

Interviews on Women's Studies

Arlene Kimick Marylee Stephenson



Barbara Cooper



Lesley Lewis



Muriel Pigeon



Dorothy Moscou



Carol Ford

Interviews au sujet des études de la femme

L'étude de la femme peut, parce que nous apprenons beaucoup à notre sujet et sur les autres, toucher les femmes dans tous les aspects de leur vie. Ces brefs interviews ont été menés auprès de femmes ayant vécu des expériences très différentes, dans le but de leur expliquer comment une compréhension de la condition féminine peut influencer leur vie de travailleuses. Les auteurs cherchaient également à savoir comment cette revue pouvait leur être utile, et l'article contient quelques remarques à ce sujet.

BARBARA COOPER, returned to academic studies as a mature student.

AK What gave you the idea of going back to school?

BC About a year and a half ago, I began to feel the need to do something. I had been a housewife and mother for many years, and a good one, I feel. While my duties at home were very important to me, I found my husband was busy with his business, a business I had helped him with a lot (and still do). My kids were going to school and busy with their own lives. So, I needed something to do with my time and something more in my life. I took a real-estate course but didn't find it to my liking. Then I went to see a career counsellor, who suggested I begin working on my BA. But I found the most help when I attended a seminar for women at a community college. I got a lot of support, encouragement, advice, and information there. My husband had always been very supportive of my plans, but finding a group of women who were so interested in what was happening in my life was a great support. I was very unsure of myself, I hadn't been to school for so many years — all that kind of thing. But now I've enrolled at York University, taking a Humanities course, and I'm quite happy about how it's all turned out.

AK What kind of problems would a mature student encounter?

BC There is a big problem in just overcoming my own insecurities and doubts, about trying out something new at this stage in my life. Trying to balance out

my home life and my work life, because I believe my role in the home to be very important; whatever I do outside of it shouldn't interfere. Having a supportive, helpful husband makes a big difference. But a lot of wives have husbands who don't approve of these 'goings-on'. There were women at the college seminar whose husbands didn't even know they were there; they wouldn't have let their wives come.

AK How could something like Women's Studies help?

BC By holding more of such seminars, workshops, providing information, moral support, that sort of thing. But also by making all of that available to women in my position, suburban housewives, advertise it in a sense. A lot of women just don't know that things are around, that counselling is available. What they know of sounds too 'Women Libberish' for them, too radical. They can't identify with what they have seen presented by the media or whatever sources they have. The women's movement in a sense has a 'bad image' for them. They aren't well enough acquainted with the issues or options as they might really be. Things they can apply to themselves. More positive PR work, if you like, is needed.

AK So could the CWS magazine help?

BC If it reaches the kind of women I know, I think it could. It would depend on what sorts of things are going to be dealt with. It sounds as if there will be things that will interest women like me. It will help us become more aware and more informed on women's issues. It is important that women like me come in contact with the journal. I hope this can be achieved. If it is geared towards community-college students and only that kind of area, unless the woman herself has made the jump back into the school system, she may not have sufficient reasons to seek it out.

LESLEY LEWIS, Women's Bureau, Ontario.

MS I need to know about your work in relation to women.

LL I am the research co-ordinator at the Women's Bureau of the Ontario Ministry of Labour. The mandate of the Women's Bureau concerns any employment-related issues for women in this province. And we're trying to define employment-related issues as broadly as possible without treading on the toes of other government departments.

As research co-ordinator I do many things. One is policy research on new issues or new legislation that affects women. For instance, I would prepare policy papers on things like pregnancy-leave legislation. I would do research on an issue such as contract compliance. I would assess programs such as our Affirmative Outreach Program in Industry where we have a staff of three people going out meeting with different industries trying to convince them that Affirmative Action is a good business practice and that they should be doing it. The one half of my job is policy research and then the other half is keeping track of what's happening with respect to research on women. I take fairly complex data and interpret it so that any woman would be able to use it.

MS Do you go out to people or do they come to you?

LL A bit of both. Some of our programs are more actively working with our 'clients'. We have one person here who is the Community Outreach person to low-income and immigrant women. So her work is entirely in the field. Although she is competent in two or three languages, she must work mainly through agencies. She runs a training seminar for immigrant workers on labour legislation for women. We also have a counselling consultant who works directly with women's counselling services in the province.

MS Tell me a little more about Affirmative Action within companies.

