

THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WOMEN AND SOCIETY

Newsletter

The City University Graduate Center
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International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women

More than 600 hundred women from thirty-five countries gathered in Haifa, Israel shortly before the New Year to attend the International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women. The theme of the Congress, "Women's Worlds: The New Scholarship," encompassed a broad range of topics concerning women's relationships to the family, health, work, politics, education, violence, religion, art, and economic development. One goal of the event, according to organizers Martha Shuch Mednick, Marilyn Safir, and Dana Izraeli, was to provide an "opportunity for researchers from different parts of the world and a variety of disciplines to meet, exchange ideas and thus to broaden and strengthen the international network." They also hoped it would "stimulate more extensive academic research on women in Israel and especially by Israelis."

Although the format consisted primarily of small workshops and symposia, each day featured a key-note address by a noted scholar. These included Jessie Bernard, Professor Emerita, Penn State University, Gloria Bonder, Argentinian psychotherapist, Donna Shalala, Hunter College President and former adviser to President Carter, and Ester Ocloo, Ghanian chairperson of the Board of the Women's Bank.

In her opening address, sociologist Jessie Bernard discussed the "prism of sex," the male bias in human knowledge, and registered a "plea for its extension to encompass" what economist Elise Boulding has called the "invisible world of women." Ultimately, Bernard asked that the conference function to "stretch our minds, refocus our lenses, get a larger perspective" in order to enliven Boulding's global community of women, who will share each others' quests for health, education and welfare.

Though Bernard's talk established broad collective goals, participants in the Congress found fulfillment on a more personal level. Elaine Baruch, Eve Hochwald, and Diana Trebbi, participants connected with the Graduate Center or the Center for the Study of Women and Society, which was one of twelve sponsors of the Congress, report that they made valuable personal contacts with women in their fields. In some instances, they felt, these networks will outlive the event itself, and will lead to a richer exploration of their areas of scholarly interest. As Trebbi stated, "feminist ideology, Western-style, is world-wide among white middle and upper-class women." However, practical applications of theory differ from place to place and much can be learned from sharing experiences on that level. Thus Hochwald, who is studying computerization in the NYC newspaper industry, was able to compare the role of women activists in other nations' trade union movements with their U.S. counterparts.

Women Office Workers announces their lookout for companies that are discriminating against their older women office workers. If you or anyone you know is experiencing age discrimination on the job, call the W.O.W. office at 212/688-4160. All calls will remain confidential.

N.O.W.'s Equal Rights Amendment Office in New York is conducting a count-down campaign to solicit funds to put Pro-ERA TV spots on prime time television in unratified states. Those interested in helping on the phone bank should call 840-1335. The office, located at 132 West 43rd Street on the 2nd floor, operates Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday nights from 6:00 - 9:00 and Saturday afternoons from 1:00 - 4:00.

Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse (CARASA) will run full page ads in The Chelsea Clinton News, The Eastsider, and The Westsider, urging people to support Reproductive Rights. Those wishing to contribute to this effort should send their donations by March 10th to CARASA, Three Paper Ad, 17 Murray Street, New York, NY 10007. Include your name and address and indicate whether or not you would like your name to appear in the ads. To get the text of the ad, call 212/964-1350.

"Women Fight Back, We Won't Go Back" is the theme of a demonstration to be held on Saturday, March 6th in honor of International Women's Day, 1982. A group of nearly fifty women's organizations, including advocacy groups, college women's centers and trade union locals, among others, invites you to gather at Union Square (14th St. & University Pl.) at 11:30 a.m. and march with them at 12 noon.



The Secretary: An Occupation in Crisis

"The Secretary: An Occupation in Crisis," an all-day workshop held on Friday, February 5th at the Graduate Center, convened about 20 specialists to explore the effects of technological change on the work experiences of secretaries. Closed morning and afternoon sessions featured presentations on the history and feminization of the secretarial occupation, the factors affecting secretaries' job satisfaction, current and future developments in office technology, and a summary of relevant data to date. The public, mid-day talk by Judith Gregory, Reserach Director of Working Women, National Association of Office Workers, entitled "The New Office and Its Impact on the Secretary," drew about 100 people, including secretaries from nearby offices.

