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Open Forum 7  
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STUDIO 'A' A.P.

FINAL PROGRAMME SCRIPT

T H E     O P E N     U N I V E R S I T Y

O P E N     F O R U M     7

"Women in the Open University"

Director.....Roger Tucker  
Assistant.....Eugenie Strickland  
Designer.....Colin Bowles  
Graphics.....Victor Chin  
Floor Manager.....Derek Kibble  
Vision Mixer.....Gladys Davies  
TM.....Gordon Blockley  
Sound Supervisor.....Jerry Lawrence  
Senior Cameraman.....Tony Sturman

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TAKING PART

Pat Herman (Presenter)  
Diana Burgess  
Eve Holden  
Pauline Kirk  
Naomi McIntosh  
Rowanne Pasco  
Lee Taylor  
Jean Wood

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Duration: 24'30"

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TWENTY SECONDS OF ANIMATED TITLES "OPEN FORUM" WITH MUSIC:

VOX POP SEQUENCE

STUDENT 1: It may be oh you can't do it, Mum, and then Mum begins to believe that, and I think the first thing women have to overcome is they really want to do work at the Open University - then they can do it, there are opportunities.

STUDENT 2: Personally my husband encouraged me to do it and gave me the confidence to do it. Em and whatever the problems I am grateful for the opportunity which I wouldn't have had anyway.

STUDENT 3: If you're a housewife you have one or two small children, your husband may not be earning a fabulous amount - it's a great drain on the family exchequer.

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STUDENT 4: Last year doing the D.100 and I started learning about politics and economics, there was a bit, a lot of resentment; I was encroaching into his field and he didn't like it at all, particularly as my political views he thought were further to the left than they ought to have been.

LAUGHTER

They were very moderate actually.

LAUGHTER

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Em but we got it into the open and we talked about it and he's now realised that perhaps it isn't so awful being married to somebody who can actually think instead of just hoover and dust.

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STUDENT 5:       The lack of encouragement I get from outside is because I still think there is a stigma attached to women doing education rather than men.

STUDENT 6:       : The children make me feel very guilty if I try and work during the day. In the fifth year now my children are at school and I'm beginning to find that I'm really quite isolated. Working at home there is this sort of conflict that perhaps it's time that I went back to work, went back to teaching and I suppose that one could combine the two, but I'm very tempted to finish now being at home, but I do find that there are problems in this way.

PAT HERMAN:     Women students talking about some of the ways the Open University has affected their lives. We are going to devote the whole of this programme to women talking to women in the Open University, in the belief that we have something to learn from one another. The OU as an institution like all others in our society is not neutral. It reflects attitudes, offers models and poses problems to women which reflect the beliefs and behaviour of a society ordered by men in their own interests. This programme was put together by women and is addressed primarily to women. We are fairly sure that whatever we say two strong responses at least will come back. Some women will feel that they have never had the slightest problem that results from being a woman and that women whose experience is different are projecting what is a merely personal inadequacy, a sort of social hypochondria. Others will simply be angry that the subject is discussed at all. To remark that all men are brothers is to state an unexceptionable, liberal platitude. To suggest that all women are sisters and should, therefore, have a care for one another and struggle for our mutual good is curiously irritating to many people. Hostility from women to women and dismissiveness of each others experience is one of the themes that we will touch on as we go along.

HERMAN CONT'D: At conventional universities where most students are in their late adolescence much stress results from the trying-out of many different roles which is part of growing up. In our university we bring with us our established adult roles and the strain may come when these prove to be incompatible with the demands and changes involved in being a student. The conventional role of a wife and mother is particularly threatened. Pauline Kirk has been doing a survey of the whole area of domestic and matrimonial disruption experienced by women students. She has received many letters from women and we've made a selection which present typical problems.

PAULINE KIRK: Some of you may remember an article which appeared in Sesame last year, "The Other Kind of Husband". Well I wrote that and it caused quite a lot of controversy. As a result I decided to undertake a survey into marital problems of OU students. I am going to quote from some of the letters I received. From them I think a pattern does emerge. They were written to me in confidence so I am not going to reveal any names. The first letter is from a student in Edinburgh doing A.100.