LL I call everything we do research and public education. Part of that is Affirmative Action. We have three people who go out to businesses, to most of the universities, municipal governments, hospitals. They work with virtually anybody who isn't either under federal legislation or crown employees of the provincial government. First they go and talk with the chief executives of the company. They have an audio-visual presentation which is very good. And they talk about why a company stands to lose if they only consider the men they have working for them. And they talk about where women are in employment and why this is wrong and what some of the myths are about women and employment. After a meeting they say we're available if you want help. Then they go away and hope that people are going to contact them. They've done a lot of homework on the individual company before they go. They've approached 250 companies in the last three years and they're working on an on-going basis with about a hundred of them. The stages that companies are at are very different. We stress certain factors such as women getting out of job ghettos, an issue that most of the companies keep pretty quiet about. We see any significant gains as being about a five-year program, but I think it's a successful program. Certainly, if there were legislative teeth you'd see much more rapid change.

MS Considering the kind of work you do now, thinking of women's studies in general, what kinds of things should be studied that would be helpful to you or your clientele?

LL My feeling is that there are a lot of innovative programs going on across the country that people don't know about and I would like to see the journal become a forum for sharing that kind of innovative idea—say someone in Medicine Hat has developed a really innovative counselling program or one for getting women into the labour force, or interested in doing something with their lives—I think that would be one kind of thing that should go in the journal.

I think one debate we haven't resolved yet is Integrated versus Non-Integrated programming.

MS What is that?

LL Well, in my context, there are people who argue that the Women's Bureau no longer needs to exist, that we should be just integrated into regular Ministry of Labour programming. In a university context, the idea that Women's Studies doesn't need to exist, that it should be integrated somewhere else. To put it into a business context, the idea that we don't need an affirmative action program for women, what we need is better human-resource development. I think that some people have some very interesting ideas about this, and ideas of this kind can be exchanged.

MS Thinking of the study aspect of women, research for instance, is there anything you'd like to see that could provide you with support for your argument (that separate programming should continue)?

LL I don't know, but the journal could act as a forum for ideas. I can see, perhaps in each volume, a presentation of what the issues are on a particular topic relating to women's lives. And an update on what's known and what needs to be done. This journal could be a publication in which people share their ideas and research and it could stimulate new approaches to problems.

MS In your line of work, what you're thinking about isn't so much research as a way of sharing information.

LL Yes, there's so much to be done—I'd welcome anything on women and work, yes—especially on immigrant women. Nobody seems to know anything about them. Not just immigrant women as a group, but issues that especially affect them—the whole issue of sexual harassment. Our gut feeling here is that immigrant women are particularly subject to sexual harassment and exploitation in the workplace. I think the research problems related to that are enormous.

MS What could you do with systematic information on something like that?

LL I think we could then work with some of the agencies that work particularly with immigrant women, to help them in designing programs—group counselling and that type of thing—to help the women deal with what's happening. Then our affirmative action people could work with a company, with companies with large numbers of immigrant women, designing awareness sessions with foremen perhaps. If that's where the harassment's happening we need to make them aware of the legislation in that area.

MURIEL PIGEON, Rulings Officer, Excise Tax Administration, Revenue Canada.

AK Can you tell me a bit about your job as Equal-Opportunity Co-ordinator for women?

MP It's a sideline, it's not a regular part of the job I'm being paid to do. My official title is Equal Opportunities for Women Co-ordinator. I am a regional co-ordinator (Toronto region). What I do is prepare an action plan, basically a series of activities for the managers and for the women. (The women aren't managers, that is why it is specified that way). The program is to improve the status of women in the government. It's the same here as anywhere else, the majority of our women are concentrated in low-paying jobs—clerical, secretarial. The action plan is an attempt to equalize the situation between

men and women, in proportion to the men and women in the government population here. We have a budget and activities are nearly always approved.

The only problem I find is that there's really no time to do the job properly. It's not something I have in my job description. It's a thing you do when you have time to do it. But I think we can do something for the women in this region. In Toronto the committee tries to encourage women in the low-paying jobs to take action to upgrade their status and get a better job. First you have to encourage motivation so they'll go out and try for these jobs. I see it as undoing the whole socialization process. And that's a big job. It's attitude change of managers and the women.

We provide information, career advancement seminars—we have six of those. We do many things we're not trained to do—like become a trainer for some of these seminars. In the long run I'd say it has had an effect and is very favourably received by the women—not so favourably by the managers. But the top manager supports it and that's important. I look at it as a catch-up program. We are trying to get the women up to the men's level.

AK What kind of things could Women's Studies do for you in your work?

MP We've had four one-day seminars with a total of eighty women taking them and they were great consciousness-raisers. And that is the premise I'm starting with on this whole program. So motivational courses would be good. We have run some of these and we will continue to have more courses. The community colleges, that is their Women's Studies departments, have been a great help. They put on our seminars.

AK Is there any sort of resource information that you need?

MP I find the Ontario Ministry of Labour is far ahead of the federal government as far as programming. They've got a Women's Bureau, a tremendous library, and research facilities. Films are loaned out free and you can just go there to look around. The YWCA is another source.

