Feminist Scholarship Review

Trinity College Volume IV, No. I

Hartford, CT Fall 1994



Helen Hunt Jackson, author and reformer of Native American policy in the U.S. (1830-1885)

Feminist Scholarship Review

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Feminist Scholarship Review
is a project of the Trinity College Women's Center

Table of Contents

Letter From the Editor

Women's Center: Reviewed Sources

Report: Women's Studies/Feminist Information on the Internet

Trinity College Library: Additional Sources

Women's Center: Additional Sources

Letter from the Editor

Letter from the Editor:

Feminist modes of research. The topic of this issue of <u>FSR</u> sounded distant to me, cool, theoretical. I wasn't sure I had anything to say about it. At least not until I began to read some articles which employed oral histories and researcher interpretations of those histories. Then the subject came to life for me. Reading the Scanlon article which is reviewed later in this issue of <u>FSR</u> illuminated some of the knotty issues involved in research methods that have the courage to take subjects and readers into account. I still wondered how this related to me, though, and what I could say about that relationship. Suddenly, I knew.

Many years ago, newly married and recently relocated to a small town in Massachusetts, I became pregnant and, unfortunately, suffered a miscarriage. I had few acquaintances in this new location, and virtually no support group. I felt isolated, vulnerable, lost. By chance, and simply for "factual" information, I bought the original edition of Qur Bodies. Ourselves. It was a slim volume compared to today's edition. I located the chapter on miscarriage, and was surprised to see that oral histories of women who had undergone this experience were included in the editors' definition of what was important to know about this topic. Personal stories were validated here in print, and through them, my own story was taken into account, as well. I read and reread those women's words countless times, and found, in them, my temporary support group. Some months later when I became pregnant again (with the baby who is now a senior in college!), I read the section on pregnancy and tried to assuage my fears and confirm my hopes through the stories of the women who spoke to me from the pages of that section of the book.

We come back, perhaps, to women's words, the topic of <u>FSR</u> in our Spring, 1993 issue. The expression of human experience and its interpretation by an audience is key to our sense of commonality, struggle and comfort. The "abstract" topic of feminist research is as concrete as our everyday experience, our everyday concerns and joys.

--- Deborah Rose O'Neal

Women's Center: Reviewed Sources

Women's Studies International Forum, 16:6, 1993, pp.639-645
Jennifer Scanlon, "Challenging the Imbalances of Power in Feminist Oral History"

The author of this article, Jennifer Scanlon, states that her purpose in writing it is to "engage in some of the feminist debates about conducting and using oral histories in academic work and to offer suggestions...[as to] how one can and should give...compensation for information provided by research subjects:(640). The bulk of the rest of the paper, however, is concerned with Scanlon's own oral history, which includes a lengthy dose of what could be interpreted as the guilt she experiences when she uses others' histories to enhance her own reputation and position as a professor and published researcher. She talks protractedly about the unique situation which has placed her in a town on the Canadian border which temporarily houses scores of refugees from Central America and Africa and about her own efforts to give service time to the groups which support this needy population. Perhaps it is Scanlon's style of writing that makes her explanations sound awkward and selfserving. Perhaps it is actual self-recrimination and self-blame that puts me off, but whatever the reason, I tire of her list of good deeds. "The most consistent effort I make for the refugees is to volunteer one morning each week at the Crisis Center...I often accompany women to Social Services so they can complete the paperwork there...I often accompany pregnant women to doctor's offices.." To my ear, the recitation is a hollow one.

There is some value to this article, however well-hidden it may be. Despite herself. Scanlon does explore some of the issues involved in feminist research. The introductory paragraphs discuss the purposes of research in general in a thoughtprovoking, if too brief, manner. Scanlon's survey of the literature on this subject includes rich and stimulating commentary from other researchers. The researchers she cites propose ideas such as that "research must produce emancipatory knowledge", raise the "critical consciousness of the researcher and the subject, improve the lives of those involved in the project and begin to transform societal structures" (Maguire qtd. in Scanlon 639). A reference to Shulamit Reinharz, who is included in the anthology The Knowledge Explosion: Generations of Feminist Scholarship, summarizes neatly the reasons for the development of feminist scholarship with its attendant participatory approaches: "...doing research with people rather than on them; having women do research; doing research in ways that empower people; valuing experiential knowledge; honoring female intelligence; and seeking the causes of oppression" (Reinharz atd. in Scanlon 639-640). In this short quotation, Scanlon gives us much to think about.

Scanlon longs to tell her own story and she found this listener to be a reluctant one! It may well be worth reading the article, however, if only for its fine introduction and for the list of references at the conclusion of the paper.

Women's Center: Reviewed Sources

FEMINIST METHODS IN SOCIAL RESEARCH (1992) Shulamit Reinharz

Does feminist research have its own methodology? What qualities distinguish feminist research from other forms of research? Who decides what research is and is not feminist? These are a few of the questions that Shulamit Reinharz addresses in Feminist Methods in Social Research published in 1992 by Oxford University Press.

Reinharz does not provide definitive answers to these questions. Her goal is "to illustrate what feminist research includes, i.e., to collect, categorize and examine the multitude of feminist research voices." She provides us with many answers to each question, often using the authentic voices of feminist researchers. Her text is a comprehensive compilation of the range of approaches used in feminist research and the rationale behind each perspective. Reinharz sees the defining of feminist research as an ongoing discussion, a work in progress which includes diverse perspectives. In keeping with this approach, Reinharz refuses to limit freedom of thought by accepting any one definition of what is feminist. Her text examines any work by a researcher who identifies her or himself as a feminist or is published in a feminist journal.

