, which is sponsored by the New York Council for the Humanities.

MAY 1980

- Friday, May 2 Noon Feminist Students Organization Meeting,
8th Floor Lounge.
- Friday, May 2 12 Noon-3:00 WOMEN IN THE ARTS V: COMPOSERS.
Concert featuring Vivian Fine, Meredith Monk &
Amina Claudine Myers, composers.
Panel featuring composers plus Adrienne Fried Block
(chair); Anna Burton; Judith Tick; and Elizabeth
Wood. Rosette Lamont, series chair. 3rd Fl. Studio.
- Tuesday, May 6 11:45-1:15 Tuesday Noon Lunch, 18th Floor Dining Room.
Meet in 1400 before going upstairs.
- Friday, May 9 3:00-5:00 Feminist Methods of Inquiry meets in Room 1712.
The topic is "Unveiling Lesbian Content in Wo-
men's Writings." Frances Doughty will speak
and the Lesbian Herstory Archives will present
a slide show. For further information, call
Trudy Berger at 780-5476.
- Monday, May 12 4:00-6:30 WOMEN'S WORDS: A WORKSHOP ON FEMINIST PUBLISHING.
Room 207, the Graduate Center. Representatives
of Conditions, Feminist Studies, Heresies, Signs,
and other journals will speak. Sponsored by
the Feminist Students Organization.
- Tuesday, May 13 11:45-1:15 Tuesday Noon Lunch, 18th Floor Dining Room.
Meet in 1400 before going upstairs.
- Thursday, May 15 2:00-4:00 Elly Bulkin, co-editor of Amazon Poetry: An
Anthology and an editor of Conditions magazine,
will speak on contemporary feminist poetry.
Sponsored by Feminist Students Organization.
Call Center, 790-4435, for room number.
- Tuesday, May 20 11:45-1:15 Tuesday Noon Lunch, 18th Floor Dining Room.
Meet in 1400 before going upstairs.
- Tuesday, May 27 11:45-1:15 Tuesday Noon Lunch, 18th Floor Dining Room.
Meet in 1400 before going upstairs.
- Friday, May 30 3:00-5:00 Women and Health Group. Topic: Women as Pro-
viders of Healthcare. Room 1401.

LOOKING AHEAD

During the next weeks, we will begin to plan the lectures and events for the next semester. As we do, we would like to have your ideas and suggestions for topics, speakers, and schedules. Please fill out this form and return it to the Center for the Study of Women and Sex Roles, CUNY Graduate Center, 33 W. 42nd St., NYC 10036 as soon as possible. We will try to incorporate your suggestions into the program for next year.

Colloquium speakers and topics: _____

Ideas for informal presentations of current research (Conversation Hour):

Topics around which interest groups or seminars should form. (The Center would announce and hold the first meeting; participants would then determine if and when they want to meet regularly to discuss their work.): _____

Best days and times to schedule events: _____

Ideas for Newsletter: _____

Other ways in which you would like to work with the Center: _____

General comments: _____

The Center for the Study of Women and Sex Roles has recently completed a "Guide to Collections on Women in the New York Area." The Guide contains information on over thirty collections, most of them in New York City, plus a list of additional sources on women's libraries, archives and other collections. To obtain a copy, please send \$1.00 and the following information:

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

_____ ZIP _____

Return to: Center for the Study of Women and Sex Roles, 33 W. 42nd St., New York, NY 10036.