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The Dickinson College

Women's Resource Center Newsletter

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Catharine Stimpson on Resistances to Women's Studies

S. Soutner

The Zatae Longsdorff Conference in Women's Studies was highlighted by the luncheon address of Catharine Stimpson, the Editor of "Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society." Ms. Stimpson discussed the internal and external sources of resistance to the new intellectual movement - Women's Studies.

The internal sources of resistance, according to her, to which those interested in Women's Studies must be aware, are the barriers set up by the 'Practicioners' of Women's Studies themselves who are often wary of criticisms and who are "never wholly unified." The problem of unity is exaggerated by academia itself, which is characteristically more concerned with the mind and less so with institutions. Ms. Stimpson emphasized the mistake of hoping for a Ph.D. program in women's studies when no women professors at a college are tenured. Those involved with women's studies, she says, will "never reach unity unless they are concerned with institutions as well as with the mind." She also noted that political divisions among practitioners will always be present.

External resistance is evidenced by the tendency of many scholars to trivialize the study of women which Stimpson points out is analogous to the trivilization of women in public life. A second resistance is that scholarly work concerning women is assumed to have been done badly, an assumption which correlates with the age-old myth that women are not rational and thinking persons.

Ms. Stimpson cited two paradigms which have also resulted in external resistance to the study of women. They are (a) the influence of biological factors on the shaping of sex roles and (b) the vision of women as a victimized sex. Women scholars have tended to underestimate the significance of biology in shaping sex roles and have attributed it to socio-cultural factors. Stimpson noted the opinion of a French school of thought which insists on the "irreparable differences between the sexes." She concluded that socio-biological differences will become more important to our conception of male-female roles, even though social, economic, and cultural conditions will continue to determine the significance of these differences. Stimpson also discussed the view of women as victims. She alluded to two sub-worlds of patriarchy - one of which is male and productive; while the other is female and reproductive. The male world is characterized by public culture and public speech; the female world by domestic and informal speech. Women's Studies, says Stimpson, are now "mapping the female sub-world" which will serve to bring about a greater sense of woman as being active in history, rather than as a victim.

Stimpson also warned that as Women's Studies become an increasingly international phenomenon, American scholars must avoid making certain mistakes: 1) they must not forget the effect that Americans have on the world - sometimes beneficial, sometimes not; 2) they should remember that nationalism, tribalism, religion, geography and class, structure different senses of sexuality; and they should therefore not try to homogenize the women of the world; 3) they must not make, too quickly, moral judgments concerning the practices of other cultures; and 4) they should not forget how affluent and successful Americans are. therefore, Women's Studies should become a source of experience and influence for the rest of the world.

Ms. Stimpson ended her address by saying that she hoped that the time would come soon when one no longer has to talk about resistance - external or internal - to the study of women.

Victorian Women

by Elizabeth Pincus

The first session of the Zatae Longsdorff Conference, held on Saturday, March 4th, explored the experiences of some unique Victorian women. Speakers on this subject were Betsy Fahlman, Franklin and Marshall professor, and Warren Gates, history professor at Dickinson, with Lonna Malmsheimer, American Studies professor at Dickinson, acting as chairperson. Each of the speakers chose a different area to explore, but the conclusions to be drawn were basically the same; that even in the regulated atmosphere of the Victorian age, women managed to discover ways to escape their traditional duties of home-making. Ms. Fahlman expressed this idea in her description of an individual Victorian woman's life, that of "Alice Morgan Wright" Sculptor and Suffragette;" while Professor Gates discussed the topic from a group perspective in his lecture entitled "Her Voices at the Picnic: Women in the Grange."

In her lecture on Alice Morgan Wright, Betsy Fahlman traced the major elements in this woman's life, beginning with her childhood in Albany, where she was born in 1881, continuing with her education at Smith College and her subsequent development as a sculptor in Europe and America, and as a member of the Women's Suffrage Movement with Emily Pankhurst, and ending with her death in 1975. Throughout the description, it became clear that although Alice Morgan Wright never "completely found her stride as an artist", she was consistent in her desire to express herself throughout life. She was fortunate enough to be able to spend her life pursuing her interests rather than supporting herself, in that her parents kept her financially secure throughout her life, but instead of sinking back into her comfortable home, Ms. Wright travelled a lot, exploring everything which attracted her. Her artwork shifted from conservative academic pieces to modern Cubist ones and finally to sculptures of animals, when she decided that "women didn't need any help - but animals did." In the same way, Ms. Wright's involvement in the Women's movement moved from a mere interest to an active participation in demonstrations and in such organizations as the League of Women Voters in 1921. Her primary concern in both realms was with life's forces, a theme which she adopted from Auguste Rodin, and this active interest in Life made her an unique female individual in her era.