Reinharz looks at feminist work within a variety of methods including experimental, cross-cultural, case studies, ethnography, survey, oral history, multiple methods and action research. She explores the challenges of diversity, inclusivity and subjectivity within each method and outlines ongoing controversies between scientific methods and feminist ideals. For example, in using interviewing as a method of gathering data, ethical decisions relating to researcher self-disclosure are discussed. Should one remain a neutral observer or provide advocacy and/or resources to participants in need? In the area of ethnography, researchers explain how they have come to understand and negotiate gender issues when doing fieldwork. The benefits and limitations of quantitative methods are also considered, as is the issue of how choices in language can narrow responses on surveys.

Students of social science research will find the extensive overview provided by this text to be extremely informative. The multitude of methods examined from the perspective of feminism stimulates one's own thinking about the diverse manners in which research topics can or should be approached. Reinharz's analysis goes far beyond the qualitative versus quantitative debate. Seasoned social scientists will appreciate the feminist analysis and the discussion of ethical and scientific concerns. For each dilemma posed, the reader is provided with a number of alternative viewpoints and options, a frustrating experience but certainly one that pushes you to think. This is the most obvious drawback of the text. Many more problems are raised than solutions. Feminist Methods in Social Research also left this reader with the wish that Reinharz had examined the research methods from the differing viewpoints of social, radical and liberal feminism. That, however, is another book and in no way diminishes the importance of this much needed, well-written, comprehensive overview of feminist research in social science.

Women's Studies Information on the Internet

WOMEN'S STUDIES/FEMINIST INFORMATION ON THE INTERNET

Does the thought of receiving information from strangers across the country via your computer make you nervous? If you are one of the people who have not fully mastered communication through the Internet, do not fear. The Internet is an international web of computer networks which includes federal, regional, campus and international networks. It is an amazing resource for sharing knowledge with thousands of people worldwide. As a research project for an Independent Study class, Laura Hunt of the University of Michigan compiled information regarding valuable Women's Studies resources on the Internet today. With fundamental Internet skills, a wealth of information about current women's issues can be yours at the touch of a key. A partial listing of listservs Hunt researched and found useful and instructions on how to access them follows.

THE CLEAR AND SIMPLE WAY TO E-MAIL AT TRINITY

If you can operate a microwave, then you have what it takes to master E-mail. To start an E-mail account, students must make a trip to the Computer Center (MCEC) with a blank disk to copy it onto. The entire process takes about ten minutes, and requires that you choose a password for secure access. The next step is installing the account on the disk into your computer. This is a remarkably easy process that will be explained to you in detail by the Computer Center worker. Once E-mail is installed, the Eudora icon will permanently appear on your hard drive and all you have to do is double click it and you're on your way. If you don't own a computer, all you need is the disk with your account on it and you can use any computer to recieve your mail.

Faculy and staff members of Trinity have it even easier. E-mail has automatically been installed on all of your computers. If the Eudora icon does not currently appear on your hard drive, or if you do not already have a password assigned to you, call the Computer Center (x. 2100) and they will set up one for you. E-mail can be used by both PC's and Macintoshes. The Computer Center staff will tell you exactly what you should do to access Eudora. From there, a quick double click on the Eudora icon will allow you to check and send mail.

FEMINIST INFORMATION ON THE INTERNET

EDUCOM-W is a moderated list to facilitate discussion of issues in technology and education that are of interest to women.

Send subscription requests to: LISTSERV@BITNIC.EDUCOM.ORG

FEMECON-L is a listserv for feminist economists. A source of information and answers to questions on economics with feminist perspectives.

Send subscription requests to: MAILSERV@BUCKNELL.EDU

FEMISA is a list for discussion of feminism, gender, women and international relations, world politics, international political economy and global politics.

Send subscription requests to: LISTSERV@CSF.COLORADO.EDU

FIST (Feminism in Science and Technology) is an unmoderated list for discussion of feminism and science and technology.

Send subscription requests to: LISTSERV@DAWN.HAMPSHIRE.EDU

GEOGFEM is open to the discussion of all topics relating to gender issues ion geography. Discussions of theoretical and empirical issues, book reviews, calls for papers, and information on conferences.

Send subscription requests to: LISTSERV@UKCC.UKY.EDU

H-WOMEN is an international forum for scholars and teachers of women's history. Send subscription requests to: H-WOMEN@UICVM.BITNET

LIS is a list for lesbians in industry, universities, government labs, etc. Send subscription requests to: ZITA@JUNO.PHYSICS.WISC.EDU

SASH (Sociologists Against Sexual Harassment) is a moderated list focusing on sexual harassment.

For information or to subscribe, write to: Phoebe M. Stambaugh AZPXS@ASUVM.INRE.ASU.EDU

SSSSTALK is a sexuality discussion list where professional researchers, clinicians, educators and students in the field of sexuality can communicate freely, professionally and efficiently.

Send subscription requests to: LISTSERV@TAMVM1.TAMU.EDU

STOPRAPE is a sexual assault activist list.

Send subscription requests to: LISTSERV@BROWNVM.BROWN.EDU

WISENET is a list for women in science, mathematics and engineering. Send subscription requests to: U35049@UICVM.BITNET

WMN-HLTH is a women's health electronic news-line, started by the Center for Women's Health Research.

Send subscription requests to: LISTSERV@UWAVM.U.WASHINGTON.EDU

WIRE: Women's Information Resource and Exchange is the first International interactive computer network dedicated to women. WIRE provides women with a centralized source of women-oriented information and conversation. WIRE provides access to databases, discussions, alerts, abstracts, resources and experts on health, politics, career, finance, technology, parenting, education, etc. WIRE is located in San Francisco, CA and is available for a monthly fee. For more information contact WIRE at 415/615-8989 or send E-Mail to INFO@WIRE.NET

For information on more feminist oriented Internet services, please contact the Trinity College Women's Center.