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"I read with great interest your article on marital problems. I started A.100 last year with an intelligent two-honours degrees, Classics and Law, kind loving husband who seemed to change overnight into a boorish philistine who threatened to leave our two children alone at night if I went out to tutorials. Left me to find the money for books and fees. I get no grant as I am supported and raised the roof about Summer School."

The second letter is from a mini-survey that a student undertook for me.

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KIRK CONT'D:

"My constant exhaustion from the new intellectual demands had two effects. I lost interest in sex and our social life was non-existent. I was working an average of 20 hours a week on the unit, double that the week of an assignment. My husband was extremely patient and I took August off to try and make up all round but I was very much aware that there were large practical problems to be overcome if I carried on the following year. I was always aware that like most men with clever wives my husband felt vaguely threatened by my development. In the end we did manage to discuss the problem, keeping it as light as possible, and he said how he felt somewhat helpless and hopeless in the face of my coping with him, two establishments and three sons as well as such subjects as logic and philosophy. I became quite clear that I should have to take 1975 off in order to redress the balance. OU was quite simply occupying too large a proportion of my time and energies thereby affecting all aspects of my life."

The third is from a student with less happy experiences.

"My husband never discouraged me from the OU although I always felt that he was not encouraging either. It was not until about a year ago that I discovered that in fact he bitterly resented it. But had not been able to admit to himself and had hidden from me how much he hated it. Not surprisingly he saw it as having taken me away from him. Whereas I am quite certain that if it hadn't been the OU something else, perhaps later, would have brought to life the irreconcilable differences that had been there all along. Marriage guidance did at least enable us to trace these back to before we were even married. The OU was the catalyst, not the cause, of something which sooner or later was inevitable."

PAT HERMAN: Pauline Kirk to whom those letters were written has received dozens more like them and we'll be hearing more from her presently. One of the immediate questions which they provoke is whether these domestic problems are really related to the fact that one or other partner is an OU student, or whether they would have come up any way for other reasons. Here are two of the women students who wrote to us discussing this and related points.

JEAN WOODS: Well in my case it wasn't the Open University which was the initial problem. My first husband felt threatened by the fact that I wanted to improve my education. He felt that his status would be in some way reduced if I continued to study. I had no access to money, even though I was working. He wouldn't allow me to use anything for a purpose that he didn't approve of, and you can't work in a house where the atmosphere is such that.....

EVE HOLDEN: No I agree.

JEAN WOODS: It doesn't go like that.

EVE HOLDEN: I think this would have happened to me too if I'd continued to be married to my first husband. I am sure he wouldn't have agreed at all to my doing anything like the Open University which would have taken me away for hours from housework or well we didn't have any children, fortunately, but there was a question of earning money - we never had the finances. I certainly couldn't have studied in those circumstances. But I can now because my husband's actively encouraged me to study.

JEAN WOODS: This is the case now but in the first time I had no importance - I was there purely as an adjunct.

EVE HOLDEN: Yes, yes.

JEAN WOODS: I wasn't allowed to have any personality.

WOODS CONT'D: I wasn't allowed to have the right to think differently. He was afraid that I would become too individual.

EVE HOLDEN: Yes - did you never talk about this together?

CROSS-TALK

JEAN WOODS: It wasn't permitted.

EVE HOLDEN: Well, why were you so frightened of him? Why weren't you frightened before?...You didn't see this did you before you met him?

JEAN WOODS: No, he had a public image and a private image and the private image emerged somehow after we were married.

EVE HOLDEN: But then in that case you would say that he was a sick man wouldn't you? You wouldn't say that this is quite the normal reaction is it?

JEAN WOODS: My second husband has quite a different reaction. When we met he was about to begin an Open University course.

EVE HOLDEN: Well that's interesting.

JEAN WOODS: He encouraged me in every way and his attitude is that the housework and all other things are secondary.

INAUDIBLE CONVERSATION

JEAN WOODS: Our marriage is most important, Open University studies come next. We worked together, we encourage each other.

EVE HOLDEN: Yes, yes.

JEAN WOODS: Whereas my first husband's attitude was that he was the most important ; I had to be his doormat.

