

Women's Studies

April 1995

In Our Own Words

On Saturday, April 8, at 8 p.m., *In Our Own Words*, a performance piece directed by Ruth Dominguez, will play at the University Center Auditorium. The performance piece is based on short stories by and about women, including "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Lust" by Susan Minot, and "The Female Body" by Margaret Atwood. Admission is one dollar, to benefit *Winged Nation*. Dominguez is directing this piece as part of her Honors Project through the Charles Center.

Linda Joy Burke to Perform

On Thursday, April 13, performance poet Linda Joy Burke will lead an afternoon workshop and give an evening performance. The performance will be at 8 p.m. in Tidewater A of the University Center. To sign up for the 3:30-5:00 poetry writing workshop, call Kristi soon at 221-4753.



Internship Money Available!

A scholarship is available for women students interested in receiving "real world" experience to complement their W&M studies. Awards from \$100 to \$400 are available for summer internships. To apply, submit a one-page proposal to Dr. Green, Women's Studies Office, 327 Richmond Road, by April 10. For more information, call Dr. Green at 221-2457.

Prize Money For Essays!

In the Spring of 1995 four prizes will be awarded to students whose work (completed during the 1994-1995 school year) is evaluated by selection committees as most successful in advancing our knowledge of women. Students may submit term papers or other class assignments, independent study projects, Honors or thesis research. The Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences will award two prizes of \$100 each. This competition is open to both undergraduate and graduate students. The Dean of the School of Education will also award two \$100 prizes, one to a graduate student and one to an undergraduate student. In order to be eligible for these prizes, the work must be completed in courses offered by the School of Education. However, students need not be education concentrators. Three copies of each entry must be submitted. Include your full name, social security number, local phone number, and the name of the instructor and class to which the work was originally submitted. If the work is longer than 20 pages, a summary of no more than 20 pages is requested in addition to the completed work. Submit materials for consideration in the Arts and Sciences competition to Dr. Green in the Women's Studies Office. Submit materials for consideration in the Education competition to the Office of the Dean, Jones Hall 212. The final deadline is 5 p.m., Friday, April 14.

Women in Islam

Amina Wadud-Muhsin, Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University, will speak on "Islam and Spirituality" on Tuesday, April 11, at 7:30 p.m. This talk, part of the Women's Studies 205 forums, is open to the public and will be held in Washington Hall, room 201.

Racism on Campus

A panel of women students will address this issue on Tuesday, April 18, at 7:30 p.m. in Washington Hall, room 201. This is the final Women's Studies 205 forum of the year, and is open to the public.

Upcoming Conferences

United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women
Virginia Commonwealth University invites you to join them for the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held from August 30 to September 8, 1995 in Beijing, China. Cost is \$2100. Registration deadline is April 14. For more information, contact Dr. Green at 221-2457.

Race and Ethnicity

The Ninth Annual Melus Conference, "Constructing Race and Ethnicity: History, Culture, Literature & Theory" will be held from April 28-30 at Johnson and Wales University. Registration is \$10 for students, \$40-\$50 for others. For more information contact Dr. Green at 221-2457.

Women's Studies in Summer

During Session I (May 30-June 30) of summer school at W&M, Kirt Moody will teach a class entitled, "Women, Science, and Culture." The class will be held from 8:20-10:00 a.m. Monday through Friday in the Women's Studies Building, 327 Richmond Road.

During Session II (July 3-August 4), Visiting Multicultural Fellow Melinda de Jesus will teach a class entitled "Women of Color in the United States." The class will meet from 10:10-11:00 a.m., Monday through Friday, in the Women's Studies Building.

Also during Session II look for visiting professor Vicki Kirsch's class in the English Department, entitled "20th Century American Women Writers."

SUGGESTED SUMMER READING

Instead of encouraging you to engage in dialogue, as a parting farewell to the Spring semester, I encourage you to engage in some summer reading as you relax by poolsides, sneak a quick 10 minute break at work, or take care of your families. Here is a very brief bibliography of feminist readings, heavy on theory. [Compiled by Lorelee Clark]

Introductory Material:

Donovan, J. (1985). Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions of American Feminism. New York: Frederick Ungar. This book provides excellent overviews of liberal, cultural, Marxist, radical feminisms. Also looks at feminism in relation to Freud and existentialism.

Eagleton, M., ed. (1986). Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader. New York: Basil Blackwell. This book contains excellent overviews on finding a female tradition, women and literary production, gender and genre, and feminist writing. Includes ground-breaking articles such as Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" as well as Dates' "Is There a Female Voice?"

Humm, M. (1986). Feminist Criticism: Women as Contemporary Critics. New York: St. Martin's P. This book looks at language, psychoanalysis, Marxist feminism, black and lesbian criticism, and focuses on well-known feminist critics such as Woolf, de Beauvoir, and Rich.

Liberal Feminism:

Schwarzer, A. (1984). After the Second Sex: Conversations with Simone de Beauvoir. New York: Pantheon.

Radical Feminism:

Daly, M. (1978). Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism. Boston: Beacon.

hooks, b. (1984). Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center. Boston: South End P.

Lorde, A. (1984). Sister Outsider. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing.