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

To subscribe to a listserv you need to send a subscription request as an E-mail message to the addresses supplied above. A subscription request simply consists of the message below sent as the body of your message. Most of these are done electronically and not by individuals, so do not write more than that message if all you want to do is subscribe.

Subscription request: SUB <LIST NAME> <YOUR FULL NAME> Unsubscription request: UNSUB <LIST NAME> <YOUR NAME>

---Jennifer Guy

The preceeding information was researched by Laura Hunt, University of Michigan.

Trinity College Library: Reviewed Sources

Feminist Research Methods

What is feminist research? Are the specific tasks, techniques and approaches different for feminists operating within sociology, psychology, anthropology, or any of the social sciences? How are these tasks different? Connie Miller searched through the literature to find instances where feminists self-consciously address the issue of differing methodologies. She has gathered her findings in the annotated bibliography Feminist Research Methods where in recognition of the varying interests of others she sorted her findings by discipline.

Each chapter begins with an overview of feminist activity within a particular discipline and then lists annotations to discussions within that field. The sources include books, chapters from books, journal discussions and documents published between 1920 and 1990. Because Miller's findings have shown her that in general feminist researchers tend to be more interdisciplinary in their work she also includes a detailed subject which functions as a cross index to the sources. There is also an author index.

Feminism has changed traditional research. Miller is hopeful when she observes that non-sexist language has become a standard guideline for submission to many journals and that researchers are more cautious about drawing conclusions about everyone from only studying men. She also picks up on some disappointments. Factions of feminists are forming and some factions spend more energy criticizing the methods of other researchers than clearly articulating their own.

While the books and articles on feminism and research are plentiful, most approach the topic inductively by showing instances of feminists in action. It is more difficult to find practitioners reflecting on their feminist approach within a discipline. Can quantitative methods exhibit sensitivity to gender work? Must all studies of social differentiation include gender along with tank, class and kinship? Why do some feminist psychologists pay more attention to social context and status in their analysis that do traditional psychologists? Consideration of these key issues and the like will improve your own research methods. Explore Connie Miller's bibliography.

---Linda McKinney

Women's Center: Additional Sources

Vol. XI, No.12

Inside:



Mirna Cunningham, a Miskita Indian woman who tells her story to Margaret Randall in Sandino's Daughters Revisited: Feminism in Nicaragua, reviewed on p.18.

- •• A dramatic enactment of the Los Angeles riots appears in book form: Rachel Kranz reviews Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 by Anna Deavere Smith, p.6.
- ■◆In her last poetry collection, The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance: Poems 1987-1992, Audre Lorde explored "lifelong preoccupations with the geographies of relationships, of political movements, of identities, of cities," says Cheryl Clarke, p.13.
 - ▶◆Irene Elizabeth Stroud reads The Center of the Web: Women and Solitude, and finds its essays are troubling testimony to women's lack of private time and space, p.22.
 - ◆ "The telling of truth changes the world. And changing the world remains Allison's goal": E.J. Graff reviews Skin: Talking About Sex, Class, and Literature, Dorothy Allison's latest collection of essays, p.10.

and more...

Wrestling with writing

by Alix Kates Shulman

Voice Lessons: On Becoming a (Woman) Writer, by Nancy Mairs. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994, 166 pp., \$15.00 hardcover.

As a novelist ever on the alert for insights about writing to pass on to my workshop students (and hug to myself), I treasure such books as Annie Dillard's The Writing Life and Italo Calvino's Six Memos for the Next Millennium, both deeply perceptive works about writing. But too often reflections on the writing life are either lessons from on high full of epigrammatic pronouncements, or else hortatory pep talks. Nancy Mairs' new book of essays, Voice Lessons, is neither. Not that it lacks its share of useful tips-"What creators do, over and over [is] fail and start again." "If I kept merely wanting to write it appeared pretty likely that I would die. Instead I reached for a pen." But it offers something far morevaluable. By continually examining the messy context in which her work developed, a context with feminism at the center, Mairs' book, like Dillard's and Calvino's, is more useful and satisfying than even the best advice.

Mairs unabashedly believes that writing is an "instrument of conversion" and shows how writing-others' and her own-has changed her life. As much about the making of a feminist as the making of a writer, Voice Lessons traces the interaction of these two narrative strands in the intellectual development of one particular writer who is "female, white, welleducated, moderately prosperous, crippled, a Roman Catholic convert, heterosexual." A collection of nine autobiographical essays, the book is actually an intellectual adventure story that recounts Mairs' efforts to integrate the dichotomies that have interfered with her writing: between the academic and "real" worlds, ideas and emotions, writer and reader-and between critical and creative writing, the one that, she says, "proved most vexatious to my

An essay collection, Mairs writes in "Essaying the Feminine," "begins, halts, shifts, begins anew," and Voice Lessons is no exception. Yet embedded in it is a fairly unified



