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Readers' Speakout

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READERS' SPEAKOUT

Readers are invited to send in comments—about the Women's Studies Quarterly, about the National Women's Studies Association, or about any issue of concern to feminist education—in the form of letters or brief essays of opinion (up to 700 words). We will print letters only with the written consent of the writer. Please send to the editor two copies of your letter or essay, along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

COPY DEADLINES

Winter 1981 issue: September 15.
Spring 1982 issue: December 15.
Summer 1982 issue: March 15.
Fall 1982 issue: June 30.

Dear Ms. Howe:

In a paper called "Lesbian Perspectives on Women's Studies," presented at the National Women's Studies Association's 1980 Convention, Marilyn Frye, professor of philosophy at Michigan State University, said that in her judgment the field of women's studies is heterosexual. This paper has served as a springboard for discussion among the professors and students who comprise the Women's Studies Advisory Committee at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Across the country a division between heterosexuals and homosexuals in women's studies is being generated. In a sense we at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign are blessed that this has yet to become a divisive issue; however, we are seeking means to avoid divisiveness. We feel that simply to include a section on homosexuality within a particular course is no more appropriate or satisfactory than it is merely to include a section on women within a course in a particular subject.

While many of our faculty members readily accept the above premise, a majority expressed concern about their abilities to determine what content on homosexuality should be taught and how that material should be incorporated into their women's studies courses.

As a first step to assist those faculty members the Women's Studies Advisory Committee has developed the following statement for distribution to all women's studies faculty on this campus.

Women's studies courses are designed to introduce people to all aspects of women's lives. Sexuality is an integral aspect of life and impinges on all areas in ways of which we may not be fully conscious.

Women have traditionally been defined by their sexual functions as mothers and homemakers. Implicit in this is an assumption of heterosexual bonding. It is commonly assumed that all individuals are innately heterosexual and that most individuals are and should be heterosexual throughout their life span. Even women's studies courses, as Marilyn Frye has argued, tend to offer students "almost entirely heterosexual women's literature, and the history of heterosexual women... or the literature and history of women presumed to be heterosexual, and analysis of the roles of heterosexual women in work, business, the arts, and heterosexual domestic life... The evidence that many of the women we study were Lesbians is generally overlooked—an erasure which builds as added security for the assumption of natural, near-universal heterosexuality."

An alternative to the assumption of innate heterosexuality is that individuals begin life as single, uncoupled beings with the capacity to make a wide range of choices throughout their life span, including choices regarding their own sexuality. Whether they choose heterosexuality, homosexuality, celibacy, or bisexuality, all choices are valid, should be made freely and should be treated without bias or prejudice. This is a basic right of all human beings, female and male. A nonjudgmental, unbiased approach is imperative to the teaching of sexuality.

In addition, the Women's Studies Advisory Committee has begun an attempt to create a bibliography by subject matter area which could assist our faculty in their attempts to learn what content on homosexuality should be included in women's studies courses and how that might be accomplished. While several helpful sources have been identified, much of the material is general rather than specific to certain subject matter areas, or it assumes a lesbian perspective which many faculty members teaching women's studies courses do not possess. The professors and students on the Women's Studies Advisory Committee have expressed a strong desire and need for a compilation of materials to assist faculty in incorporating content on homosexuality into women's studies courses. If we are fortunate enough to secure the external funds which we have sought, this compilation of material may soon become a reality.

Jean L. Perry, Associate Dean
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Dear Editor,

We would appreciate your calling readers' attention to the urgent need for funds to support the case of the Cornell Eleven (see Women's Studies Newsletter, Volume VIII, Number 4, Fall/Winter, 1980). We need funds to finance depositions, to meet other heavy legal expenses, and to demonstrate to the Court our financial capability to undertake this suit. In order to raise money quickly, we have set up a loan fund.

We need the names of persons able to lend $1,000, under specific contractual conditions—or groups of persons who, together, might reach $1,000. The term of the loan is for one year, and may be extended at the option of the lender. For further information, write to Friends of the Cornell Eleven, P.O. Box 67, Lansing, NY 14882.

Mary Beth Norton, Co-Chair
Friends of the Cornell Eleven;
and professor of history,
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