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1979

Lesbian Research Projects

Charlotte Criste

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listen to and respect older women and often come away from a session with a sense of the continuity and importance of women's history.

Oral history draws in the community while reaching out to it. The "Hidden Faces" project at Colorado University, initiated by Sarah Jacobus, developed into a readers' theater that traveled throughout the state. Another traveling project reaches women in Idaho. Under the direction of Corky Bush and Isabel Miller, skits are presented to women's groups which act out part of women's history. (The skit presented at the Convention featured a reunion between two women who did war work during World War II, "because it was patriotic.")

Sue Armitage of Washington State University, through detailed interviews (mainly in Colorado), is assessing the importance of housework in the development of the West and raising questions about the economic and political impact of women's daily lives on the larger community. Virginia Stamper of the University of Wisconsin/Milwaukee has found that when women are interviewed by a sympathetic interviewer, they begin to remember and even enjoy parts of their own histories that have been submerged for years. For instance, one of her class members revealed that she had been an "Aunt Jemima," yet had never written down her experiences, thinking they weren't significant.

There is a sense of urgency about oral history. Many women interviewed are over 80, and interviewers are determined not to let their stories be lost. Oral history is self-consciously tentative about theory, because it is becoming a new form, a combination of both history and literature with sociological overtones. The lack of value judgments in the ideal interview allows women to open up the truth about their lives, but the lack of evaluation techniques limits the usefulness of the material. The emotional content of an interview makes it interesting, but does it also make it unreliable as accurate history? None of these problems will be solved easily or quickly. Meanwhile, tape collections grow.

Betty Burnett is a literary agent in St. Louis, Missouri.

Lesbian Research Projects

By Charlotte Criste

As a new member of NWSA, I was unprepared for but delighted by the number and quality of the lesbian-centered sessions. At Kansas, lesbian culture was not only superficially acknowledged, but validated and treated with respect as a significant aspect of women's studies.

The Friday morning panel, "Voices of the Lesbian Community: A Workshop on Researching, Archiving, and Teaching," presented a wealth of images. From the Cambridge Women's Center, we heard Chris Czernik report on a teacher's responsibility to include all aspects of women's culture in her courses: "If I am doing an introductory section on Afro-American women," Czernik noted, "I should include some information on Afro-American lesbians. If I'm doing a section on lesbian history/culture, it should not be focused on white, middle-class women."

The Buffalo Community Research Project, engaged in collecting an oral history of the lesbian community in Buffalo, New York, is documenting the lives of usually invisible, "common" lesbians, rather than the "special" lives of those rich, gifted, artistic women who have left their own written records.

The slide show presented by the Lesbian Herstory Archives (P.O. Box 1258, New York, NY 10001) was intensely moving. We learned that the Archives, which publishes a newsletter that regularly includes a bibliography, is devoted to the preservation of all aspects of lesbian culture: books, magazines, journals, newsletters, news clippings, bibliographies, photos, historical information, tapes, conference proceedings, films, diaries, original poetry, prose and research papers, records, biographies, autobiographies, notices of events, posters, graphics, crafts, buttons, T-shirts, and other memorabilia.

The Archives is a labor of love collectively run by women in the community — not in an "academic institution." Lesbians, as Joan Nestle has written ("Radical Archiving: A

Lesbian Feminist Perspective," in *Gay Insurgent*, nos. 4-5, Spring 1979), "do not exist in historical understanding or academic institutions. . . . We live in our homes . . . and we create our herstory every day. It is this story the Archives wants to preserve and share. Once lesbians have generations of herstory to experience, they will change history by the force of their presence."

Charlotte Criste is a newly-appointed Lesbian Caucus representative to the Coordinating Council.

International Programming

By Peg Strobel

The NWSA took several important steps in international programming at its First Convention. Those participating in sessions included women from Argentina, Britain, Ghana, Holland, India, Mexico, the Philippines, Senegal, and Zanzibar. Three national leaders of the All China Women's Federation of the People's Republic of China spent a day touring the Convention. But more important than the mere presence of foreign visitors were the information and issues generated by an international perspective.

In the first place, the Convention provided a forum for exchange of information. International sessions covered such topics as the educational needs of immigrant women in capitalist systems; women writers of Africa, Asia, and Latin America; French and West German feminism; multinational corporations and Third World women workers; and teaching about Third World women.

"International Women's Studies: The Academy and the Activist" in many ways set the tone for the controversial issues raised throughout the Convention. Participants from Britain, Holland, and Argentina discussed the connections and tensions between work in educational and research institutions and work in community settings; the distrust of academics by feminist activists; the ethics of research; and the