

THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WOMEN AND SEX ROLES

Newsletter

The City University Graduate Center

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ACTIVIST WOMEN AND POLITICAL PRIORITIES

Dr. Marilyn Gittell opened the Graduate Center's Dinner Seminar Series on October 6, with a talk on "Activist Women and Political Priorities", a discussion of how different types of women leaders define women's issues. She began her talk by pointing out the vitality and importance of women's traditional participation in community voluntary organizations, despite popular beliefs that women have been inactive politically. She went on to describe her current research, a study of the motivations and life styles of female community leaders in lower income areas, and an investigation of how they relate to women's organizations, the women's movement and feminist issues. In order to understand the roles of women community organizers, and their relationships to other female leaders, Gittell interviewed three types of leaders: 1) elected and appointed women leaders in city government; 2) leaders of women's organizations; 3) leaders of community organizations. In her research Gittell travelled to 6 U.S. cities -- New York, Denver, Oakland, Houston, Chicago, and San Francisco -- to interview over 200 women leaders.

While middle-class activists have often stressed their primary role as mothers and homemakers, Gittell reported that leaders in lower income community groups were less concerned about maintaining impeccable households, and that they assumed that their families would adjust to their roles as community leaders. Gittell described the kinds of family backgrounds and personal experiences that brought women into leadership, and noted the changing nature of community organizations -- how many advocacy groups took on service functions during the 60s and 70s, softening their demands for social change. (Under current budget cutbacks, some organizations predict a return to their original advocacy roles.)

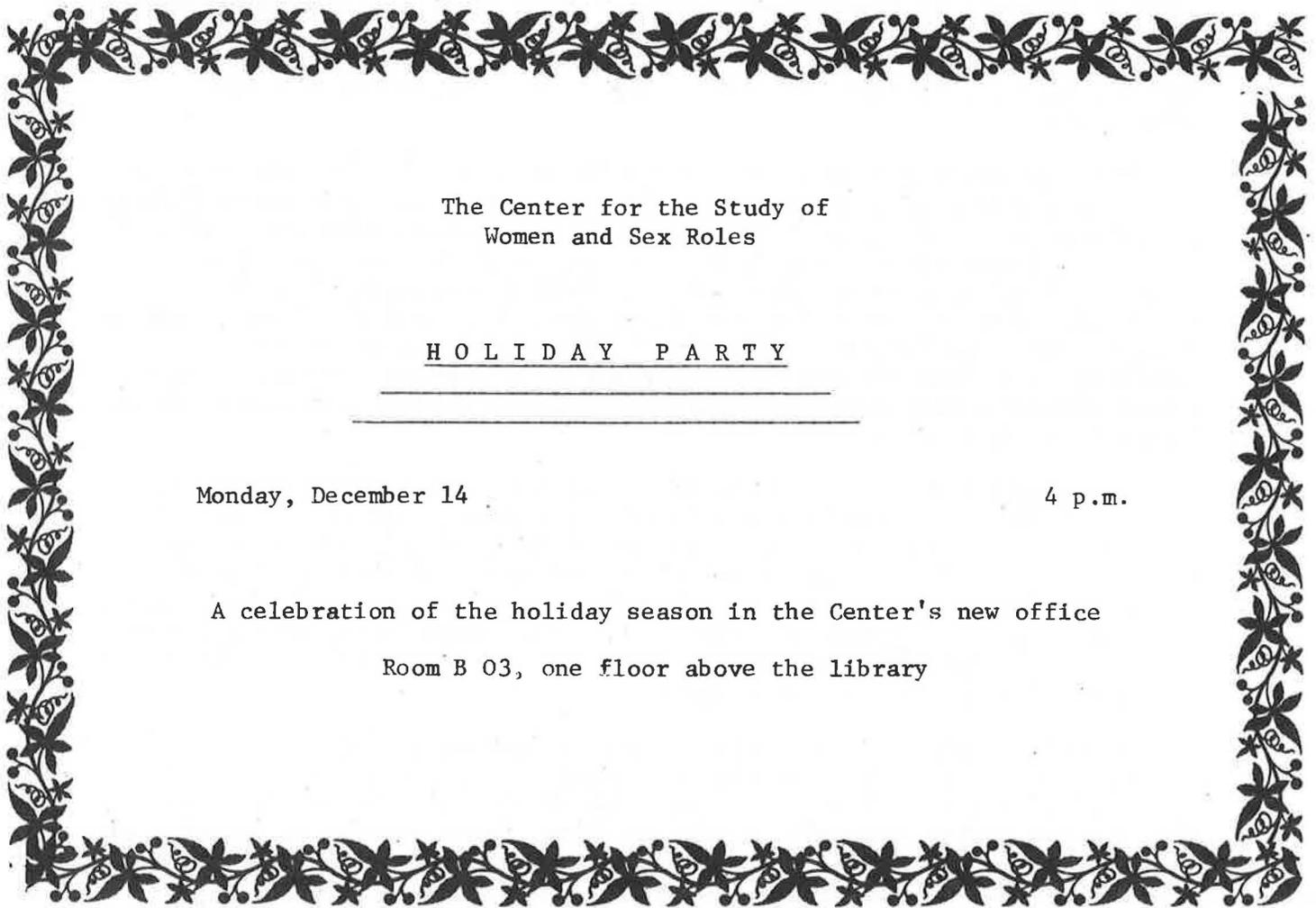
The identification of women's issues varied for the three groups that were interviewed. Community women leaders saw women's issues as the issues of importance for the community at large: housing, health care programs, daycare, and employment. While most were supportive of feminist demands for ERA and affirmative action, they placed primary importance on the basic needs of their communities. However, for younger women especially, sexism within local organizations was a concern, even though they might question the rhetoric and priorities of the feminist movement.

