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IMPRESSIONS OF THE FIRST NWSA CONVENTION

Some Thoughts on the Integration of Diversity

By Elizabeth Schultz and Janet Sharistanian



In contrast to the 1977 Founding Conference, when a much smaller number of participants concentrated, of necessity, on structural and definitional issues, the Lawrence Convention offered 246 sessions on an impressively wide range of topics to over 1,000 participants from most states and several countries. With twelve or more sessions running simultaneously at any time, the program could and did reflect the diverse constituencies within the NWSA.

Sometimes, indeed, it almost seemed that there was *too much* diversity; those working backstage were chagrined to see how often individual lifestyles and preferences were translated into demands for alterations in practical arrangements which were exceedingly difficult to honor, given our shoestring budget. At other times, and depending upon one's perspective, it seemed that there was *not enough* diversity. For instance, women representing community programs sometimes regarded academic women as narcissistically lost in their own research and careers. Some Third World women said that they felt undervalued and underrepresented, and insisted that for the Association to eradicate its own racism, they would need to hold

power in excess of their numbers. The few men present, not represented by any caucus, were sometimes treated like second-class citizens, with some women questioning their right to any involvement in the proceedings. Married women, particularly those who brought children, often received condescension or disapproval from their more separatist sisters.

At times, the Convention seemed more an exercise in majority-minority relations than anything else, with many seemingly feeling they were in some kind of minority yearning to be in the majority — a peculiar phenomenon in an Association all of whose subgroups define themselves as being, in some crucial way, outside of and in opposition to conventional attitudes toward women. It was in the context of majority-minority relations, in fact, rather than in its intended context of literary criticism, that we found ourselves applying Annette Kolodny's paper on feminist criticism, with its vigorous defense not only of the *need* for critical pluralism, but also of the *inevitability* of diverse and sometimes contradictory responses even among feminists.

For us, then, the Convention raised a question about the future of the Association: to what extent will it be necessary or possible for diverse constituencies within the NWSA to agree *not* to disagree sufficiently to allow the Association to serve those diverse interests? More broadly, in what ways can the Association, like the larger women's movement, renew its commitment to acknowledging distinctions among various political and individual perspectives, and at the same time seek to transcend those distinctions for the common benefit of women? This is a question which will probably take different forms at different conventions. Perhaps it also ought to be an issue to which we explicitly address ourselves in our future annual meetings.

Elizabeth Schultz and Janet Sharistanian, both at the University of Kansas, were involved in behind-the-scenes Convention planning.

A Third World Woman's View of the Convention

By Nupur Chaudhuri

By most accepted criteria, the First NWSA Convention qualifies as a resounding success. The more than 1,000 people who attended could select from 246 sessions representing a wide range of topics in two general groups: (a) women's studies

research in literature, feminist theory, art, etc.; (b) issues for women's programs and pedagogy, including teaching and curriculum administration. The Program Committee (Emily Abel, Deborah Rosenfelt, and Peg Strobel) put together an