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National Conference on Sex Role Stereotypes

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A CRITICAL VIEW OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

[Below is a condensed version of Part I of an essay, to be called “What Matter Mind,” that will appear next year in Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal. Part II of the essay describes the external opposition to Women's Studies, and Part III, a strategy for survival that aims to minimize internal dissent while reducing external opposition.]

Quarrels haunt all political movements. The more radical the movement the more vicious the internal struggles seem to become. One suspects that hostility first compels radicalism and then allies compel each other's hostility. The fights within Women's Studies have a unique flavor: the dislike women evidence for other women, which makes collective action emotionally perilous. To that dislike, women often add an atavistic, but well-documented, distrust of women in authority, which transforms potential leaders into possible ogres whom we hound. Women have apparently accepted the theory that womanliness and power may never converge in one person. The distrust has a special mode within academic circles: the public denunciation of women who have conventional credentials (e.g., publications or the Ph.D.). As feminism has become more fashionable, some women get attention, job offers, and mildly grave requests from foundations for advice. Such favors, if favors they be, become as suspect as a bibliography or a doctorate. (See Joreen, “The Tyranny of Structurelessness,” Second Wave, 2, 1 (1972), 20–25, 42, for general comments about elitism, the star system, and internal democracy.)

To be fair, women have asked for it, as we said in childhood fights. Nearly every Women's Studies meeting has had its share of reprint-pushers, title-mongers, and book-peddlers. Part of this is the natural exuberance of women (continued on page 4)

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SEX ROLE STEREOTYPES

On November 24–26, the National Education Association held the first national conference on sex role stereotypes in elementary and secondary schools, under a grant from the Office of Education. Held at Airlie House, in Warrenton, Virginia, the conference drew about 200 participants, including representatives of such groups as the NAACP, the Feminists on Children's Media, NOW, Women on Words and Images, The Women's Action Alliance, The Feminist Press, as well as representatives from NEA affiliates from various sections of the country.

The conference had two fundamental purposes: to bring together as many resources as already existed so that information and materials might be shared by all groups involved; and second, to stimulate sufficient interest in the subject of sex role stereotypes so that NEA affiliates would replicate the conference in at least a dozen other parts of the country during 1973: in Florida during the first week in May; in Seattle in March, and later, in Colorado, Illinois, Michigan, and Massachusetts.

The conference framework focussed on sex role stereotypes as experienced by Native Americans, Asians, Blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and Whites—in relation to the school's involvement in teaching students political, economic, physical, and psychological survival skills. Speakers at the opening and closing sessions addressed these topics head on.

Elizabeth Koontz, Director of the Women's Bureau of the U. S. Department of Labor, opened the conference by stating that schools have done little to prepare students for the work world. Citing the statistic that nine out of ten girls in high school today will work during their lifetime, she emphasized the urgency of the problem. Prince Charmings won't arrive on white horses to fill the spaces of a woman's life, she explained.

Michele Russell, black women's leader from Detroit, Michigan, analyzed the economics of schools in a society (continued on page 8)
that reinforces divisions among the "kept-outs." It is no accident, she claimed, that the industrial needs of the U.S. society have dictated educational policy and that the status of women has not progressed in step with that development. She contended that the pattern of scrambling over another piece of the pie reoccurs when interest groups—women, blacks, other third world people—define themselves as unique or isolated. She suggested that teachers and students will need to combat such individualism, to define change as other than acceleration, and to create consciousness about the meaning of economic survival.

Celeste Ulrich, Professor of Health, Physical Education and Recreation at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, talked about the physical survival needs of girls and women in schools. She cited a startling fact: of all the 1972 U. S. Olympic women, none had trained in public schools. In a society where even bicycles have a sex, Ms. Ulrich argued, girls are given no opportunity to excel in physical sports.

The final speaker at the opening session, and a representative from the National Chicana Foundation, Cecilia Suarez, Associate Professor of Education at the California Polytechnical State University at Pomona, highlighted the psychological survival needs of all students by discussing misinterpretations of research findings on Chicana children. Her talk, even more than the others, aroused a number of questions and led directly into the conference's continued focus on sex and race throughout the two series of workshops held on Saturday.

A total of 19 workshops took place on such subjects as early childhood education, counseling, the teaching of history, teacher's sexist behavior patterns, affirmative action and other legal tools, "analyzing instructional materials" for sexism, "consciousness-raising techniques for changing schools."

Between plenary sessions and workshops, before and after meals, the NEA had assembled a series of slide shows, multimedia documentaries, and in addition, MS's new recording, "Free To Be You And Me." (See News Briefs for slide shows.)

At the final session, Florence Howe, of The Feminist Press, spoke on "Schools and Political Survival." She began by pointing out that the presence of as many third world women as white women had changed the content of the conference significantly: racism and sexism are inextricably intertwined and a conference of this sort can begin to deal with the issues vital to social change. In schools, wherever we work, Ms. Howe suggested, we need to search for "the entering wedge" that will move us towards change. One such wedge is teacher education, especially through in-service courses that focus on sex and racial stereotypes.

Each participant received several hundred pages of useful curriculum resources and materials. While these are not yet available for general distribution, a letter to Shirley McCune at the NEA (1201 16th Street NW, Washington, D. C. 20036) will get you a group of reprints from the December issue of Today's Education. The following conference materials are also available for a token sum: A Child's Right to Equal Reading by Verne Moberg, The Feminist Press. Exercises in the liberation of children's books from the limitations of sexual stereotypes. (30d) Consciousness-Razors by Verne Moberg, The Feminist Press. A pamphlet of creative ideas for raising the consciousness of educators, parents, and even Santa Claus! (25d) The 51% Minority, ed. Suzanne Taylor, Connecticut Education Association. The papers presented at the Women in Education Conference held in the Spring of 1972 by the Connecticut Education Association. (50d)

Carol Ahlum

NEWS BRIEFS

Deadline for Spring issue: February 15 for articles; February 28 for news briefs and other announcements. We are looking for terse, informative essays (under 1200 words) that describe courses or programs or particular experiences with texts or methods; or that discuss theoretical issues of general interest. We will also publish correspondence directed to us. Promised in the next issues: on art and women's studies by Pat Mainardi; essays by program planners at Penn, Sacramento, Washington; essays by high school teachers from tapes made by Carol Ahlum; more bibliography by Tillie Olsen.

**Slide shows**

*Our North American Foremothers*: a multi-media documentary, by Anne Grant for New York City NOW. A 75 minute show—brilliant and moving images from women's history. For further information, write to Anne Grant, 617 49th Street, Brooklyn, N. Y. 11220.

*Sex Role Stereotyping in Textbooks*. Still in experimental form; an analysis (with music) of readers, social studies texts, math and science texts most used in the first six grades. For further information, write to Lenore Weitzman, Dept. of Sociology, University of California, Davis, Calif. 95616.

*Sex Role Stereotyping in Children's Readers*. Analysis of 134 most widely-used readers available for rental at $35.00. Write to Women on Words and Images, P. O. Box 2163, Princeton, N. J. 08540.

*Dick and Jane Receive a Lesson in Sex Discrimination*. A new slide show. For further information, write to Corrine Perkins, 815 Oakcrest Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52250.

*Sex Role Stereotyping in Award-winning Picture Books*. Analysis of Caldecott winners available for rental at $35.00. Write to Lenore Weitzman, Dept. of Sociology, University of California, Davis, Calif. 95616.