EVE HOLDEN: So many men don't seem to realise that a woman is only half a woman by just doing the housework and the children and the cleaning and so on. Of course there's gardening and there's all sorts of creative things that you can occupy yourself with, all kinds of sorts of creative work in marriage. You can make curtains, you can make your own dresses, you can make the children's dresses, but you see my own personal view here is that we are not all made that way. Men on the whole have this desire for a kind of mouselike creature that brings them cups of coffee and meals on a tray; you know there's something about men they seem to enjoy having a couple of slaves on either side of them you know.

JEAN WOODS: I think in our case it was a basic difference in background and I had been brought up in a home where we were each expected, regardless of sex, to be important....

EVE HOLDEN: Yes.

JEAN WOODS: in our own way. And my first husband was brought up in a part of the country where it was almost unthinkable for a woman to have a life of her own. This in ourself have different backgrounds.

EVE HOLDEN: Yes, yes.

PAT HERMAN: Again it wasn't the Open University which started things, but it was one of the factors which came up later?

JEAN WOODS: Yes.



PAT HERMAN: Now of course it's easy to say and the temptation is very great to say that the problems discussed by these two students are not typical. But what is certain is that numbers of women students have written to Pauline Kirk with the same kind of evidence. We have done no statistical analyses of such stresses but before we discuss them further let's hear from Naomi McIntosh some of the basic figures concerning women in the OU.

NAOMI McINTOSH: Well let's start at the beginning. How many women actually apply. We were disappointed in our first year because only 30% of women actually applied; we thought we'd do much better than ordinary universities where there were 28% of women at that time. But they beat us in that first year and there were 34% of women entering normal universities. In fact it then got better as the chart shows and the figures increased from 1970 through to 1973 quite appreciably and we got up to 42.6. The last couple of years we've in fact dropped a little but marginally, but behind these last two years is a real increase in actual numbers because the overall application rate jumped to over 50,000 students. And 41.7% of over 50,000 is an awful lot of women; it's over 20,000 women. And if you think for a moment that in the polytechnics, in the whole of the polytechnics sector there are only about 21,000 women, you'll see just what an important addition to opportunity the Open University then is providing. But if we go on there are differences in applications in regions which are quite well, curious, depressing, London and the south east generate always more applications from women as this chart shows and in London and the south east you have well not quite half and half, but getting on for it. It drops through East Anglia, forty-three percent the Midlands and the North are lower. The lowest are Wales and Northern Ireland - there's something about the Celtic fringe. But even in Wales, Northern Ireland, it's improved immensely but the most

McINTOSH CONT'D: significant difference is the fact that women apply predominantly for Arts and Social Science. They have done this every year and the disparities are really very great. If you look at this chart you will see nearly 60% of women apply for Arts, 45% in Social Science, 28 in Science, going right down to 7.7 in Technology. And while women apply overwhelmingly for the courses which are already over-applied for, it's very difficult for us to give them their fair share of places without at the same time keeping men out effectively from Arts and Social Science, which we don't want to do because that is in fact where the men with the least qualifications start their entry to the university, so this time for the first time and this time last year we tried a bit of positive discrimination, and we actually tried offering women places in a higher ratio on Science, Maths and Technology to try and see if we could actually redress the balance a little bit. And I am pretty unrepentant about doing this because the women that do have the courage to start on Maths and Science and Technology - if they can get over the barrier, in fact do extremely well on them and the pass rate particularly in Maths for example for women is very high; it's a good 10% higher than it is for many of the men. Maybe this relates to our next chart which shows the fact the women we have attracted to the university have in fact a rather higher educational background than many of the men. It shows on this chart in two ways. If you look at the people who left at 15 or earlier you'll see that more men left school earlier and you pick up the women who stayed on later in the 19-20 group where there is a 10% difference in background between men and women. What we've found is that more men have left school early and have gone on through part-time education, often through the local tech, through apprenticeships and found their way back to the Open University. The picture for women is rather different. Women by and large have done pretty well at school, they've got their O. levels and they've got their A. levels, but they've been screened off from education for the sort of social and cultural