CONTENTS

- 1 Alix Kates Shulman Voice Lessons: On Becoming a (Woman) Writer by Nancy Mairs
- 4 Letters
- 6 Rachel Kranz Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 by Anna Deavere Smith
- 7 Susan Stanford Friedman The Psychiatric Persuasion: Knowledge, Gender, and Power in Modern America by Elizabeth Lunbeck
- 9 Rickie Solinger I Am Roe: My Life, Roe v. Wade and Freedom of Choice by Norma McCorvey with Andy Meisler
- 10 E.J. Graff Skin: Talking About Sex, Class, and Literature by Dorothy Allison
- 12 Ann Jones Moving Targets: Women, Murder and Representation edited by Helen Birch
- 13 Cheryl Clarke The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance: Poems 1987-1992 by Audre Lorde
- 15 Gail Pool Eliminate the negative? reviewing, censorship and self-censorship
- 17 Karen Buhler-Wilkerson Transcending AIDS: Nurses and HIV in New York City by Peggy McGarrahan
- 18 Maxine Molyneux Sandino's Daughters Revisited: Feminism in Nicaragua by Margaret Randall
- 20 Elsa Dorfman Family: A Portrait of Gay and Lesbian America by Nancy Andrews; Fathers and Daughters: In Their Own Words, Photographs by Mariana Cook
- 22 Irene Elizabeth Stroud The Center of the Web: Women and Solitude edited by Delese Wear
- 23 Regina G. Kunzel Contraception and Abortion in Nineteenth-Century America by Janet Farrell Brodie
- 25 Jewelle Gomez . The Serpent's Gift by Helen Elaine Lee
- 26 Sonia Jaffe Robbins Cinderella Goes to Market: Citizenship, Gender and Women's Movements in East Central Europe by Barbara Einhorn; Women in the Politics of Postcommunist Eastern Europe edited by Marilyn Rueschemeyer
- 26 Alice Ryerson Two Poems
- 27 Tsianina Lomawaima Mankiller: A Chief and Her People by Wilma Mankiller and Michael Wallis
- 29 Gardner McFall Otherwise by Eleanor Wilner; Rivers of Salt by Shirley Kaufman
- 31 Prathia Hall Wynn Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920 by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham
- 33 Books Received
- 35 Index to Volume Eleven

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13.73

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Volume XI, number 12 September 1994

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The Women's Review of Books (ISSN #0738-1433) is published monthly except Aspact by The Women's Review, Inc., 828 Washington Steet, Wellnessey, MA. 02181. Annual subscriptions are \$18.00 for enthickable and \$30,00 for instantions. Overseas portage fees are an additional \$20,00 arms or \$5.00 surface mail to all countries outside the U.S. Back issues are available for \$2,00 per copy. Please stow 6-8 weeks for all subscription translations. Second-class postage paid at Boxon, MA and additional making effices. POSTMASTER: send address connec-ions to The Women's Review of Books, Wellesley College Center for Research

on Women, Wellesley, MA 02181. The Women's Review of Books is a project of the Wellesley College Center to Research on Women. As an autonomous publication it has its own editorial board and board of directors, who set policy with regard to its editorial, financial and

organizational character.
The Women's Review is distributed by Irland Book Company, East Harver, CT:
Injury, Nashmile, TN; Oon-Cloon Distribution, Minneapous, Mith Small Changes,
Sastile, W. and Doormous, Tronton, Canada, All other distribution is handled

directly by The Women's Review. The Women's Review's indexed in the Sook Review Index, the American Humanisian Index, the Atlementer Press Index and the Left Index. It is available on 16mm and 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche from University Microfilms International, 200 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Mil 40106.

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IN MEMORY OF THE WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN KILLED Gina Abens, 24 Rolfe, Iowa Collegn B. Benz, 37 Portland, Oreg. Barbara Nell Canada, Houston, Tex. Marjone Bernard, 25 Boston, Mass. Theresa Adams, 34 Cleveland, Ohio ean Co Women's Center: Additional Sources Carol Cannon, 49 Atlanta, Ga. lle, S. Latonya Billings, 19 El Dorado, Ark. tary Ann Aeschliman. elle C tark, Susan Rebecca eur d'Alene, Idaho Carlton, 49 Durham, N.C. Patricia F. Billings, 35 Hygiene, Colo. thleen Ahearn Jeenfield, Mass. ila Folston, 27 and, Calif. Amy Camevale, Beverly, Mass. Jayne Billingsley, 39 Cleveland, Chio Mavis Groat Chattanooga, Tenn Doris Holland, 62 De Smet, S.Dak. Day Michelle Albey, 21-lacksonville, Ark, Jan Ken Duque, ord, 19 Linda Lou Carp Linda C Aiken, S Claudia Jean Bills, 48 Laramie, Wyo. Robbin Grubbs, 39 Barnwell, S.C. Charlene Holt, 37 Lithonia, Ga. 46 Otto, S.C. Lucy Algarra, 44 El Paso, Tex. **G**eth Cris Diane Carr, 31 Cleveland, Ohio Dekalb County, Ga. Renata Bioas, 17 Garfield, N.J. Sheila Guitterez, 27 Nashville, Tenn. Linda Hoover, 36 San Antonio, Tex Charmaine Allen, 25 Friendship, Wis. Lorretta Ellen Foster, Michelle Crock, 25 Little Rock, Ark. Kelly Duty, 26 Toledo, Ohio 29 Waterloo, lowa Laura Blake, 32 Omaha, Nebr. Patricia Carr, 52 Marcia Darlene Myrtle Maxine Gundy. argo, Md. Sandy Springs, Ga. Howard, 40 Tucson, Ariz. Meeker, Okla. Traci Crozier Chattanooga, Tenn. Mavis Eagelman, 37 Minneapolis, Minn. Judith Hart Fournier, 33 Brattleboro, Vt. a Altagracia, 40 Rosa Carrasco, 42 Amarillo, Tex. Cynthia Ann Bogany, Rhonda Guyton, 29 Gaffney, S.C. Crystal Hudson, 16 Eudora, Ark Tricial Cunningham, 20 Lakewood, Ohio Houston, Tex. Tina Frederick, 30 Brownstown Towns Barbara Lou Eason, 32 Amy Sue Casanova, 20 Alamosa, Colo. Kathy Hudson, 36 New Llanc, La. Karen Bonnette, 28 Lake Charles, La. Julia D. Eckenroth, 21 Aaronsburg, Pa. goli Alvarado, 31 Beverly Hacelton, 49 Fayetteville, Ark. nporia, Karis. Vang Da. 48 Oakland, Calif. Tony Cervera, 36 Pasadena, Calif. Adelia Fredrickson_36 Clinton, lowa Elaine Hackett, 50 Wilder, Vt. Gioria Ann Haft Signal-Mountain, Ter Arva Edgerton, 54 Cambridge, Nebr. larbara Anderson, 33 ladarburg, Wis. Delores Boppre, 50 Scottsbluff, Nebr. Cheryl Huff, 26 Donna Daigneau, 33 Harrodsburg, Ky. Glendale Heigh Martha Freeborn, 42 Millie Cesardo San Francisco, Calif. Linda Hughes, 29 Bay Shore, N.Y Sytvia Boyd, 33 England, Ark. assandra Lee Naomi Edwards, 57 Des Moines, Jowa Inderson, 27 Woonsocket, R.L. Katherine Fritz, 55 Duluth, Minn. Amie Hulbert, 23 Oskaloosa, lowa

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Tatulla Boykins, 17 Little Rock, Ark.