Lorraine, T.E. (1990). Gender, Identity, and the Production of Meaning. Boulder, CO: Westview P. Concerned with the "ways in which women have been silenced and why women have allowed themselves to be silent." Looks at the construction of identity via Lacan, Irigaray, Chodorow, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Sartre.

Socialist Feminism

Eisenstein, Z. (1988). The Female Body and the Law. Berkeley: U of California P. Concerned with theoretical assumptions of power as related to engendered discourse, "reaganism," pornography, affirmative action, and abortion. Also looks at biology as a gendered notion.

----- (1984). Feminism and Sexual Equality. New York: Monthly Review P. Offers a critique of liberalism and liberal feminism, stating that the root of liberalism is in "phallographic ideology." Focuses on the benefits of a sexually particular, equal, free, feminist theory; a revisionist feminism.

Marxist Feminism

Lesage, J. (1988). Women's Rage. In Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture. Chicago: U of Illinois P. Speaks to the need for promotion of "self-conscious, collectively supported, and politically clear articulations of [women's] anger and rage." It focuses on heterosexism as an institutionalized desire, intellectual poverty, and power's relation to psychological and social change.

Mackinnon, C.A. (1988). Desire and Power: A Feminist Perspective. In Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture. Chicago: U of Illinois P., Mackinnon wants to define feminism without looking at "who we think we are to think we can define what it means." She moves toward a unified theory of social inequality and poses questions such as "Why do women fake orgasms?" and "Isn't the relationship between mother and child hierarchical and dominant?"

Identity (Re)Construction Within The Feminist Movement: An Historical Perspective and Brief Overview of books' Feminist Theory.

[Essay by Lorelee Clark]

One of the points hooks takes issue with within the feminist movement is identity construction. She examines the identity of the feminist movement in part through her critiques of classism and racism which existed and still exist within the movement. She looks at how the feminist movement defines itself, noting that the definitions the movement and movement members use constructs a very specific, limiting identity.

Feminism has said, essentially, that all women have a common bond and a common oppression. The common oppression was defined as sexism, but the sexism described only defined sexism for white, middle class housewives. Hooks notes this did not allow for the acknowledgement of differences among women. Women who were not white and/or middle class did not have the same issues and concerns as the current leaders and members of the movement--their concerns were more far-reaching. They felt their issues were not on the movement's agenda.

By being classist and racist the feminist movement alienated the very members they wanted to attract: women. Perhaps the movement's life/world was simply replicating what it was rebelling against in the first place? The leaders and members of the feminist movement were intent on changing women's oppression. However, in the process of trying, they perpetuated the oppression of women through tactics which were racist and classist.

The oppression of women is being maintained in the feminist movement on another level as well. Many liberal feminist reforms are simply reinforcing societal values without truly liberating members economically (hooks, p. 22), which is a critique of neo-Marxism. So if only white, middle class interests are being served, women are still being oppressed. There is a problem then in the movement of those wanting reform and those wanting social transformation.

As the movement reproduced what it was revolting against, it was not only limiting membership, but also making it "practically impossible for new and varied theories to emerge" (hooks, p. 9). Hooks notes that criticisms or alternatives were not received with open arms. Many of the white, middle class women wished to stifle what they saw as dissent--which in actuality was the desire for diversity. The feminist movement was overlooking women's reality when the white middle class women who "started the ball rolling again" saw their concerns as the only concerns which naturally extended to all women.

Diversity, for many theorists and organizers of social movements, is seen as a problem because it is believed to increase instability. Hooks contends that diversity would strengthen the feminist movement. So how can the feminist movement encourage a diversity of voices? Advocate for a diverse identity? Many women today will not associate with the feminist movement because they are uncertain about what the term feminism means. Could this be a drawback of the diversity hooks advocates?

Certain definitions can negate some women's realities, which in turn will cause them to not want to identify with the movement. Feminism has been described as a life-style/a way of living. Hooks notes that lifestyle and political commitment are two entirely different foci: "The willingness to see feminism as a lifestyle choice rather than a political commitment reflects the class nature of the movement" (hooks, p. 27). This connects back to the issue of reform versus social transformation: If one is apolitical in their agenda, they are reformist. Scott asserts that "the attempt [within new social movements] is to bring about social change through challenging values . . . rather than by more conventional and directly political action" (p. 18). It is this mentality that could have contributed to classist and racist agendas within the feminist movement; this reformist vision. Hooks notes that it is precisely those apolitical definitions of feminism, which have more appeal, that will result in perpetuation of established norms (p. 24).

Reformism is seen as much less disturbing and risky than social transformation. Hooks believes lifestyle should be a definite focus for lesbians within the feminist movement because it is directly tied to their politics (p. 27); but that as a whole the feminist movement should be concerned with recovering and maintaining feminism's "positive political significance and power" (p. 23).

By focusing on political commitment, members of the feminist movement resist emphasizing individuality and become engaged in a revolutionary praxis. If one identifies with a social movement in a collective manner--I advocate feminism--there is greater mobilization, greater political commitment. This is a very different construction of identity.

When a member individualizes within a movement they are essentially saying there are predetermined notions of identity and behavior. This does not allow for diversity. As an attempt to not only allow for diversity within the movement but also strengthen political commitment, it is important to reconstruct the ways feminist movement deals with issues of identity.

[Supporting materials gathered from Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center by bell hooks (1984) and Ideology and the New Social Movements by Alan Scott (1990).]