Women involved in the Granger Movement were as progressive as Ms.

Wright in a different way. Unlike Ms. Wright, these women were not always financially secure, and they played a much more active role in the economy of their farm society than she had in her bourgeois world. Nevertheless, women in farming societies still had to confront men in order to make them aware of their need to express themselves. Women did this at Granger Picnics and Exhibitions, particularly those held in Williams Grove, Pennsylvania during the last week in August, from the 1890s until the end of the first World War. These picnics allowed women to participate in the market activity along with men, but they also allowed women to develop their own programs to promote women's works. There were three types of women's programs at these Granger Picnics: ones which merely exhibited women's wares; ones advocating the Suffrage cause; and ones expressing temperance interests such as the WCTU. Through involvement in these activities, women worked alongside average people and were given leadership experience as well as exposure to the changing times. In Malmsheimer's words, the Granger Women's organizations "provided a training ground for public activity later."

Thus, in this first session of the Women's conference, the portrayals of "Victorian Women" by Professors Fahlman and Gates as Feminists in their own traditional conservative environments support Professor Malmsheimer's final statement that the "Victorian age was nothing if not didactic."

The Feminist Credit Union *by W.R. James*

Until recently, women have had a hard time trying to establish credit ratings in their name. They have found that most financial institutions don't meet the needs of the liberated female. Attitudes exist against single, married, separated and divorced women of various ages and employments records. The establishment of the Equal Credit Opportunity Act has helped mitigate the situation. The Act establishes the following guide lines: a person can't be refused credit because of sex or marital status, a woman can't be denied credit because she is of child-bearing age, and a person can have credit in their name if they are credit worthy. Another answer for women who are seeking a financial institution which meets her needs and enables

her to establish a credit history in her own name is the feminist credit union.

The First Pennsylvania Feminist Credit Union is one such institution. It was organized by a group of women who had suffered credit discrimination and felt compelled to establish a financial institution which met their needs. As is the case with all credit unions, their members must share a common bond. In this case, feminism is the uniting force. The sponsoring organizations are the Harrisburg Women's Rights Movement, National Organization for Women, PA Women's Political Caucus, Harrisburg YWCA, and the Lancaster Women's Center. A person who is a member of any of these organizations is eligible to join the credit union. Women and men who join the credit union and establish a savings account are establishing a credit rating for themselves and are doing a service to others who need the loans. All credit unions are cooperative saving and lending institutions. They pay their members or shareholders dividends on their shares annually. One of the biggest problems which the Feminist Credit Union has had to contend with is that of bad loans. Although the idea behind the feminist credit union is sisters-helping-sisters, not all sisters have their stuff together. When the Feminist credit union first opened its doors four years ago, it was run by women more idealistic than realistic. They were willing to loan money to people no matter what their ability was to repay their debt. As these loans came due and the delinquency rate began to grow, it became clear that things had to change.

Today, the credit union has adopted a more stringent loan policy. Its members now number over 500 and it has more than \$100,000.00 in assets. Credit union members borrow money for such things as cars, vacations, furniture and almost anything else one can think of. The highly professional attitude of the feminist credit unions and its attractive interest rates (in many cases the interest charged by credit unions are lower than banks) has caused commercial banks and other financial institutions to sit up and take notice of a new competitor. So next time you need to borrow or want a good place to invest, give some thought to First Pa. Feminist Credit Union. Your money will be insured up to \$40,000.00 and the union provides life insurance up to \$2,000.00. For more information contact the office manager, Debbie Fetterman, room 302, YWCA Bldg., 4th and Market Sts, Harrisburg PA 17101

The
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European Women by Ellen Palzer

The 11:15 sessions was titled "Women and Society in Pre-Modern Europe." The first speaker was Stephen Weinberger and he spoke on "Women, Poverty, and Social Status in Medieval France." Early in the history of France the southern portion was dominated by the Romans, whereas the northern portion of the country was not. This explained why women in the south gained more power than farther north. Since Roman Law was more amenable towards women, one of the ways women achieved power was through the groom's gift to the bride - a rather handsome piece of his land was given to the bride and it was in her name. However, there are documents stating that women donated land which she received from her parents to churches or individuals. It is clear, from these documents, that brides did not hand over their land to the groom. Beginning with the 11th century, though, there is an increase in documents and concern over scarce land. It is also seen that less and less land is being owned and given to women; eventually the dowry became smaller and women were totally cut out of the father's inheritance.