Linda Gale Bradley, 44 Renton, Wash.

Alexis Paula Braley, 29 Somerville, Mass

Francis Brandon, 25 Johnsonville, S.C.

Joanne Branscum, 41 Patagonia, Pa.

Detores Brezina, 73 Octavia, Nebr.

Geraldine Brizeridine,

Hot Springs, Ark:

Beth Brodie, 15 Groveland, Mass

Odell T. Brooks; 34 Baton Rouge, La.

Pearl Bruns, 48 3 South Portland, Maine

Valena Buckley, 33

Tena Bufferine, 31. Hickory, N.C.

Eleanor Burns, 62 Presque Isle, Maine

Yolanda Burns

Plaquemine, La.

Carmen Bush, 37

Rosemary Butler, 24 Hartford, Corin

Lumisha Buxton, 62 Allendale, S.C.

Natalie Callaway, 24 Atlanta, Ga

ndra Calo, 24-perville, Mass.

Dekaib County, Ga.

Brenda Atkins Callaway, 47 Jonesboro, Ga.

Pittsburgh, Pa.

Baton Rouge, La

Heather Brown

Chico, Calif.

rene Anderson, 63 odel, Nebr.

laria A. Andrade, 50 ludson, Mass.

ndra Anzalone, 22 elsea, Mass.

aura Arana, 40 Ponx, N.Y.

ammy Archer, 16

Sebbie Ashley, 41 Jille Rock, Ark.

anda Avila, 37 finatchee, Wash.

itile Awkal, 22 leveland, Ohio

ynthia Bacher, 31 leimar, N.Y.

amile Bailey, 21 liwaukee, Wis.

andra Baird, 39 ochester Hills, Mich.

tirley Jean Barnes,

tte Rock, Ark.

acey Bartholmay

andra Becwar, 46

elinghausen, 27 dessa, Tex,

resa Bender, 28 bkosh, Wis

\$5.95

NADA \$6.50

sti Neil

ritle Ga

egina Armstrong auderdale Lakes, Fla.

Theresa Champigny, 39 Millersville, Md.

Pauline Chaput North Hampton, N.H.

Angeline Charido, 55 Saugus, Mass.

Ida Mae Chrisafulli, 42 Hinton, W.Va.

Shelly Christianson, 27 Seattle, Wash

Erma Claibome, 33 Baton Rouge, La

Claudia Clarey, 40 Fairmount, N.Dak.

Dianne Rebecca Clark,

Forest Park, Ga.

Patricia Thomas Clay

Woodmere, N.Y.

becca Clifton, 21 Tucson, Ariz.

Wendy Cloven, 22 Warren, Mich.

Barbara Coats, 25 Baton Rouge, La.

Jeannette Cochran, 35 Denver, Ark

Many-Jane Colbert, 30 Concord, N.H.

Wanna Burroughs, 51 Warren, Mich. Carol Cole, 31 Waverly, W.Va. Grace Burrus, 75 Oceanside, Calif.

Theresa Cole, 20 Danvers, Mass.

Rita Colucci, 40 Portland, Maine

Ketherine Comstock

Fairfield Bay, Ark.

Juanita Cook, 63

Catherine A. Copeland, San Francisco, Calif.

Connie Lynn Coram, 38 Knoxville, Tenn,

Tarsha Cotton, 17 Forrest City, Ark.

Karen Coughlin, 36 Holden, Mass.

Mary Dalfas, 33 Elyna, Ohio Ly Dang, 26 Terrell, Tex

Paula Sue Danielson Grand Marais, Minn

Mary Beth Daugherty,

38 Meadville, Pa. Brenda Davis, 34 Waukegan, III.

Charlene Davis, 22 Diane Davis, 48 Kenilworth, III.

Vonnie Marie Day lvydale, W.Va.

Arlene Delavega, 21 Providence, R.I.

Delfina Deleon, 32 Lawrence, Mass. Elizabeth Delgado, 19 Springfield, Mass.

Marisela Del Rio, 43 Amityville, N.Y.

Karen DeMatteo, 31 Hamden, Conn. Melody Derosia-Waters, 19 Hopkinton, N.H.

Denise Derr, 42 Spanish Lake, Mo. Delfina V. Dias, 36 East Providence, R.I.

Sheila Ann Dickson, 24 Bondsville, Ark.

Patsy Dillard, 37 St. Paul, Minns Carol DiBesto, 26 9

Dana Dixon, 27 Baker, La.

Jennifer Dolan, 25 Arlington, Va.

Anne Scripps Douglas, Bronxville, N.Y.

Beth Douglas, 32 Bay City, Mich.

Marsha Downs, 38 Tama, Iowa

Lincoln, Nebr.

Anne Erdey, 39 Hammond, La.

Rose Ervin, 31

Maria Escamilla, 43 Scottsbluff, Nebr.

Tina Escobedo, 21

Gloria Espino, 28

Barbara Evans, 37.

Melissa Dawn Ewart,

mie Michelle Faris

16 Lake County, Calif.

Mary Feldbruegge, 29 Madison, Wis.