We are planning to use *Women's Studies: A Multimedia Approach* which is a comprehensive workbook put out by OECA and Centennial College. There is another bilingual workbook which I plan to use, *Approaching Affirmative Action*, because it is very practical in its approach. It's from Centennial College too.

DOROTHY MOSCOU, Co-ordinator of Step One Program, Centennial College.

MS Describe how this program started, and the work that you do.

DM OK. This program was suggested by the College Women's Committee. Faculty members and any of the women that work at Centennial are on this committee. Each of the departments can send a representative—clerical, business, administrative, faculty. The women on this committee felt that Centennial should be in the process of reaching out, not just having someone come up to the college and say, 'I want to take a course.' They felt Centennial should be involved in going out into the community, in reaching people who would never come to Centennial. So they got together and decided to see if single parents could be con-

tacted. The idea was to offer them courses plus things the rest of the colleges can't—like car-fare, lunch money, babysitting money, books, and tuition. So through the bursary program the college was able to put this package together.

I got the job of co-ordinator. I developed the program, wrote the curriculum, put in the ideas that I've always wanted to see go into a program like this. The whole purpose of the program is for women to use it as a way of coming out of the home and maybe deciding to go to work or to use it to move into the regular college community and be able eventually to get through school.

After we started the program we found that these courses raised people's expectations, and we must remember that once expectations are raised the agency or the organization has some responsibility. Because of this I went back to the committee and they gave us an extra fifteen weeks. So instead of these people going directly into the regular college community, they would have a supportive setup. So the program is now thirty weeks, divided into phase I and phase II.

Phase I is basically English, a little math, life skills, sociology—and we consider that personal growth is the ultimate goal. What you begin to feel about yourself can determine how you make decisions about the rest of your life.

In the second half of the program students move into the regular curriculum of our up-grading program—and they take English, math, Man and Society—but it's only three a week with the same benefits of car-fare, babysitting, etc., as the first part of the program.

MS How many people enrol for it?

DM Today was our fourth graduation, so in two years that's 120 women. We have a very good rate of people starting and moving into the regular up-grading program and also into the regular college program, as mature students.

I think the only unhappiness I have with the program is getting women to take non-traditional job training. They're very reluctant to be the first, to move in. I still haven't been able to convince anybody to go into aircraft, automotive, heavy-duty engineering, or architecture. They still seem to want the safety of moving into the traditional roles of secretary, legal assistant, child-care worker, and the pay in these jobs is so much lower.

MS Thinking of Women's Studies in your work, are there things that you would like to have studied or taught, or brought to you? What kind of things would you like to see done that would be useful to you?

DM I've had to do a tremendous amount of work in finding referral systems. One of the things that I do in my program, the first major project, is to have the students develop a resource file box for themselves—that's on every health service, every educational service, that will affect them and their children—because that's how you begin to get control over your life.

Also, to know where I can get Canadian books and films concerning what it's like being a sole-support mother—I want to know this.

MS Talking about this magazine and your kind of work, what would you see the magazine doing for you?

DM To have a very good resource list, and books that I could find concerning women, and also a good book list for children—non-sexist, because I'm dealing with women.

MS **Do you try anywhere in your course to convey to the women that part of this situation has to do with their being women?**

DM Yes. From the very beginning I let them know—I am a feminist, but I'm not a proselytizer. All the speakers and lecturers I bring in are women. They act as role models.

We go through assertiveness training, we do transactional analysis, we have consciousness-raising sessions within the framework of my class. The ultimate goal that I have to create is that women are each other's best friends and it's only because of the structure of the sexist society we're in that women are pitted against each other, and when you get to the point of trusting each other you're going to be very conscious of the exploitive society that you live in. It's never easy. I find that you can frighten women very easily. Five to six weeks into the class, and they are beginning to open up—and I'm shocked at how many boyfriends want them to quit the class because they're beginning to change—it's very important that the women begin to understand why they're in this situation. And a great deal of it is because they're women.

CAROL FORD, Personnel Director in private industry.

MS **You're the head of the affirmative action program at a large patent-medicine company. Would you describe your job?**

CF It's a function within a function within the personnel department. I do recruiting and employee relations, and when, in 1975, we felt we wanted to get involved with an affirmative action program they chose me as co-ordinator of a committee and of the program itself. This was based, I guess, on the fact that I was dealing with the largest group of women in the organization, because clerical and secretarial staff is where women usually are. So the company felt I was already in tune with their needs and would make an appropriate co-ordinator.

