The second symposium in the Feminism and Difference project, sponsored by the Five College Women's Studies Committee and Faculty Seminar, focused on Gender and Visual Representation. A core group of about 25 people attended the conference, held at the University in April, with as many as 70 viewing the films at a given time. The goal of the two-year project is to provide for faculty development in various disciplines of women's studies. According to Lorna Peterson, Associate Coordinator for Planning and Program Development for the Five Colleges, the conference provided a good opportunity to learn a great deal about women, video, and film, while offering those who were more sophisticated the chance to see new works and to talk to the critics and makers of the films.

The theme of difference was examined from the perspectives of female and male, as well as from third world and Euro-American directors. Allile Sharon Larkin spoke about third world filmmakers, pointing out that for black women, the issue of difference is often rooted in a focus on racial identity rather than on their identity as women. The theme of "passing" was discussed and in the limited time available, Larkin engaged the seminar participants in dialogue about the films by Julie Dash, Sarah Maldoror, Sara Gomez, and herself which were all very powerful. In responding to questions about the film The Color Purple, perceived by many to be the definitive work on black women, Larkin commented that she had enjoyed the book but it was not a priority for her to see a Steven Spielberg film.

Helen von Schmidt, who teaches a film and writing course at Amherst College, noted that women take difference as a subject in their films in a way that male directors don't address. She cited the film A Question of Silence as an outstanding film, both cinematically and thematically, acknowledging that she was stunned by that movie. She noted that it was a film with a "female gaze" rather than the usual male gaze. Lorna Peterson agreed that A Question of Silence and Delusion were the most impressive films for her. She believed that all the films were well-received and provocative in some way, even those films viewers didn't like. She described Joan Braderman's Dynasty/The Tape, compiled of clips from the show "Dynasty" superimposed with her own narrative, as "stunning and fascinating" and she considered it to be one of the best pieces she viewed at the conference.

The organizing committee for the conference, chaired by Catherine Portuges, Director of Women's Studies at the University, consisted of Joan Braderman from Hampshire College, Stefanie Sandler from Amherst College, and Ann Mochon from the University. The committee coordinated all aspects of the conference attempting to get films which reflected a variety of innovations. Anne Mochon and Judith Barter also curated an exhibition at the Mead Art Gallery at Amherst College titled Rules of the Game: Culture Defining Gender. Joan Braderman credited the women's movement with the rise of female producers of film. Financing for films is available through different sources, she said, such as state and national funding or grants from foundations for the arts. In this country, women filmmakers are often dependent on the state and national funding which has been cut under the Reagan administration.
WOMEN'S CAREER DAY

Since the first career class was taught in 1981, Arlene Avakian, who teaches the course with Dale Melcher, notes that there have been several changes in both the student interest and the class tone. Although many women are still interested in human service careers, there has been a marked increase in enrollment from the schools of business and fashion marketing. Students are more serious now about pursuing careers while retaining their feminism. They seem to be more focused, which she attributes in part to the economy. Interest is high enough that the Women's Studies Program coordinated a Women's Career Day in April. The all day event, sponsored by the University Placement Service, featured job search workshops, as well as presentations by five Women's Studies alumnae who returned to describe their experiences in the workplace and their careers.

As instructors, Arlene and Dale suggest possibilities for career choices, and generate discussion around students' likes and dislikes. Exercises about lifestyles and needs help students determine how much money they'll need to live. Arlene said that students are less reluctant to talk about money now, but they are still ambivalent about earning it. Class discussion introduces the concept of compromise and setting priorities, and makes the participants recognize that they do have choices. It is empowering for students to figure out what they like by examining issues such as power, what is pure and what is corrupt, and where they can make compromises without sacrificing their integrity. Since 1981 modifications have been made in many of the exercises and more time is given to the "nuts and bolts stuff" at the end of the course such as cover letters and job interviews. Arlene commended the University Placement Service for its efforts to deal with humanities students. When asked if she finds herself encouraging students toward a specific career direction, Arlene responded that if she has a bias, it is "to get students to consider careers that are non-traditional for women and to push them to view these choices with more tolerance."