Yvonne Michelle Fleids.

Melissa Figueroa, 19 Bronx, N.Y.

chester, N.H.

Bonnie Fleitas, 37 Sherwood, Ark.

Ann Flickinger, 25 Valparaiso, Ind.

Marsha Gail Woods

Flippo, 22 Harrison, Ark.

Christine Fleming, 20 Bellevue, Nebr.

Christina Fey, 25 Queens, N.Y Brenda Ficklin, 39 Little Rock, Ark

Austin, Tex.

Morrow, Ga. \

Kim Evans 35 Hammond, Ind

Halbrook, N.Y.

Pamela Edwards, 27 Colorado Springs Julie Carol Frost, 26 Lewiston, Idaho Colo. Julia Elics, 44 Roswell, Ga. 44

Sonja Gallego, 31 Ridgewood, N.Y.

Laura Garrison, 30 Charlotte Geiger, 50

Dorothy Geister, 26 Rawlins, Wyo Charlotte Gentry, 38 Forest Park, Ga.

Teresa Gibbs, 70

Colorado Springs, Colo. I Carolyn L. Gibson, 40

Cumming, Ga. Donna Gloson Baton Rouge, La.

Lana Gilbert, 45 Somerville, Mass. Benita Carol Gilmer

Katie Gingerich, 29 Mill Village, Pa Melinda Jane Ging

27 . Waterlood Ind. Kimberly Globis, 25 Waukegan, III

aukegan, III. sbrina Golliday, 24 Waco, Nebr.

Annie L. Gooch, 69 Lebanon, Tenn. Patricia Good, 38 Pittsburgh, Pa.

Latoya Gordon, 19 Tacoma, Wash MareKay Gordon, 48 Milton, N.H.

Robyn Goring, 29 Las Vegas, Nev.

Wilda L. Graham, 41 Tucson, Ariz. Brenda Grant, 29 Dover, N.H.

Thelma J. Grant Kake, Alaska

Patricia Hildreth, 49 Orleans, Mass.

Carolyn Haines, 55 Walnut Creek, Calif.

Stacy Haldema Amold, 27 Lancaster, Pa.

Diane Hail, 34. Allen, Mich.

Ruth Ann Hampe, 49 Waynesburg, Pa.

Julie Harlow, 22 Whitman, Mass.

Deborahr J. Hams, 30

Elizabeth Carter Harris,

amento, Calif.

Francine Harris, 33 Baltimore, Md.

Pamela Harris, 32 Cleveland, Ohio

Baton Rouge, La.

Betty Hartwell Princeton, W.Va.

Dorothy Harrison, 63

Ella Mae Hatcher, 61 Pontiac, Mich.

Julie Hauptman, 28 Auburn, Nebr.

Julia Hawkins, 35 Missoula, Mont.

Christine Hecker 23 A Carlton County, Minn.

Susan Helm, 25 Des Moines, Iowa

Cynthia Hemphill, 34 Port Allen, La.

Ana Hernandez, 29 Providence, R.I.

Lynn Elizabeth

Hickman, 26 Pickford, Mich.

Fairdale, Ky. Elizabeth Hayes, 59

Janniece Jackson, 36 Kensett, Ark. Cleo Handymartin, 49 Bellevue, Nebr.

Janis Hanson, 32 Missoula, Mont. Mikisha Jackson, 18 College Park, Ga. Francis Kay Hardin, 36 Sikeston, Mo.

Florence James, 25 Philadelphia, Pa. Linda McClean Jenner,

Susan Hunt 31-

Johanna Hufey, 26 Anchorage, Alaska

Alexis Jackson, 21 Lake Village, Ark.

Plymouth, Mass. Stephanie Jennings, 34 Austin, Tex.

Debra Ray Jensen, 36 Huntsville, Tex. Mary Ann Johnson, 41

San Francisco Township, Minn. Geraldine Jones, 29 District Heights, Md.

Karen Jones, 33 Burbank, Ohio

Paulette Jones, 48 Arapahoe, Colo. Sara Jones, 28 ... Spartanburg, S.C.

Tara Jones, 24 Omaha, Nebr. Yvonne Jones, 30 Clarendon, Vt.

Brenda uurdan, 34 Chicago, III.

Patty Moore Judish Scottsblutf, Nebr.

Clara Sue Byrd Jumper, 54 Palestine, Ark.

Banumattie Kamta, 38 Queens, N.Y.

Connie Kast, 22 Cozad, Nebr.

Marcella Kelley, 50 Jonesboro, Ark.

Sonni Kelly, 37 Baskin, La.

Jenny Flores, 29 Diamond Bar, Calif. Anita Green, 42 Encino, Calif.

FEATURES



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Making Safety a Civil Right by Linda Hirshwan 44 Remember the Children by Resembly L. Bray 38 What's Love Got To Do with 1t? by D.G. 34 A Day in Court by Rita Healey Jensen 48 Setting the Record Straight 33

Women by Achy Obejus 53 . Resources: National and State Organizations 64 Plus: The Not-so-Fine Print by Kristen Golden 39 · Women Who Batter Where Do We Go from Here? An Interniew with Ann Jones 56 Men Changing Men by Robert L. Allen and Paul Kivel 50

Watermarks: Swimming Through Memories by Laurie Stone 26

INTERNATIONAL POPULATION POLICY

Puerto Rico: The Covert Campaign To Sterilize Women by Vanessa Bausi 14 Expusing the Numbers Game by Sonin Corren and Resolind Petchesky 10 The Cairo Conference: The Stakes, the Players by Rebecta Faster 12

In South Africa We Have New Hope by Clarin Mechanone 20 Dispatches 18

A Women's Mag Masks Sleaze as Service by Helen Rogan 92 The Push To Test Rabics for HIV by Sue Woodman 90 Clippings by Kate Rounds 94