Women's movement leaders defined their community as the community of women, and stressed the importance of the ERA, equal pay, affirmative action and reproductive rights. They also shared some of the concerns of community organization women: childcare, family violence, birth control information and teenage pregnancy. Despite the overlap on some issues, Gittell found very few examples of coalition building between the groups.

Among elected and appointed city officials, women's issues were defined more narrowly -- as affirmative action and equity demands. Their ties to community organizations were not strong and their participation in feminist organizations was often limited to networking for professional advancement.

Despite their differences, Gittell pointed out the important strengths and resources of each group of women leaders. Female community leaders have experience in advocacy, large numbers of members, and sensitivity to the needs of lower income women. Leaders of feminist organizations know how to reach middle class women, and have the education and resources to help them organize. Elected or appointed officials have valuable experience within the formal political system and are likely to have access to information and administration skills.

Gittell concluded her talk with a discussion of the possibility of coalition building among these groups, and the need to overcome class and race differences. She stressed the need for new strategies, for a broader definition of issues and for mutual understanding and respect among all types of women leaders.



The Center for the Study of
Women and Sex Roles

H O L I D A Y P A R T Y

Monday, December 14

4 p.m.

A celebration of the holiday season in the Center's new office

Room B 03, one floor above the library

Announcements

The Women's Studies Division of the Western Social Sciences Association calls for papers for their 1982 meeting in Denver, Colorado. Send two copies of a one-page abstract plus a self-addressed, stamped envelope by December 1, 1981 to Elizabeth Nelson, WSSA, Department of Sociology, California State University, Fresno, California 03740.

Women and Health: Taking Care and Taking Charge is the title of a conference on September 30--October 2, 1982 in Morgantown, West Virginia. Proposals for the conference should include name, address, and affiliation of person(s) presenting, format, and estimated time of presentation. Please send paper abstracts and ideas for workshops, and demonstrations (1-2 double-spaced typewritten pages) to: Judith Stitzel, Women's Studies, Stansbury Hall, West Virginia University, Morgantown, W.V. 26506. Deadline: March 1, 1982.

The Center for the Study, Education and Advancement of Women at the University of California, Berkeley, plans a research conference on Women and Work in Third World Countries for March, 1982. Interested researchers should send copies of their resumes and research papers to Dr. Nagat El-Sanabary, Center for the Study, Education, and Advancement of Women, Bldg. T-9, Rm. 112, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720. Deadline is December 1, 1981. For information, call (415)527-4773.

The Fourth Annual National Symposium on Sexuality and Disability will take place on June 18-20, 1982 at New York University. Proposals for programs should include a 250 work abstract and indicate the specific audience: general or advanced. Please submit three copies, typed and double-spaced to Deryck Calderwood, Human Sexuality Program, 51 South Building, New York University, New York, N.Y. 10003. Participants will be expected to register for the Symposium. A limited number of scholarships will be available. All papers become the property of the Symposium.

On Wednesday, February 17, N.Y.U. will host a conference on "Women and Work," sponsored by the New Directions for Women, Gallatin Division. Panelists include Betty Friedan; Elizabeth Holtzman; and trade unionist Lillian Roberts. The event will take place in John Ben Snow Memorial Room, Bobst Library at 8 p.m. For information, call 598-7077.