Arlene was surprised to hear Judy Lebold and Liz Bennett, veterans of the first career class, finally admit that the career process really works. In the past two years, both women reviewed all the course materials and did the exercises in an effort to determine their "real" career directions. In fact, Judy reported that she is now doing her "dream job" as a fundraiser for Womanshelter/Companeras in Holyoke and Liz plans to return to school to pursue a Ph.D. in counseling after being the Coordinator of Education and Outreach for the Rape Crisis Project of the New Bedford Women's Center. Liz realized that her present job, while "politically correct" and often satisfying, did not meet her needs financially. This prompted her to apply for graduate school, in order to do work she likes at a more remunerative level.

Barbara Joseph, a lawyer in Washington D.C., spoke about dealing with men in the office, explaining that she has no qualms about being as assertive as they -- that's what she is supposed to do as a lawyer. She is adamant about the value of her Women's Studies degree in her search for a job -- she believes that any place that would object to her degree, is a place where she wouldn't want to work anyway. Linda Geary, presently a legislative analyst in the New York State Assembly, concentrates on presenting the material and not worrying about what listeners may be thinking of her. She thrives on the political excitement of her workplace, and she has applied to law school in New York.

Carol Potter spoke about the difficulties of being true to her vocation while managing to survive as a published poet and English instructor at Holyoke Community College. Carol's choice of teaching at HCC leaves her summers free as well as a couple of days each week to write. What she gives up is a lucrative income, but for her the writing time is worth it.

The alumnae stories highlighted what students enrolled in the career planning class are taught. Empowering students to figure out what they like and examining their own priorities allows them to see where they can make compromises. Taking themselves seriously, and realizing that they do not necessarily have to forsake their politics to earn a living wage, were clear messages from both instructors and alumns, now that they are a clearer about those issues themselves. When reflecting on what the alumnae had to say, Arlene said it makes her look at the education we offer our students and realize that it is doing what is intended.
MARCH FOR WOMEN'S LIVES
by Julie Lanza

Approximately 170 UMass students and area residents journeyed to Washington D.C. this spring to join more than 80,000 pro-choice activists in the largest women's reproductive rights and freedoms demonstration in the country's history.

Organized by the National Organization for Women, the March 9th "March for Women's Lives" attracted students and NOW members from all over the northeast. Chanting "Free Choice - Now!" and waving banners and signs, the marchers weaved through the streets of inner D.C., starting at the Mall near the Washington Monument, filing past the White House and rallying finally at the Capitol Building. In the tradition of the suffragettes who went before, the majority of pro-choice marchers wore white clothing. The UMass and Western Massachusetts coalitions marched behind two large banners, both proclaiming a woman's right to choose.

For well over an hour pro-choiceers poured onto the lawn of the Capitol Building rally sight, soon filling the sidewalks and plaza below. The bright sun and clear skies added the spirit as marchers were welcomed by speakers and folk singers, including Holly Near from the NOW podium atop the Capitol stairs. The crowds cheered approval as an assistant to Washington Mayor Marion Barry declared March 9th Women's Reproductive Rights day in Washington D.C.

When NOW President Eleanor Smeal finally rose to speak her words reaffirmed an earlier promise to recharge the women's movement around the issue of free choice. "The numbers game is over. The silent majority will be silent no more!"

Acknowledging the huge numbers of marchers yet to reach the mass at the Capitol, Smeal said, "They are still coming down the avenue. The Women's Movement is on the move!"

This pronouncement was one that struck a chord with those in the crowd who took part in the larger pro-ERA march in Washington in July 1978. But Smeal's emphatic promise for a strong future of the women's movement was also meant to encourage a deeper alliance with college students, who were well-represented at the march and who have been in the past about their support of abortion rights. Indeed, student presence at the March for Women's Lives and the broad based unity that was evident may be more from strong identity with the issue itself, rather than a coming out for NOW in particular.

While Smeal's appraisal of the new generation of feminists was positive, young women who consider themselves feminist today do not often qualify themselves as strident NOW supporters. Membership of students in NOW is still very low or non-existent, as many young feminists disagree with the tactics and priorities of an organization that is still largely comprised of white, middle class women. As many women's studies programs expand to a cross-cultural frame of reference in their theory and practice, some women's studies graduates find their differences with NOW widening. Susan Manning, a WOST Certificate student who graduated in May, agrees that the membership of NOW does not completely represent young women or their specific concerns. As she notes, NOW is a lobbying group and "has a different role to fill," as opposed to feminist organizing in academic communities.