Co-coordinators Dr. Mary C. Murphree, postdoctoral fellow, and Lisa Master, administrative assistant, both work under the Economics and Sociology of Women and Work training grant, which co-sponsored the workshop with the Center for the Study of Women and Society. They plan to issue a short report on the proceedings of the conference and a directory of participants and individuals researching secretary and clerical occupations. Anyone who wishes to be included in the directory should write or call Murphree or Master at the Graduate Center, 790-4470 or 790-4301.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

SYMPOSIUM ON RADICAL PERSPECTIVES, sponsored by Hunter College Political Science Department, Graduate Center Political Science and Sociology Programs and the Ditzion Foundation, will take place on Friday and Saturday, March 26-27, 1982 at the CUNY Graduate Center. On Saturday from 2:15 - 3:45 p.m., the session on Women and the Left will feature Ti-Grace Atkinson, Marilyn Gittell, Annette Rubenstein and Meredith Tax. Other sessions focus on Corporate Power and the Welfare State, Defense Policy and the Cold War, Culture and Counterculture, Labor and the Left, Blacks and the Left, Students and the Left and Civil Liberties and the Left. To attend, send name, address and \$5.00 (Students, \$2) to Dr. Susan Tenenbaum, Dept. of Political Science, Hunter College, 695 Park Avenue, NYC 10023.

OUR RISING SONG, sponsored by the Sisterhood of Black Single Mothers, presents "Noted Black Women Historians, Griots, Poets and Activists in a Thirteen-Part Series on Histories and Experiences of Black Women in North America," Sundays, February 7 - May 11, 1982, 2:00 - 5:00 p.m. Events will take place at the Restoration Corp., 1368 Fulton St., Brooklyn, NY, 212/638-0413. Call Barbara Omalade, Coordinator, at 462-9428 for more information. Childcare and free refreshments will be provided.

THE SCHOLAR & THE FEMINIST IX: TOWARDS A POLITICS OF SEXUALITY, presented by the Barnard College Women's Center will take place on Saturday, April 24th, beginning at 9:00 a.m. The morning session will feature Ellen Carol Dubois, SUNY Buffalo, Linda Gordon, Univ. of Massachusetts in Boston, Hortense Spiller, Haverford College and Alice Echols, Univ. of Michigan. Fifteen concurrent afternoon workshops will be followed by a plenary session and feminist poetry reading. For more information, contact The Women's Center, Barnard College, New York, NY 10027, 212/280-2067.

EAST COAST FORUM ON URBAN HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH, sponsored by National Endowment for Education and CUNY Graduate Center, will take place on Friday, March 19, 1982 from 9:00 - 5:00 p.m. Gwendolyn Baker, Vice-President and Dean of Graduate and Children's Programs at Bank Street College of Education, will speak on Women and Minorities. For reservations or information, write or call Dr. Deanna Chitayat (Room 300A), Center for Advanced Study in Education, CUNY Graduate Center, 33 West 42 St., NY, NY 10036, 212/221-3598.

WORKING WOMEN AND SOCIAL POLICY, sponsored by Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, is the subject of a lecture series by Professor Alice Kessler-Harris, Hofstra University, author of Women Have Always Worked and Out to Work: A History of America's Wage Earning Women. Kessler-Harris will conduct four consecutive Wednesday sessions, beginning April 14th at 7:30 p.m. in Room 901 at the Graduate Center. Call Professor Bogdan Denitch at 790-4320 to register.

THE SIGRID UNDSET CENTENARY LECTURE is entitled "Was Sigrid Undset an Anti-Feminist?" and will be presented by Professor Ase Hiorth-Lervik, School of Languages and Literatures, University of Tromsø. The talk, co-sponsored by the Center for European Studies and the Center for the Study of Women and Society, will be held on Tuesday, May 4th at 7:45 p.m. in Room 1629 at the Graduate Center. Call 790-4442 for further information.

WOMEN AND WORK IN LATIN AMERICA , co-sponsored by the Hunter College Women's Studies, Sociology, and Inter-American Affairs Programs, features Dr. Ruth Sautu addressing "Economic Development and Women's Work in Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay." The talk will be held on Wednesday, March 10th from 1:00 - 3:00 p.m. in Room 626 at Hunter College, 695 Park Avenue, NY, NY.

THE FEMINIST CONNECTIONS THROUGHOUT EDUCATION, 4th Annual Conference, will be at Humboldt State University from June 16 through June 20, 1982. Register by writing to Phyllis Chinn and Rosalind Ribnick, Co-Coordiators, Women's Studies, Humboldt State University, Arcata, CA 95521.

