

Spinning Off

PROGRESS REPORT FEMINISM 101	
SECTION	COMMENTS
Consciousness	<i>raised</i>
Equality	<i>still struggling</i>
Class Schisms	<i>diminishing</i>
Anger	<i>expressing regularly</i>
Risks	<i>taken</i>
Sexuality	<i>still touchy</i>



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contains a calendar of women's events

Feminist Education

Education is the key to the creation of the future. We are molded by what we are taught to believe. Our attitudes are shaped, our behavior reinforced and our visions determined by the educational process we undergo.

Feminist education involves "unlearning." We have been taught some faulty information: that males are the sole architects of history, culture, philosophy and science; that women are totally absent from or play a minimal role in the development of civilization; and that as women, we have certain inevitable limitations on our capabilities. Feminist education is a recovery from that amnesia which has erased *female* from our cosmology.

Once we have shed these fallacies, we discover new information about feminine consciousness. As we reclaim our heratige, we uncover sources of ancient wisdom: the power of intuitive knowledge and the value of learning from our subjective experience.

Feminist education challenges both the content of traditional instruction and the process through which we learn. Our efforts in this field include filling in the gap made by women's exclusion from scholastics, restructuring the learning situation and building new institutions that create a context for expanding and nurturing female knowledge. These activities manifest themselves in three major formats:

- 1) Women's Studies Programs in colleges and universities;
- 2) Small groups, including workshops, study groups and consciousness raising;
- 3) Independent schools, programs and learning communities.

The purpose of Women's Studies is to transform the content of traditional subject matter to include women's experience and contributions. Similar to Afro-American Studies, Women's Studies are seen as a supplement to existing information. Today most colleges and universities offer classes like *Women in Literature* or the *Psychology of Women*, and some have developed departments and degree programs.

Female educators in these programs often find themselves restricted by the established tradition of sexism in academia, and subject to budget cutbacks, struggle for tenure, scorn from their colleagues and censorship of their subject matter. Despite the limitations these programs face, they open the doorways to new learning possibilities for women. If all these facts were omitted from my course of study, one thinks, what *else* might I have missed?

Small groups of several kinds provide a chance for women to answer that question, a kind of self-help education. The small group has been a basic structure in the feminist movement, as it nurtures an atmosphere of intimacy and trust, and affords women the opportunity to teach and learn from each other and from ourselves.

Consciousness raising is a small group structure that furnishes us with an escape from our isolation, our otherness. By sharing personal experiences in a supportive environment, we learn to validate our own perceptions of the world. Individual lives can be put in the context of cultural and political perspectives and we can learn from what we experience.

Study groups form to research and reevaluate existing information. Women who share an interest in a particular topic (e.g. socialism, spirituality, Jewish feminism, lesbian separatism) meet to read, discuss and theorize about that issue. These groups encourage women to think for themselves, to reconceptualize and draw new conclusions. As in C-R, these groups are often leaderless, with participants assuming equal responsibility for the group's development. Similar to these are critique groups, in which artists, writers or performers share their creative work with their peers for feedback, discussion and support.

Workshops are a common and prolific form of small group education. Based on the knowledge that women have skills and information to share, the workshop structure serves the function of providing women with a chance to learn everything from carpentry and auto mechanics to self-defense and psychic healing. In workshops women learn survival skills not accessible to them elsewhere.

Feminist educational institutions are an outgrowth of both Women's Studies and small group activity. Many of these independent schools and programs began within the confines of an academic establishment and all of them derive from or contain elements of small group process. These new learning centers focus on the content *and* method of feminist education, personal as well as intellectual development, and experiential wisdom. The particular emphasis may vary: from the study of feminist political theory to the expansion of feminist art and culture to the creation of a women's community lifestyle.

In Los Angeles, the Feminist Studio Workshop at the Woman's Building is entering its sixth year of alternative education for women. In 1973, the founders—Judy Chicago, Sheila de Bretteville and Arlene Raven—left their teaching positions at Cal Arts to build a program where women could engage in creative evolution outside the competitive standards of academia.

The Feminist Studio Workshop combines a focus on feminist issues; an exploration of female culture, past and present; personal reflection and collective sharing; and training in writing, performance art, video, graphic art and feminist education. Through these media, a woman learns to express herself and to address issues relevant to a broad public audience. In individual and group learning situations, she may discover her own symbol system, forms that seem intrinsically female or the beginnings of a new language.

The program remains flexible, restructuring every year in response to changing student needs and the growth of the feminist movement. Members are encouraged to actively create their own educational process through participation in collaborative art projects, consciousness raising, the formation and experience of community, and the maintenance and survival of the institution itself.

A number of other programs have emerged from the Feminist Studio Workshop:

The Summer Art Program, a 7-week intensive version of the FSW, is offered at the Woman's Building during July and August of each year. It is facilitated by a staff of women who have studied the process of feminist education in the FSW.

The Feminist Educators' Workshop is a week-long summer session by and for women who teach women, examining structures, methods and contents of female-defined education.

The Lesbian Art Project Program of Sapphic Education is a year-long program of classes and workshops beginning in the fall of 1978. Based on a seasonal model, the feminine cycle, the program will investigate, create and make public lesbian culture and sensibility.

Ariadne, a Social Art Network will be launched in the fall of 1978 to educate women to address a large audience about feminist issues (for example: violence against women), by engaging in collaborative art projects that utilize mass media.

The Extension Program at the Woman's Building offers four eight-week sessions a year, including courses and workshops on women's issues, ideas, experience and skills.



Art For All, a New Moves workshop taught by feminist educator Gloria Hajduk. Photos by EK Waller

As we take control of our own education, we take control of our futures. Feminist education is expanding the possibilities for women both inside traditional institutions and without, creating new information, theories and methods that challenge the very basis of patriarchal society. By our invention of a feminine cosmology, we are redirecting the destiny of human civilization. —Terry Wolverton

To discover the opportunities for your own participation in feminist education in Los Angeles, contact the following:

University of Southern California, 741-2311, call Lilyan Frank, of the Women's Studies Program. She is also a member of the Pacific Southwest Women's Studies Association, and can provide information about other programs available.

N.O.W., 655-3331.

Womospace, 399-9813, in Santa Monica.

Gay Community Services Center, 464-7400, ext. 31.

EveryWoman's Village, 873-4406, Van Nuys.

(All of the above offer a number of consciousness-raising, rap groups, and special interest workshops.)

Califia Community, 933-1496, an experience of learning to create feminist community; will hold two week-long sessions for women and children this summer.

The Feminist Studio Workshop, 221-6161, speak with Dana Chalberg for further information about this two-year program for women in the arts.

Feminist Educators' Workshop, 221-6161.

Summer Art Program, 221-6161.

Extension Program at the Woman's Building, call Sue Maberry at 221-6163.

Lesbian Art Project, contact Terry Wolverton at 221-4166.

Ariadne, a Social Art Network, call Suzanne Lacy, 221-6161.