MS **What kind of things did you aim at?**

CF Ideally, it should be a full-time position. First of all the assembling of your committee, and if you're going to follow a program that is tailored to the situation, then Ontario Women's Bureau will give you lots of consulting service. Their program very clearly outlines Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III, so you must be prepared for a long-term type of thing. Phase I is your data-collecting and analysing it—doing your homework, within an organization, and with the help of a committee. As a co-ordinator, you do a lot of work, because you have to help women who have normally not worked on these types of projects, but it's important to have them involved because you want a cross-section of employees.

Then we broke ourselves into small task groups with assignments on different issues. So the first phase really will take upwards of a year to complete. And your committee, in order to determine if there is discrimination, will have to learn the procedures, the policies, and the practices of the company. So it's a learning experience. And then we recommend changes based on what we've learned, if we feel there's something within the system that is discriminatory. This job requires lots of committee meetings, good writing skills, ability to liaise with all levels of management, and you should have an aptitude for training because you definitely need communication throughout the program.

Because communication will have to come in either written or oral form, you need some sort of small training session where you're helping your management staff to understand what type of program is taking place in the organization, and you're helping the employees realize what the content would be.

In our case we were very anxious to make sure it was a positive kind of approach and not a reactionary approach. It was something we voluntarily took on. It might have taken different shape if it had come from a different source. It's such a huge topic, and if it isn't defined in some category with which you can work, then a committee will just drag on with really no accomplishments.

MS **What were your goals in terms of change?**

CF I think you'll find the problems are traditional. The stereotyping is there, in the plants for instance. Our objective initially was to assess the situation and to recommend ways of changing it.

We're in Phase II and we're implementing some of those recommendations on job descriptions, making sure there's nothing inherent within them that's leaning too heavily toward one sex or the other. It should certainly be an equal-opportunity program. Job-posting systems we had in place, but we're making sure that they're clean of any of this kind of inequality. In the policy manual we took out all the actual terminology that would influence us.

Job development and job access—that is a huge area and it's going to take time. We're doing it, we're doing a little bit of 'bridging'—taking people that aren't quite up to the full job capacity and bringing them up to it. This works better than if we'd gotten someone from outside to do the job, and often these people are women, but obviously it can be used for men and women. It's meeting the staff halfway, with clearly defined objectives, of how to get the full job grade.

We don't have a quota system per se. We have increased the women in supervisory management by a full third. Obviously these would be objectives, but we didn't state them in numbers.

MS **Thinking of the study of women, are there things in your work where you've thought 'I wish I knew about that, that such and such had been studied', etc.—for you or the employees you've been working with?**

CF I think, certainly, studies that will help us understand the deep-rooted stereotyping that is so evident. Studies that will help women understand themselves better—and men understand. We need studies of attitude change and the psychology behind the changes taking place for women and men. I think this is being met in many schools and courses. Perhaps that isn't too profound, but it seems to be obviously an area that every co-ordinator would want to know about.

A co-ordinator needs to think of ways of being more influential within a system, ways of bringing this topic to a higher priority, ways of bringing social concern above the economic. 1978-9 is a difficult year in Canada. So economic problems tend to push the priorities for social issues, perhaps. I'm glad we're not starting in 1978. In 1975 it was a good year to begin. We had the momentum of International Women's Year behind us. There certainly is an educational gap. But unfortunately

many people are not going to get that education voluntarily.

MS Thinking of this magazine, are there any things for your kind of work, for the people you deal with, that you would like to see us make available?

CF Yes. I think a lot of women will appreciate having a magazine that will deal with individual concerns such as how to be assertive and not aggressive and how to take an interest in your career when your lifestyle priorities are quite different.

You really have to adapt your lifestyle and prepare—you know, if there's one work you could use for studies, it's to get this into teenagers' hands. They must start thinking about working the rest of their lives. And having some sort of direction to their lives. The whole priority-setting, and the planning of your whole life.

We've been doing clerical luncheons with quite a few of our clerks. What we know to be true is that as women we stumble around in life looking for that job fulfilment. If you happen to get lucky and stumble into a job that fulfils you, you're really excited, you can do your best, and you're

fortunate. So many people have never found a job that really fulfils them.

There is a need for more studies to help us define what we're good at and what we'd enjoy doing. We need more studies to help us plan our lives. Women rarely do any planning for themselves. So women need more of that. Teenagers need to realize that they're not going to type for five years, get married, and live happily ever after—and not work. Somehow that has got to filter down into the schools, into the high schools. Women must begin to come out of school with better defined goals. That's a learning area that I see as vital. I see a need to promote the idea that women must learn to take risks. Women seem to be willing to let someone else identify their potential, and that has to be changed. I think the areas of study should have a practical base.

This magazine is going to be in industry, business, government and schools to help women in those areas. For the first time there will be a link—a missing link. It could really be useful. Politically it could help different groups to understand each other and the different sides of a problem.

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