McINTOSH CONT'D: reason which says that girls don't go onto higher education and particularly you find when there wasn't enough money in the house that it was the girls that suffered more than the boys and more of the girls left for finan..., didn't go onto higher education for financial reasons than the boys. Well what's it look in our own staff. Among our part-time staff in 1972 17% of all of our part-time staff, tutors and counsellors were women, 73 it crept up to 18%, 74 it crept up to 19%. I don't know the figures for 1975 but we're not actually knocking down the bastions here. There are extremes between regions. The south east for example mastered as many as 27% of women, but North and Manchester - the Yorkshire region, they come in at about 11 or 12% so there are interesting differences in the availability and recruitment of part-time staff which are quite significant. In terms of full-time staff, it looks pretty depressing. We have about 11% of all of our full-time staff are women, but in fact this is absolutely no worse, it's actually 1% better than the country as a whole. This is just a commentary on the real gap there is in the education of women that not enough go on to do degrees and not enough of those who go on to do degrees actually do post-graduate work and again go on beyond that.

PAT HERMAN: Thank you Naomi. One can agree that the overall picture of the employment of women in the full-time and part-time staff of the Open University is deplorable. But it is encouraging that we have just had the appointment of our first woman professor, Judith Green, Professor of Psychology, and that we should mention that Naomi McIntosh herself is the only woman pro-Vice Chancellor in the British university. That's something to be said at least in our favour. The facts and figures which Naomi read helped to fill in the incomplete picture. We should remember that as well as the traditional responsibility for home management and the care of young children.

HERMAN CONTD: Women carry with them into the Open University the legacy of educational inequalities in the school. The Open University was called into being to redress the balance of a social and educational system which sits harder on some groups than on others. When you say that it's usually the working class we have in mind. It is even more applicable in the case of women who, after all, form half the working class as of all classes and who as a group invariably expect less, achieve less and get less of whatever is on offer. So when as women we look at the Open University we might ask what's in it for us. Can we use it as an agent of change in our situation. Must it first change itself in any way. Many Open University women are already discussing these questions and we have four of them in the studio today.

PAULINE KIRK: Well we've heard enough from students so far I think to suggest that the Open University at least throws up problems, if it doesn't actually create them. Now a lot of this was voiced by married students. I wonder if it's simply a problem married students face. Rowanne, you yourself are single, do you feel there is this division?

ROWANNE PASCO: It seems to me watching the programme so far that the main division is not one of sex or gender, it's not between the men and the women students, but between women who are married, who have a husband perhaps who doesn't like them studying and who have children who tie them down and they haven't got the free time. Whereas a single woman has not got this dependancy; she can structure her time when she feels like it and I would like to know what are the real problems that, or are there any real problems that women as such face because they are women and not because they are married?

PAULINE KIRK: You don't have financial problems yourself then?

ROWANNE PASCO: No, no I don't. I think the majority of working women could afford the OU fees without too much trouble.

PAULINE KIRK: Diana, you had a conference I know of students, young mothers with children doing the Open University course. I believe finance was something they raised a lot then?

DIANA BURGESS: Yes, this business of financial dependence seemed to be a very important point. As Rowanne said if you've got your own money and you're spending it this is quite a different situation being financially dependent on someone else and, of course, it is extraordinarily difficult for women mature students to get grants.

PAULINE KIRK: Yes.

DIANA BURGESS: So it's very easy for a woman to find herself in a situation in which she's got no income and also finds it virtually impossible to get a grant.

PAULINE KIRK: And of course Summer School's a problem isn't it? I believe. Lee, you've done some research on this have you.

LEE TAYLOR: Well it's not just a question of women students and the problems they have with parking their children, crèche facilities, that kind of thing, but also for women on the part-time staff, I mean.

PAULINE KIRK: I can't get employment at Summer School myself because of children.

LEE TAYLOR: No, but I would like to take up Rowanne's point about not seeing the difference between problems facing men and women. If we could talk about course content for a moment; Pat earlier said that the OU was reflecting the society, and

LEE TAYLOR CONT'D: the society, it can be argued, is defined in terms of men. How is the course content related to women to the kinds of things that they are interested in. I was looking at some courses; take as an example "People and Work", a new 1976 course. It talks about people and work, but ....