THE WOMEN'S WRITER'S CENTER, INC announces openings in their September 1982 program. For further information, write or call: The Women's Writer's Center, INC., Box AY, Williams Hall, Cazenovia, NY 13035, 315/655-3788.

THE IMPACT OF CHANGING SEX ROLES ON MENTAL HEALTH, 2nd Annual Conference will be held on April 2, 1982 from 9:00 - 4:30 p.m. at Rutgers Student Center, College Avenue, New Brunswick, NJ. The key-note addresses will be by Helen B. Lewis, Yale University and Robert C. Brannon, Brooklyn College. The registration fee is \$75.00 and includes tuition, reference materials, luncheon and coffee. To register, call 201/932-7903.

Call for Papers

Reconstructing American Literature, An Educational Project of The Feminist Press, supported by the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education, aims to transform the teaching and canon of American literature. For information on how you can get involved in the project by contributing syllabi, suggesting works to be included in a new anthology, or testing a draft edition of the anthology in your classroom during 1983, write to Paul Lauter, Project Director, Reconstructing American Literature, The Feminist Press, Box 334, Old Westbury, New York 11568, Tel. (516)876-3086.

The Annual Meeting of the Popular Culture Association of the South will be held in Atlanta, Georgia, October 7 - 9, 1982. Anyone interested in presenting papers or organizing sessions should write to Jacqueline Boles, PCAS Program Chair, Dept. of Sociology, Georgia State University, University Plaza, Atlanta, GA 30303. The deadline for submissions is May 15, 1982.

The Tulsa Center for the Study of Women's Literature, announces the forthcoming publication of a new journal, Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature, edited by Germaine Greer. It welcomes the submission of articles, notes and queries, as well as subscription orders (1 year-\$ 7.00). To order or receive details of submission requirements, write to TSWL, University of Tulsa, 600 South College Avenue, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74104, or call 918/592-6000 ext. 503.

Helene V. Wenzel, Yale University, and Saj-nicole Joni, Wellesley College, solicit scholarly papers for a proposed book, The Changer or the Changed: Feminism in the Universities (A Decade of Changing Scholarship and Pedagogy). Papers should address: 1) changes in your discipline(s) resulting from the transformation of feminist awareness into feminist theory, and 2) how the results of this transformation impact on your research and on your pedagogy. Papers should be 20-35 pages, typed, double-spaced. An abstract of 2-4 pages is due by May 15th and final draft by September 15, 1982. Send Humanities and Social Science papers to: Helene V. Wenzel, Women's Studies Program, Yale University, 5046 Yale Station, New Haven, Connecticut 06520; Mathematics, Science and Technology to: Saj-nicole Joni, Computer Science Department, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Mass., 02181.

Resources for Feminist Research/Documentation sur la Recherche Feministe announces that the July 1982 issue will focus on aging. The overall theme will be transitions, changes and continuities in female elder's lives. Submissions are invited for the following categories: Discussion forum, annotated bibliography, book and film reviews, course descriptions, research in progress, and announcements of general interest. Deadline for receipt of materials is April 15, 1982. Contact: Emily Nett, Guest Editor, Women as Elders, Department of Sociology, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), 252 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5S 1V6, Tel. (416)923-6641 ext. 278. The March 1983 issue will focus on lesbian research. Contact Kathy Arnup, Gloria Geller, Pat Leslie, Jeri Wine, Guest Editors, at the above address or call (416)923-6641, ext. 556 or (416)537-6498 for details.

Media Update

Common Differences: Conflicts in Black and White Feminist Perspectives, by Ms. Jill Lewis and Dr. Gloria I. Joseph, is available from Doubleday for \$ 8.50.

But Some of Us Are Brave, edited by Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, contains materials designed to help develop courses on the lives of black women. To order this collection of political theory, literary, social, and historical essays, bibliographies, and syllabi, send \$ 7.95 [paper] or \$ 14.95 [cloth], plus \$ 1.00 for shipping/handling, to The Feminist Press, Box 334, Old Westbury, NY 11568, or call 516/997-7660.

The Women's Committee, International Defense and Aid Fund announces the availability of the following publications relating to Women Under Apartheid: For Their Triumphs & For Their Tears, Women in Apartheid South Africa, by Hilda Bernstein (\$ 2.35); Women Under Apartheid (\$ 12.75 for photo exhibition; \$ 7.00 for book form); You Have Struck a Rock, Women and Political Repression in Southern Africa (booklet, .70); A Window on Soweto by Joyce Sikakanne (\$ 12.10); and To Honour Women's Day, Thirty profiles of leading women in the liberation struggles (\$ 2.40). Include \$.70 for postage & handling on orders up to \$5.00; \$1.00 on orders from \$5.00 - \$10.00; and .30 for each additional \$5.00. Mail to IDAF Women's Committee, P.O. Box 17, Cambridge, MA 02138.