The second speaker was Anne Yarborough, who spoke on "Female Apprenticeship in Pre-Industrial Urban Life." The Industrial Revolution in the 17th century brought more economic restrictions to women. The man's role was the 'bread-winner'; the woman's was that of an unpaid worker even though women were members of the guild. There was also a shift from private to public authority. The city fathers watched over the town and guilds became dominated by men. Beginning with the 15th century, it was even thought (by men) that women ruined the craft, because they were not trained properly. In some areas (Bristol and Norwich), women were even excluded from weaving - not because there was a surplus of labor, but because weaving was in such a high demand that now men could afford to be restrictive. Eventually, girls were trained by mothers, sisters, aunts, etc. Those women that did have contracts often did not have their salary specified. Men, on the other hand, had a stated, standard salary.

She concluded her paper by saying that economic and social conditions determine women's roles. Women in Pre-industrial urban life had longer apprenticeships, lower wages, domestic training, and were not considered citizens. Basically, women were denied equal opportunities.

Women and Psychology Debbie Cohen

Professors Gregory Nicosia, Jerry Diller, and Eleanor Mattes of Wilson College began the afternoon discussion of the Zatae Longsdorff Conference in Women's Studies by debating the question, "Is there a Feminine Psychology?"

Professor Nicosia's topic, "Coping with Stress: Sex-Difference and Practical Implications," was presented from a behavioral psychology perspective, speaking specifically to the behavioral differences between men and women embodied by social norms. This idea was explored by Professor Nicosia through data analysis obtained from his experiments using both children and adults, male and female. The crowded environment experience was used to explain how men and women cope differently in such a situation; his point being that these different ways of coping with stress are behaviors that one learns from society at large. Nicosia cites the impact of the mass media as contributing to the shaping of such behaviors.

Jerry Diller explored "InterGroup Dynamics as a Metaphor for Understanding the Experience of Women," beginning his lecture by presenting the questions once again: "Is there a Feminine Psychology; Can one separate women from the mainstream of psychology?" Diller presented one answer to the question by viewing women as a minority group and showed what he feels to be the psychological effect of prejudice on such a group. An analogy was drawn between the Jewish experience and the female experience as Professor Diller has seen it. As Jews have learned to deal with their own feelings as a result of harsh treatment by society, women have also learned to cope in this manner. He spoke of a "cultural reawakening" in the minority group; internal changes within such a division creating new feelings of acceptance (rather than self-hatred) and a new feeling of autonomy. Professor Diller concluded by explaining his belief that psychology should move to a point where the mainstream of psychology and the separate psychology of women can interact.

Eleanor Mattes, Professor of English at Wilson, spoke on "Parallels Between the Fantasy Patterns and Fictions of American Women." Ms. Mattes cited the literary works of Robert May, Ellen Greenberger, and David McClellan in support of her point that women in literature are more prone than men to see death as attractive. The "death as a lover" image suggested by Ellen Greenberger is also reinforced in such literary works as Sylvia Plath's Ariel, Edith Wharton's House of Mirth, and in the poetry of Emily Dickinson. The imagery in these works suggests death's attraction for women; it thrills and attracts as well as frightens her.

For your information....

Would you like to see the Women's Resource Center Newsletter continue? We need writers and an editor for the 1978-79 school year. Come to the meeting on April 3, in Biddle House, 5:00 p.m. or send a note to Box 1821.....

Little known facts in Women's History.....Around 2133 B.C. Sobek-Neferu-Ra was queen of Egypt. Known as one of the greatest builders of the time, this woman constructed the Labyrinth, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.....In 1776, Margaret Corbin became the "first woman to take a man's part" in the American revolution. She was with her husband in battle when he was killed. She took his position in battle and defended her post until it was overrun by Hessians. Margaret was shot three times, and fighting left her with a useless arm. The United States was required to give the first pension ever to a woman.....from the Woman's Almanac.....

A copy of The National Plan of Action that was adopted last November at the National Women's Conference in Houston, Texas is available upon request from the Pennsylvania Commission for Women, 512 Finance Building, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.....find out what the goals are in such areas as Arts & Humanities, Battered Women, Child Care, Credit, Health, Media, Minority Women, Sexual Preference and eighteen other areas.....

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