PAULINE KIRK: But not men and women and work.

LEE TAYLOR: people and work.

The Course Team is predominantly male and that's understandable, though there are more men academics as Naomi was showing, but there has also been more research done on men's occupations, so the preponderance of the unit are discussing male employment. They only allude to female employment and housework is a category which is put apart.

DIANA BURGESS: Do you think a problem there is that, if we are talking about work we automatically think of men and it's only if we make a special effort of will and start to think about female labour is that we come around.....I've noticed that in courses, too. If you're talking about labour or trade unions it's only in footnote you start to think about women; you don't really think about them as part of the entire concept.

PAULINE KIRK: Does this, therefore, reinforce social preconceptions about women then? You feel it's making the OU student just accept that she will not work.

LEE TAYLOR: Well perhaps not that, but I certainly think it reinforces how women see themselves. I should imagine Summer School this year is going to be quite lively and the D.101 Summer Schools - they have a module on Women in Society and they actually raise this question of women and wages for

LEE TAYLOR CONT'D: housework and I hope that there's going to be a lot of controversy, discussion over that.

ROWANNE PASCO: But surely it's up to us as students in fact to challenge some of these concepts that they throw at us in the course material, I mean we just don't accept it. May be it may be set out this way, but I mean we can certainly challenge what they are saying.

LEE TAYLOR: Well I certainly hope so. Part of the problem is that OU material is rather more directive in some ways than other higher education material.

ROWANNE PASCO: We seem to have gone onto the course material. I wonder if we could just go back to the problems of studying again for women. One thing that struck me from the letters was that one woman said that the OU wasn't really the cause of her marital problems, but the catalyst, and this seems to suggest that the OU, in a way, didn't create any new trouble for her but gave her perhaps insight and strength to face up to her problems, and maybe tackle them.

PAULINE KIRK: A lot made the point that it gave them a new sense of identity, that they had submerged their identity in marriage and OU study made them realise that they were people, coming back to the course and that they could have rights, interests and tastes of their own. Now sometimes the marriage just seemed unable to take this but presumably there was a weakness there to start off with.

DIANA BURGESS: Do you think, perhaps, that this is a question of role conflict? The personality of a woman does tend to get a bit overlaid by the fact that she is a wife and mother and when she starts, for example doing an Open University course if it has any effect at all it must, you know, have a maturing

BURGESS CONT'D: and growth effect on her.

PAULINE KIRK: Did they talk about growing up?

DIANA BURGESS: Yes.

PAULINE KIRK: As though they had remained at a certain stage of development when they married. And then the OU made them develop further.

DIANA BURGESS: Yes and possibly develop in ways which are in conflict with the traditional roles that one's supposed to carry out.

ROWANNE PASCO: But still it still improves them as people surely rather than creating extra problems for them as people. Indeed it's the only way they could study if they were at home with the family.

PAULINE KIRK: This may be regarded by the other partners as a threat; he has known his wife as his wife and just as that much, suddenly she is a person, a student with outside interests and this can be a threat.

LEE TAYLOR: I think it's going to be very interesting in a few years time when we literally have thousands of new women graduates, partly looking for employment and partly looking at the world through rather new eyes.

PAULINE KIRK: This could I think have a tremendous impact of change. The OU itself could be revolutionary in this way.

PAT HERMAN: These future women graduates of the Open University clearly constitute a subject of importance, which perhaps we can return to, in some later programme.



HERMAN CONT'D: For the moment what I want to say to the women listening to this programme in the Open University is that here we have in our hands, in this university, potentially an instrument for the emancipation of women which is unequalled in the world of education. But we must learn how to use it. We must learn to look very carefully at the courses offered to us, to see what it is in fact they teach us. We must remember that if we stay in our homes where our course material comes, and if we never meet each other and learn to trust and to listen to one another, we are losing very much of what the Open University can do for us. We hope that the conversation that we have started here will go on wherever you meet together. Next month's Open Forum is an outside broadcast and comes from the Open University Summer School at York University.

MUSIC AND END TITLES.

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