

Science needs more openness: McNeil

by Carolyn Smith

Science must become more democratic. But is this to occur at the expense of the scientific research that may one day provide us with a cure for cancer, or cleaner fuel for our cars?

This was one issue among many

confronted in Dr. Maureen McNeil's lecture "Feminism Confronts the Sciences: Science for all the people," delivered to a crowd of forty last Wednesday as part of the English Department Lecture Series.

Although much of McNeil's lecture was drawn from the work of other

feminist theorists, McNeil showed a broad understanding of the issues. She pointed out that there has been a long-term tendency in science to exclude women both formally and informally through psychological and social barriers.

Crucial to understanding this exclusion is the historical process that made having knowledge a profession. This professionalization took knowledge out of the hands of women healers and midwives and put it in the hands of the new, male health professionals.

Dr. McNeil wonders why we should be surprised at the sexist tendencies of science. "Why should we expect that what is regarded as the epitome of Western culture should distance itself from the main values of that culture, to break... from a fairly ubiquitous pattern of gender divisions and gender inequalities?"

Biological and human sciences have had as part of their mandate the inventing and defining of women's lives. McNeil used the scientific preoccupation with finding sex differences as an example of male-defined science.

Dr. McNeil says that recent developments in the study of gender relations of science include the acknowledgement that women are not victims, and that they generate their own knowledge. Abandoning a tendency toward

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Dr. Maureen McNeil

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