Who's Afraid of Shere Hite? by Jennifer Gannerman 75 Children's Books: Buyer Beware by Janus Adams 72 Bold Type Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot: The Scholar as International Bookshelf 76 . Reviews 78 Storyteller by Donna M. Williams 77

FICTION

The Moon Before Dusk by Kim Etharrah 66

ARTS

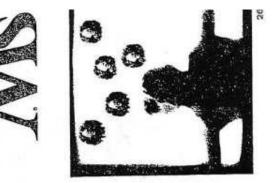
Holly Hughes: Her Heart Belongs to Daildy by Leavie Stone 88 Black (and White) Snapshots by hell hasks B2 Astronteh by Jennifer Baumgardner 89

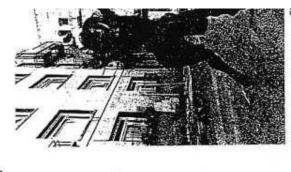
DEPARTMENTS

Prisus My Mother, the Gossip Columnist by Shells Weller 24 Afrilia Reporter's Notebook by Donarella Lorch 21 Editorial Memories To Keep by Marria Ann Gillespie Guest Room Pregnant or Not? by Mary Rae 96 Letters 4

SNAPSHOTS

Lepa Madjenovič 81 Pearl Ubungen 65





VOISSIMILE TO NUMBER C.

Women's Center: Additional Sources

WOMEN'S STUDIES INTERNATIONAL FORUM



PERGAMON PRESS

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WOMEN'S STUDIES INTERNATIONAL FORUM

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER

9			
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3	7		
Ċ	Ď	5	
۲	u	ì	

EITHNE MCLAUGHLIN

MARIA-BARBARA WATSON-FRANKE

JANINE MARIE MORGALL

MURIEL LEDERMAN

ELISABETH MERMANN-JOZWIAK

615 The German feminist movement and the question of female

aesthetics

605 Structuring feminist science

useless diversion?

627 "Who wears the trousers?" Sexual harassment in research

ROSALINE S. BARBOUR MARINA BARNARD GILL GREEN

JENNIFER SCANLON

JENNY KITZINGER

639 Challenging the imbalances of power in feminist oral history: developing a take-and-give methodology

BOOK REVIEWS

ANNE WHITE

ROSALIND EDWARDS

647 Women, Motherhood and Childrearing by Diane Richardson

647 Superwomen and the Double Burden. Women's Experience

of Change in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former

Soviet Union edited by Chris Corrin

EVELYN S. NEWLYN

648 Lesbianism: Affirming Nontraditional Roles edited by Esther D. Rothblum and Ellen Cole

(Continued on incide back cover)

1SSN 0277-5395 INDEXED/ABSTRACTED BY All Press Ind. Amer Hist & LIfe, Ann Guide Wom Perio US/CANADA, Research Alert^a. ASSIA, Br Hum Ind, Current Contents/Social & Behavioral Sciences, Social Sciences Citation Index^a, Fem Perio, Hist Abstr, PsycINFO, Psychol Abstr, Social Abstr, Stud Wom Abstr

WOMEN'S STUDIES INTERNATIONAL FORUM

VOLUME 16 NUMBER 6 1993 NOVEMBER-DECEMBER

(Contents - continued from outside back cover)

CHRISTINA BAKER

JUDITH D. AUERBACH

650 Women's Two Roles: A Contemporary Ditemma by Phyllis 649 Emma Goldman in Exile: From the Russian Revolution to the Spanish Civil War by Alice Wexler

650 A Blockaded Family: Life in Southern Alabama During the Civil War by Parthenia Antoinette Hague

MARA LYNN MCFADDEN

The practice of protective legislation for pregnant workers in Italy: limits, problems, and contradictions

581

PATRIZIA ROMITO

591 Medical technology assessment: a useful occupation or

569 The Lycian heritage and the making of men: matrilineal

models for parenting

553 Women and the family in Northern Ireland: a review

1 Feminist Forum: News, Conferences, Reports 653 Biographical Statements

XIX Volume 16 Contents and Author Index





Women's Center: Additional Sources

POLUMBER 1

JOURNAL OF WOMEN IN CULTURE AND SOCIETY

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

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1	_	
į	Z	
1	*	
į	,	
	ō	
j	ŏ	

Flizabeth Faue	184	Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in
		Nineteenth-Century England by Sonya O. Rose; Lady Inspectors: The Campaign for a Better Workplace, 1893–1921 by Mary Drake McFeely; Women and Working Lives: Divisions and Change edited by Sara Arber and Nigel Gilbert
Kathy Alexis Psomiades	681	Fiction of the Home Place: Jewett, Cather, Glasgou, Porter, Welty, and Naylor by Helen Fiddyment Levy; Jane Austen among Women by Deborah Kaplan; To Kiss the Chastening Rod: Domestic Fiction and Sexual Ideology in the American Renaissance by G. M. Goshgarian; The Daughter's Dilemma: Family Process and the Nineteenth-Century Domestic Novel by Paula Marantz Cohen
Ruth Fincher	194	Gendered Spaces by Daphne Spain; The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women by Elizabeth Wilson
Patricia Herminghouse	961	The Woman beneath the Skin: A Doctor's Patients in Eighteenth-Century Germany by Barbara Duden, translated by Thomas Dunlap; Feminism and Motherhood in Germany, 1800–1914 by Ann Taylor Allen; Kathinka Zitz-Halein and Female Civic Activism in Mid-Nineteenth Century Germany by Stanley Zucker
Valerie Traub	201	Daughters, Wives, and Widows: Writings by Men about Women and Marriage in England, 1500–1640 edited by Joan Larsen Klein; Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama by Karen Newman; Staging the Gaze: Postmodernism, Psychoanatysis, and Shakespearean Comedy by Barbara Freedman
Paula Rabinowitz	205	Rich and Strange: Gender, History, Modernism by Marianne DcKoven; 1915, the Cultural Moment: The New Politics, the New Woman, the New Psychology, the New Art and the

Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New New Theatre in America edited by Adele Deal Public Art and Theater by Barbara Heller and Lois Rudnick; Engendering Melosh

Mariana Valverde

Single Pregnancy and Race before Roe v. Wade by Rickie Solinger; The Politics of the Body in Thane; Poor and Pregnant in Paris: Strategies 1880s-1950s edited by Gisela Bock and Pat Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and Rachel Fuchs; The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Nancy Leys Stepan; Wake Up Little Susie: for Survival in the Nineteenth Century by Gender, and Nation in Latin America by Weimar Germany by Cornelia Usborne the Rise of the European Welfare State, 210

Hansa Women in the Twentieth Century edited by Catherine Coles and Beverly Mack; Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy, and Experiences of Thirty Zimbabwean Women Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983 by Belinda Bozzoli with Mmantho Nkotsoe; compiled and edited by Irene Staunton Mothers of the Revolution: The War 216

Marcia Wright

and Beatriz Sarlo; Latin American Women and Histories by Magdalena García Pinto; Women edited by Sara Castro-Klaren, Sylvia Molloy, Women Writers of Latin America: Inlimate the Search for Social Justice by Francesca Writing in Latin America: An Anthology Miller 220

Joanna O'Connell

Macleod; Both Right and Left Handed: Arab Women Talk about Their Lives by Bouthaina R. Keddie and Beth Baron; Accommodating Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Protest: Working Women, the New Veiling, Shaaban; Woman's Body, Woman's Word: and Change in Cairo by Arlene Elowe 224

Boundaries in Sex and Gender edited by Nikki

Women's Center: Additional Sources

NOVINCER 1994

What You Want h Bec, Vico's faking Orgasm and Olici ex Survey

WY C EATE WITH A D'

CELER

OUR I

On the Cover

NURENGE HIBURNE



VOLUME 25/NUMBER 7

NOVEMBER 1994

90

16

24

27

32

34

103

111

128

132

134

136

60

62

PEATURES

A MAN CALLED FISH

Friends call him Fish, but actor Laurence Fishburne is not an easy man to eateh during an interview. By Audrey Edwards

Some of us are living large on Wall Street. Are big bucks worth the price? By Diane Weathers

WHEN A MAN LOVES A WOMAN
What can turn an "on the go" B-boy into a one-woman man? By Nelson George

A HEAVY DATE WITH HEAVY D

An ESSENCE editor's date with a hip-hop heavyweight. By Tara Roberts and Heavy D

A lyrical take about fathers and soos - with a new twist. By John Edgar Wideman

BEAUTY

THE GETAWAY

How to whisk your man away with you for a day of pampering!

ROOTS: HAIR REPAIR

SHORT TAKES: BEAUTY BEAT

Glamour goes to work, blushing tips and beauty finds.

PRODUCTS: COOL BUYS

Fashion:

STYLE: MENSWEAR MONARCH SHAKA KING

COAT CULTURE

Fabulous coats with an ethnic flair by our top designers.

Contemporary Living

LIFESTYLE: SPECIAL AUTOMOTIVE SECTION 1995 CAR GUIDE: PUT IT IN DRIVE

Wheeling, dealing, leasing and the latest in "technowizardry," By John Russell

FOOD: FOUR-STAR HOLIDAY DINNER

Tips from top chefs to make year-end entertaining a breeze. By Jonell Nash

RECIPES: GIVE THANKS FOR FINE FOOD

Delicious dishes from our four-star chefs. Edited by Jonell Nash

VINTAGE: PUNCHES FOR BUNCHES

TRAVEL: DUE SOUTH

View Mexico's African legacy in photographs, and take a stroll through Savannah.

PARENTING: DADS DOIN' THE RIGHT THING

Brothers unite to fight for our children. By Lisa Isom-Rodriguez

DEPARTMENTS

PUBLISHER S COMMENTARY	
LETTERS	12
HEALTH	
Prevention Sex Survey: Your Answers	37
Between Us	40
ESSENTIALS His health, your job search,	2
COLUMN TO THE RESIDENCE PROPERTY AND A SECOND SECON	ALC: UNKNOWN

CAREERS Preparing for a Layoff 52 INTERIORS Yearning for Daddy 54

WINDOWS Black-Latino Pride PEOPLE Allen Payne, Joshua Redman, Thelma Golden, Robard Gilbert,

Elizabeth Nimez; new books IN THE SPIRIT Who's Loving You?

SHOP

GRAFFITI 157 HOROSCOPE Scorpio 158

BROTHERS Love With a White Woman 56 BACK TALK Health Care: The Choice Is Yours 162

ON THE COVER: Actor Laurence Fishburne stars in the new movie Higher Learning and gives us a glimpse into his complex persona. The perfect fit for the cool and inviterious man. Halston's Catalyst for Men. Photographer. Jeff Sedlik. Grooming. Kim Davis for The Crystal Agency. Vest, Paul Smith. Sweater, 525 Made in America. Necklace, Beads of Paradise. Stylist, Elaine Wallace. Assistant stylist, Darryle Johnson. Coordinator, Sandra Martin. On this page: Grooming. Kim Davis for The Crystal. Vest, Paul Smith. Sweater, 525 Made in America. Pants, Franklin Rowe. Necklace, Beads of Paradise. Bally. Stylist, Elaine Wallace. Assistant stylist, Darryle Johnson. Coordinator, Sandra Martin.

casuals. 76

in easy

"The myth of male superiority can only be demolished with shining examples of female achievement against which nobody could argue intelligently."

--Wangari Maathai Environmentalist, Political Activist