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WOMEN'S PROJECT
AT UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Women's Studies happened at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities in the spring of 1973. It was an event, a process, a pedagogy, politics and academic research. Originating from a confrontation with the twelve man faculty by members of the seminary community consciousness-raising group in the spring of 1972, the seminary Women's Project was funded by the United Church of Christ Committee on Theological Education after a proposal was submitted by Professor Lance Barker. The project was to consist of a consultation on women, a class on women taught by a woman, and support of a woman student intern to coordinate the project. The seminary Self Study Committee submitted that, in addition to studying about women, the institution should examine manifestations of sexism in its own structures. Kristina Pearson, an active feminist in the middle class, was hired as coordinator of the Women's Project; and I, who am completing a doctorate in American Studies at the University of Minnesota with a dissertation on contemporary feminism, was employed as Visiting Instructor.

The class and the consultation, as they happened, were integrally related. The class, turning out to be the most popular elective offered in the spring term, attracted both sexes, a wide range of students in age, in points on the political continuum and in phases of their own feminism. I prepared a broad topical outline for the class and requirements for the course in a meeting with some women students; and, in the class, students developed focus and emphasis in topics through which they chose to offer leadership to the class. The outline was broad—half the term to be spent in looking at "Women in American Culture" through such subtopics as "The Feminist Movement," "Women in American History," "Women in American Art," "Female Psychology and Sexuality," etc.; half the term to be spent on theological and ecclesiastical feminism and the treatment of women. Students created some marvelous projects, which were not "handed in," but were presented to the class and were often given in addition to groups outside the class. One student prepared a very practical and profound manual for conducting sexism seminars and offered herself to churches to conduct such seminars. One student developed an utterly brilliant feminist constructive theology in which he presented a 200 point matrix of theological categories and feminist categories derived from Shulamith Firestone's Dialectic of Sex. One student made a slide-tape show on women in American history for her district's United Methodist women's group. One student's topic was "My People are Crying," in which, through her experience and her correspondence with women, she gave guidelines to ministers for counseling them.

The consultation was ten days' worth of intense activity for the whole seminary community. Theologian Peggy Way of Vanderbilt held a Communion Service. Psychologist Anne Wilson Schaef of Denver conducted two workshops on sexism, one with the faculty and one with the middler class. There were workshops on child care, on career motivation among women, on women's liberation in the high school. Kate Millett's film, "Three Lives," was shown.

As a result of the class and the consultation, the discussion and action that they have engendered, feminist ferment is high in the seminary. But not everybody is happy about it. One male seminarian suggested that workshops like Anne Wilson Schaef's should be a requirement for all seminarians, and another male student proposed in the Assembly that the course on women become a regular part of the curriculum. But some male students are saying that the women are "laying on" too much. The Women's Project has been "successful" by many criteria; but at this point there has been no official move to continue it for another year or to fund the class for another term. We learned a great deal, and we did a great deal; some feminist change has occurred in all of us, even in the institution.

HOW IT WORKS OUT:
THE WOMEN'S STUDIES GRADUATE

We're all so busy developing our own women's studies programs, creating new curriculum, hassling over funding, over internal governance and community-related programs, that most of us rarely have time to ask how women's studies affects the work lives of students once they leave the university for full-time participation in the real anti-feminist world. But a program that has been functioning for several years produces graduates: what are they up to? Historically, women in America have been the temporaries in the labor force—though one can be temporary 40 hours a week, for 40 years of one's life. Has women's studies begun to bring to center stage the shadowy figure of the women worker? Are women beginning to choose deliberately the shape of their work lives, to create strong identities?

Women's studies is in its third year at Portland State University and many women have now left their demanding, but satisfying lives as women's studies planners and students to find themselves loose in the male-dominated world we jokingly called "the real world." I liked what I saw of students' choices about their lives in the real world. I could make clear connections between women's studies experience, and the confidence and realism of graduates in carving relatively satisfying lives for themselves, and with others. In planning a women's curriculum, can we make sense of the healthy choices of PSU women's studies graduates, isolate the elements of their education that seem to be helping them survive, and translate these elements to other settings, perhaps with tougher racial and economic problems?

To ask the question—how has women's studies affected the work lives of students—is to come at evaluation of women's studies from an oblique angle. I cannot simply ask how well courses teach their proposed subject matter. Most graduates do not go on to teach courses in nineteenth century feminist movements or seminars in Doris Lessing. Nor do significant numbers of women graduates go on to be full-time women's movement organizers. Thus to judge a women's studies program by how well most students know Lessing or how articulate they are about socialist thought seems less fruitful than to examine the range of feminist values put to use after graduation as women continue their work lives.

I by no means want to undervalue the explicit curriculum of women's studies (Lessing, feminism)—its content is the first to make sense in my education or career. But I do think that women learn equally as much from the implicit curriculum of women's studies, from creation of and participation in a specific style of meeting one's own needs and the needs of other women.

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