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Editorial

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As we go to press with the first issue of our fifth year, it is with pride in our new format and an apology for being late. Unpredictable circumstances kept us from appearing in December, and one significant decision made us delay until now.

The decision belongs to the new National Women's Studies Association: that the Women's Studies Newsletter become its official disseminator of news and information. Elsewhere in this issue we print the policies established by the Association and accepted by The Feminist Press on behalf of the Newsletter. Here we'd like to talk about our sense of the moment and our expectations for the future.

In 1972, when the Newsletter began to appear, there wasn't a glimmer of a national organization in view. The Newsletter began in order to build a network not only for those one thousand academics then pioneering new women's studies courses on college campuses across the country; but especially to link them with the handful of elementary and secondary teachers—far fewer than one hundred—known at the time. The first editorial promised a "forum . . . for the women's studies movement—in higher education, continuing education, secondary and elementary schools, and in community liberation centers."

In 1977, when more than five hundred delegates gathered for the founding convention of a new national women's studies association, it was not surprising that the first order of business was the constituency. Who was creating this association? Whom should it serve? Time went to debate the question of male presence and to affirm that men may be members and participants; and much more time went to confirm the demands of special caucuses for formal representation in the association. Third-world women, lesbian women, elementary and secondary school teachers and administrators, clerical staff, and students—all rose and identified their desire to be a visible part of this association, to share its goals and commitments. And the founders realized the need to define constituency as broadly as possible, within the frame of educational levels and educational settings.

We noted some puzzlement about those tasks of definition—and some impatience with the time spent on them. Why does a professional association need to be concerned with various minorities among its membership? Why does a professional association need to assign particular representation in its governance and at its conventions to caucuses? Others, understanding the need, wanted to get on quickly with the "business" of the convention.

In our opinion, looking back at the moment, the debate was instructive, reminding all of us visibly, palpably, of how far we had come towards our goals; of how complex the distance still to travel. We could count the seventeen third-world women; and we were moved by the lesbian representative who asked lesbians to stand as she read their caucus statement, and then reminded us of those in the room who could not stand publicly. We began to look around for the students among us. We cheered when a high school teacher spoke up for the special needs of her group, a clerical worker for hers. It was an experience that defined the emerging association's relationship not only to the power and constituency of the campus and its women's movement, but to the one off campus.

What the convention told us, most powerfully, was that the women's movement was alive in educational institutions.

The accomplishments of the convention follow in these pages. We call your attention to the need for membership and to the increased urgency for network-building. We commit ourselves to printing the news and views of the Association's formal structures and individual members. We expect to hear from you.

Our next issue will arrive sooner than you think. If you have news of the National Women's Studies Association, or if you'd like to respond to some of the news in this issue, please write to us at once. Deadline: May 10. —F.H.