Between Men, a film which explores issues of masculinity and the military in the U.S.A., is now available for rental or purchase. Filmmaker Will Roberts co-directed the Academy Award winning documentary, Men's Lives with Josh Hanig. To order Between Men, write or call United Documentary Films, P.O. Box 315, Franklin Lakes, NJ 07417, 201/891-8240.

Feminist Review, a feminist journal published by an independent women's collective based in London, focuses primarily on contemporary British debates in feminism and Women's Studies. However, it has an international approach and publishes on Europe, North America, and the third world. To subscribe: send \$ 15.00 for one year (3 issues) to Feminist Review (Subscriptions), 65 Manor Road, London N16 5BH.

Women in Psychotherapy: A Consumer Handbook is a 31-page guide designed to help women make informed decisions about choosing and working with a therapist. To order, send a self-addressed mailing label and \$ 3.75 per copy ordered, plus \$ 1.00 for postage and handling, to The Federation of Organizations for Professional Women, 2000 P St., NW, Suite 403, Washington, DC 20036. Checks should be made payable to "FOPW."

Women and Work

Work and Family, An Annotated Bibliography, 1978-1980, (\$ 4.50), prepared at Wheelock College's Center for Parenting Studies, contains more than 250 entries of recent writings on work and family. New Management Initiatives for Working Parents, Reports from an April 1981 Conference, (\$ 11.00), edited by Clifford Baden and Dana E. Friedman, is a guide to employer programs for working parents. To order, make check payable to Wheelock College and send to Office of Continuing Education, Wheelock College, 200 The Riverway, Boston, MA 02215.

Resources for Working Women, 1981-1982, a catalogue of publications from the Women's Educational Equity Act Publishing Center is available by calling toll free 800/225-3088. Listings include materials which address the needs of minority, rural and disabled women, as well as guides for programs that develop skills, advance educational opportunities, and eliminate sex bias and stereotyping. The Center is funded by Women's Educational Equity Act Program, US Dept. of Education, and the Educational Development Center, INC.

Catalyst, a non-profit organization that works to expand career options for women, announces their new publication, Media Review, a bi-monthly annotated bibliography of audio-visual materials relating to women and work. Media Review, issued by the newly established Audiovisual Center of Catalyst's Library and Information Service, is one of many services and programs provided by Catalyst for use by employers, educators, counselors, women and the media. To find out more about their activities, write or call Catalyst, 14 East 60 Street, New York, NY 10022, 212/759-9700.

BOOK REVIEW

Schooling for Women's Work edited by Rosemary Deem
(Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980) 160 pp., paper, \$18.00.

Schooling for Women's Work introduces a thematic approach to studying education: analysis of the relationships of gender patterns within and outside of schools, for clarification of structural and ideological influences on both the choices that are made and those that are available. Each chapter looks at ways in which schooling reproduces gender categories in society, as well as students' class, the sexism of labor, and patriarchal relations in work. Some offer theoretical analyses, while others report on the experiences of students and workers. The editor contributes a concluding chapter, which supports her argument for integrating empirical research and theoretical work, and indicates links between them. Her proposals include testing hypotheses that patriarchal, sexist, and class biases in curriculum content and in textbooks affect students' behavior.

Madeline MacDonald's first chapter develops a powerful theoretical framework for approaching discussions of racial and class features of gender classifications. She corrects some flaws in earlier conceptualizations in the sociology of education and expands the useful ideas in them. After a warning that historical patriarchal relations take a particular form in capitalist societies, she criticizes the well known Bowles and Gintis work of 1976 for denying sex inequalities as integral to capitalist operations by ignoring the material base in differential production tasks and in pay scales. However, she retains their concept that educational forms within schools reflect society's class stratifications, because it illuminates the varying amounts of control exerted in teaching methodologies.

Fuller's report on black West Indian girls suggests two important concepts for future studies. She presents a context for collecting data in terms of students' reactions to events and their efforts to exert control over events. As a result of her method, listening to girls in conversation, she could distinguish situation-specific attitudes toward conformity with schools' values, which affected classroom behavior and achievement in respect to class and gender features of racial categorizations imposed by society.