"I think Eleanor Smeal has received a lot of attacks from women's studies professors and scholars, but she has to play politics," says Manning. She adds that college and university students gave "energy and strength" to the March in Washington, which she explains helps to invalidate the all too common complaint today of "apathy" among students around political organizing. Manning maintains, however, the march showed young women's concern over their individual rights with abortion and birth control. She sees danger in Smeal and NOW "using" the large student turnout to represent anything more. "NOW has used young women as pawns, to show Reagan that NOW represents young women. You cannot classify NOW into one philosophy... many students disagree with them."

Meanette Vermes, president of NOW's Greater Springfield chapter, warns that getting students into NOW is "tricky" because of constant turnover and relocation of student populations. UMass, for instance, has never founded a NOW chapter -- nor is there one in the Amherst/Northampton area -- and Smith College's NOW chapter went defunct two years ago when president Jennifer Jackman graduated and became NOW's Boston Chapter leader. "Smeal is committed on this (getting students active in NOW)," says Vermes. But she's going to have to send out specific teams to campuses. We don't have the personnel to go to the University of Massachusetts."

Vermes attributes the large student response to the march to NOW's extensive publicity and, for this area, a smooth communications network between the Springfield office and the UMass Women's Studies Program.

Julie Lanza is a 1986 graduate of the University with a B.A. in Journalism.
FACULTY NEWS

Leila Ahmed has been at the Bunting Institute at Radcliffe College this past year. While there she delivered a paper in November titled: "Arab Women Past and Future." Also in November she provided an overview of current directions in research on Middle Eastern women at the Middle East Studies Association conference in New Orleans. In April Leila did an overview of Women in Muslim History at the conference on Arab Women at the Center for Continued Arab Studies at Georgetown University. At the UMass Conference on the Arab World, Leila spoke about "Women and the Arab Future."

Leila will return to the University this fall to teach Foundations of Feminism and the Advanced Seminar: Women in the Middle East.

Janice Raymond travelled to Australia in May where she testified before the Victorian Law Reform Commission on Informed Consent and Transsexual Surgery. While there, she also delivered a keynote address at the 1st Australian National Women's Conference on the New Reproductive Technologies. In June, Jan journeyed to England, Edinburgh, and Dublin where, in connection with the publication of her book in Britain and Ireland, she spoke at the Universities of Bradford, Kent, and Sheffield, and at the Lavender Menace Bookstore, as well as other places.

A Passion for Friends: A Philosophy for Female Affection presently tops the alternative best seller list in England.

Catherine Portuges gave a paper at the Colloquium on Marguerite Duras: Text-Theatre-Film at the Center for French Civilization and Culture at New York University in April. At the 1986 Symposium in Literature and Psychoanalysis "Images/Text", Cathy gave a paper titled "Aurelia Steinier" on May 16 at the State University of New York at Buffalo. More recently she participated in the Conference on the Theory of History and Literature at Janus Pannonius University in Pecs, Hungary. Cathy also conducted an interview with Agnes Varda in New York City under the auspices of the French embassy for the premiere of her new film Vagabond.

A Day at a Time, edited by Margo Culley, has been chosen as a Book of the Month Club selection in the paper back division. It also received a "Writer's Choice Award" from the Pushcart Foundation which supports the work of small presses.

FEMINISM & DIFFERENCE (continued from p. 1)

The women interviewed agreed that the highpoint of the conference was seeing films that they hadn't seen before and talking with filmmakers, such as Yvonne Rainer, about the work. Sara Lennox viewed Rainer's film The Man Who Envied Women as significant in the way she juxtaposed the "high theory" of feminism with the political reality of it. She was heartened by the way feminist issues are being addressed by filmmakers, commenting that it reminded her of "what feminism used to be." For Lorna, the intensity of the week was heightened by viewing films with people who study and understand them. Helen thought people received the films enthusiastically and that many faculty members will use some of them in their courses. She plans to use A Question of Silence and she believes it was helpful to get together with other faculty teaching film in the valley and try to pool efforts to get films shown and publicized at the five colleges. This conference helped her to clarify what she will teach this fall.

Subsequent programs in the Feminism and Difference project will focus on sexuality (fall 1986 at Mount Holyoke), reading gender in history (spring 1987, Smith College), and feminist theory (fall 1987, Amherst College). Each draw upon Five College faculty invited guests in a the particular topic.

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Women's Studies Program
208 Bartlett Hall
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, MA 01003
Account No. 4-12004

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