The Women's Caucus for Art's national conference will take place in New York City on February 23-26, coinciding with the annual meetings of the Coalition of Women's Art Organizations (CWAO) and the College Art Association (CAA). The WCA will sponsor a series of panels on "Women and Art in Society," and an exhibition, "Views By Women Artists"--thirteen separately curated theme shows, to draw attention to the diversity of women's art. Contact WCA, New York Chapter, Joan Turken, 464 First Street, Brooklyn, New York 11215. (212)499-3319.

The Center for Athlete's Rights and Education is organizing a "Speak Out for Title IX" rally on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. on December 7, Between 11 a.m.-2 p.m. For information on transportation or on the rally, contact The Center for Athlete's Rights and Education, 391 East 149 Street, Suite 319, Bronx, New York 10455 or (212)665-0602.

Book Reviews

Comparative Perspectives of Third World Women: The Impact of Race, Sex, and Class edited by Beverly Lindsay
(New York: Praeger, 1980) 334 pp., cloth, \$23.95.

This book was conceived by a group of Third World women scholars, in response to the need to compare the positions of Third World women in both developing countries and from the viewpoint of these women themselves. The first of the book's two sections includes: an overview of African women's status (by Shelby Lewis), a treatment of women's legal and economic status in Zaire (by Lois Adams), problems faced by professional women in Kenya (by Beverly Lindsay), a comparison of women in the People's Republic of China, in Taiwan, and in Malaysia (by Bee-Lan Chan Wang), a discussion of women's attitudes towards politics and political participation in northern India (by Tonia Devon), a description of lifestyles and coping skills of working class women in the Caribbean (by Gloria Joseph), an account of women's changing position in Cuba (by Johnetta Cole), and a review of four films on Latin American women (by Nora Jacquez Wieser).

The second section includes a summary of problems for native American women (Laura Waterman Wittstock), an analysis of cultural attitudes towards Mexican and Chicana women (Sylvia Gonzales), a treatment of social and economic discrimination against black women (Gwendolyn Randall Puryear), and a study of sex role typing in educational programs for Vietnamese immigrants (Gail Kelly). Lindsay ties the whole together with introductory and concluding discussions of alternate conceptual frameworks for dealing with relations among race, sex, and class, and a summary of commonalities in the problems of Third World women.

This book is written in a straightforward manner, with a minimum of jargon. As "an introduction to vital issues that profoundly influence the lives of Third World women," the book should lend itself well to use in teaching. Among issues it touches on are the following: the nature of class differences among women in different countries, and distinctions between "work" and "career" for women; the limitations of "culture of poverty" stereotypes (the vignettes describing categories of working class women in the Caribbean are most relevant here); the contradictions between general acceptance of patriarchal norms and forms of resistance (it gave me pause to read that in 1977 the Indian Housewives Federation submitted a resolution to Mrs. Gandhi demanding "as many seats for women as men in the Parliament, State Assemblies, municipalities and panchayats"); and the progress and the stumbling blocks for women under socialism (the comparison among groups of Chinese women was particularly useful for dealing with differences between capitalist and socialist "modernization"). Even the chapter that is out of step with the rest of the book—that on "La Chicana" which is unfortunately devoid of firm data on Chicana oppression and resistance—offers an interesting counterpoint in its psychological assumptions about universalistic gender roles.

I intend to use this book in my own course on women cross-culturally when I give the course again, and recommend it to others for this purpose.

--Eleanor Leacock, Ph.D.
Department of Anthropology, City College, CUNY

The Guide to Women's Studies, a listing of over 200 women's studies courses offered in New York City, is available for Spring, 1982. For a free copy, write to Lisa Kassel, N.Y.C. Commission on the Status of Women, 250 Broadway, NY, 10007 or call 566-3832.

WOMEN OF SPIRIT: FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN THE JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS edited
by Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin
(New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979) 400 pp., paper, \$5.95

In Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions editors Ruether and McLaughlin have selected a series of essays which document the ways in which women have been active participants in Western religious movements. Although this book has received excellent reviews elsewhere, I found it to be disappointing.

There were several reasons for this disappointment. First, the title of the book is misleading; of the fourteen essays, only one deals with Judaism. Second, I found many of the essays lacking in critical analysis of the issues. The first three essays deal with women and early Christianity. The core idea that is common to all three is that the monastic and ascetic life enabled women to defy the established family and social expectations. The vow of virginity is equated with political independence. This idea is an engaging one, and I would have welcomed more attention to the embeddedness of the Church within the social-cultural order of the day. Instead, these essays read like the "lives of great early-Christian women".