References in several chapters to the British system of exams and related study programs are puzzling to an American reader who is not familiar with them; however, they do not prevent understanding the concepts involved. Data on beneficial but limited effects of open admission programs to universities and recruitment of girls to engineering programs are useful. The lack of increase in the number of women academics in England in the last 50 years is set in the context of universities' control of knowledge and their gatekeeper role in preparing students for work, thus highlighting, by implication, the importance of political involvement in this problem. Less satisfactory in the book is the report of role stereotyping in textbooks that does not go beyond generalizations that are familiar by now and also the evidence of academic achievements that do not include adequate data bases for analyses and evaluation.

Two chapters are jarring. Shaw's argument for the benefits of single-sex schools deliberately ignores the conclusions of graduates who found them gender-stereotyped; it glosses over MacDonald's point earlier in the book that gender classifications are operative there and contribute to community and family categorizations. In the only chapter written by a male author (with a co-author for whom only a first-name initial is given), asymmetrical population grouping, of women but not men by marital status, is followed by data on employment problems without analysis of relevant marriage and age contexts.

The book as a whole contributes significantly to filling gaps in educational theory in general and knowledge of women in school and society in particular. It sets forth important bases for future studies of gender-relevant aspects of both women's and men's development.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

To the editor:

February 15, 1982

Last month's review of Edward Wallerstein's book, Circumcision: An American Health Fallacy, does a disservice to the book and to your readers. Ill-tempered and apoplectic, the review fails to describe the book, misrepresents the author's position on several points, and, most importantly, misses the significance of the book for feminist readers.

Hardly wandering "through old territory," the book opens up a much-needed debate about the costs and benefits of routine male neo-natal circumcision. Although such re-evaluations have recently taken place in professional circles (resulting in recommendations against routine newborn circumcision by the American Academy of Pediatrics Task Force on Circumcision in 1975), public education and discussion has been minimal. This silence is puzzling in light of extremely high rates of non-religious circumcision in the U.S. and the recent trend toward greater parental involvement in the childbirth process.

One of Wallerstein's contributions is to review the various medical and health justifications for male circumcision both in the 19th and 20th centuries. Nineteenth-century "evidence," clearly untenable by contemporary standards, linked the lack of circumcision to innumerable ailments, including masturbation, insanity, and syphilis. Twentieth-century research has moved on to other concerns (especially penile and cervical cancer), but careful scrutiny of epidemiologic evidence demonstrating the "health" benefits of male circumcision reveals it to be weak and not convincing. The book performs a service in collecting and describing widely-scattered studies from both centuries.

The second contribution is the description of the custom's introduction and spread in various parts of Euro-America during the past 100 years. The custom's contrasting fate at various times and places raises provocative questions for future research. Introduced in the later half of the 19th century, non-religious male circumcision spread within English-speaking countries. The prevalence of male circumcision increased in America from 8% in 1870 to 56% in 1910, never becoming as popular in other countries. Despite steady increases in the U.S. until the present, rates eventually declined in England, especially after 1950, to a now-negligible rate (less than 1% in 1972), while rates of newborn circumcision were approximately 50% in Australia and 45% in Canada in the early 1970s.

The reviewer faults Wallerstein for purportedly downplaying doctors' economic motivations for performing circumcisions, yet the author clearly states that financial gain coupled with third-party reimbursement for genital surgery is a major factor; he links the English decline with the British National Health Service's refusal to reimburse routine neonatal circumcision in 1949. Furthermore, it is obvious that purely economic factors do not entirely explain the circumcision complex, since infant circumcision became commonplace in the U.S. long before insurance reimbursement; moreover, contemporary rates vary considerably between countries with reimbursement schemes.

Wallerstein's book deserves reading, along with Barker-Benfield's excellent The Horrors of the Half-Known Life, especially in light of feminist interest in female genital surgery in the Third World today. Both books correct the tendency to think about the problem in "we-they" terms, since both document the prevalence of genital surgery in Euro-America and describe the rich social context in which such practices are embedded. Both books make clear two important points: The issue is not that parents do not want the "best" for their children, but that the "best" is defined and understood within a cultural and historical context. The place is not the Third World, but the world, in which ideologies about health, the social meaning of the body, economic interests, gender antagonism, sexual anxiety, and social control are played out in human lives and on human bodies.

Carole S. Vance, Ph.D., Psychiatric Epidemiology