Huber's essay on Quaker women discusses how, despite the non-hierarchical structure of this religion, women were pushed back into subordinate roles. Again, some individual women were able to transcend restraints, but the analysis of how this was possible lacks a dynamic component. Several other essays detail women's leadership in non-mainstream religions: Shakers, Christian Scientists, Mormonism and the Salvation Army. According to these essays, women were able to achieve full participation. Yet, as these religions developed and the leadership became more professionalized, "daughters did not follow in the footsteps of their preacher and professional mothers and grandmothers; thus these role models were lost."

The issue of professional leadership also emerges in the ordination of women within Protestantism. Although women began to be ordained in the 1950's, their numbers have been small. Those who have been ordained are under-represented in actual leadership positions as pastors of parishes. As in other male-dominated professions, women have been locked out of collegial networks. The authors question the maturity of the feminist viewpoint in being able to "integrate women more fully into the life of the church" without "diminishing the richness of Christian life". I find this lack of confidence in feminism to be rather disconcerting.

The last two essays on the feminist contributions to both Judaism and to Episcopalianism/Roman Catholicism present a more analytic view of women in these religions. First, they acknowledge that women who have "made it" are the exceptions to the rule. Second, they maintain that the achievement of leadership by women is not to be viewed in individual terms. Rather, they trace the social and political changes that need to occur (and have begun to occur) within the structure of the religions: themselves: the development of new rituals and theological orientations which will allow women to experience religion as meaningful and relevant to their lives.

Ruether and McLaughlin, in their introduction, maintain that historically women have gained leadership in religious movements by virtue of their holiness and charisma. This has allowed women to participate in the eschatological sphere. These concepts are embedded within theology. An integration of these concepts with social-psychological analysis would have permitted a deeper understanding of where women have been (and need to go) within the world of religion. Despite these criticisms, readers who are interested in the history of theology and women's contributions to that history, may well find this a valuable anthology.

--Ann Saltzman, Graduate Student
Social Psychology/Personality, Graduate Center

Conferences

The Women's Therapy Centre Institute is sponsoring a lecture series for 1981-82. Held on Friday evenings at the New York Academy of Sciences building, 2 East 63rd Street from 7-9:30 p.m., the lectures will run through March 1982. Topics include "Women's Conflicts About Success," "New Childrearing Arrangements and their Impact on the Psychology of Women," "Women's Anger Against Women," "Women's Terrain, The Body: Compulsive Eating and Anorexia," "Women: Sex and Sexuality," and "Passionate Attachments: Fathers and Daughters." For a complete program contact: The Women's Therapy Centre Institute, 80 East 11th Street, New York, N.Y. 10003, or call 420-1974.

The Women's Studies International Quarterly seeks material for a new section, Forum. The section will include news, notes, discussion, debates and reports about events in Women's Studies. Send reports of conferences, courses, and research as well as opinions about any controversial issues in Women's Studies to Cheris Kramarae, Department of Speech, University of Illinois, 244 Lincoln Hall, Urbana, Illinois, 61801.

The Alliance of Independent Scholars is a new group of women scholars in the Boston area who hold doctoral degrees or are completing dissertations. Their interdisciplinary colloquium meets twice monthly to provide members with a professional forum in which to present and discuss their work. They also provide career information and support groups. For information about the Alliance or to learn about organizing similar groups elsewhere, contact Clare Nunes, AIS, 6 Ash Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138.

Chrysalis: a magazine of women's culture has ceased publication due to financial difficulties. However, back issues of the magazine may still be ordered from Peggy Kimball, 2026 Palm Drive, Hermosa Beach, California, 90254. The editors of Chrysalis urge former readers to support other feminist publications, such as Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics. For information, contact Heresies, Box 776, Canal Street Station, New York, N.Y. 10013

The Women's Studies Program and Policy Center of George Washington University invites applications for the Congressional Fellowships on Women and Public Policy. The program includes one year's work for a Member or congressional committee staff on policy issues affecting women. Applications will be available from the George Washington Women's Studies Program by February 5, 1982. Write to Phyllis Palmer, Women's Studies, George Washington University, Washington, D.C. 20052.

The Business and Professional Women's Foundation announces the Lena Lake Forrest Fellowship and BPW Foundation Research Grant programs for doctoral candidates or post-doctoral scholars. The programs focus on contemporary studies and studies that provide historical perspectives on economic issues of importance to today's working women. Application deadline is January 1, 1982. Contact the Business and Professional Women's Foundation, 2012 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036, or call (202)293-1200.

The Lesbian-Feminist Study Clearinghouse promotes the exchange of information and scholarship on all aspects of lesbian feminism. For a list of available reprints, or to submit articles, write to the Clearinghouse, Women's Studies Program, 1012 Cathedral of Learning, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pa., 15260.