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Feminist Medea Premieres

The Feminist Press

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WHY DISCUSS MEN (continued)

groups, and professional activities. A number of incidents come to mind immediately. At a party a few years ago, a pipe-smoking, suave, history professor tried to impress upon us how with-it he was. "I discuss sexism in all my classes," he said. "Are you for or against?" we quipped. "Oh, I present both sides, of course," he answered proudly. We fumed about the absurdity of his answer, and since analogies were popular then, asked him if there were two sides to racism. Eventually we came to regard him as an inconsequential ass.

But we remembered the incident as we were thinking about the over-scrupulous fairness we show to men in our women's studies classes. One of us recalled a male student in an American Studies course she teaches, "Women in American Culture," who wrote in his journal that he did not care much about the reading. With the exception of Dickey's *Deliverance*, it was either by or about women. He did not care for her discussion of the sexism of the English language and its effect of making women invisible, either. "Come to think of it," she observed, "he did not care for me as a teacher." "You are almost always talking about women and only giving one side, *your* side," he wrote. It is our practice generally to ignore irrelevant criticism: we do not bother to deal in class with such ridiculous suggestions as that Kate Chopin should have joined the Campus Crusade for Christ and written about a woman who is happy being a wife and mother. But instead of discussing the reading, 25 minutes of class time were spent explaining that the title of the course was *Women* rather than *Sexism* in American Culture; documenting the fact that students learned thoroughly about men in other courses; pointing to some future assignments in which the class would deal with men; and congratulating the class in general for being so open and honest in raising basic questions.

On occasions like this, many of us overdo it, and we know it. When we discussed the experience with women colleagues, several of them noted similar experiences: giving disproportionate introductions to using *By and About Women* but not *Black Voices*; grading leniently ungrammatical and illogical papers attacking "Women's Lib" for fear of being unfair; bringing up a long series of examples of the distorted images of men in advertising while reading "The Image of Women in Advertising"; *always* demonstrating that actually men will benefit from an improvement in the status of women; and thanking, thanking, male students every time they suggest sexism hurts them.

We remembered the male student who "just couldn't understand" the problems of Hedda Gabler, Esther Greenwood, and Edna Pontillier. And so more than an hour was spent patiently explaining it all to him again, instead of telling him he'd jolly well better try harder. After all, we had spent our whole academic careers understanding the problems of Stephen Dedalus, Ernest Pontifex, Julien Sorel, Raskolnikov, Humbert Humbert, Portnoy, Tristram Shandy, Tom Jode, Paul Morel, J. Alfred Prufrock, George Babbitt, and Huckleberry Finn, not to mention Oedipus, Ulysses, Job, Faust, King Lear, Hamlet, and Jesus Christ.

We know that male colleagues are all too eager to use us as "resource people." Last summer we were both asked to speak to two classes about the women's movement. The first wasn't bad: the students had read a semi-relevant article, their questions were courteous and intelligent, and their professor bought us a cup of coffee afterward. Not real compensation, but we felt a little like missionaries. The following week we went to the second class. The male professor, obviously unprepared-as-usual, hemmed and hawed for ten minutes, mentioned a useless and outdated article, and then, in the middle of our carefully-thought-out presentation, started passing around the latest *Cosmopolitan* centerfold. Valerie Solanas almost had two new converts.

In other words, although many of our colleagues seem eager to pick our brains, we cannot assume they want to use what they find there. A final example will suffice. We once spoke to a group of high school

students studying the women's movement. A few days later we received an indignant letter from the (male) teacher and the (male) principal. We had angered the young men in the class to the extent that they had "decided to deny women equal rights." The writers went on to explain to us that the major responsibility of feminists was to work for all people, not just women. With a complete lack of logic and without awareness of the ironies, the writers scolded us for our specific offense: we had made references to the oppression of men and in so doing had "embarrassed" them. We refrained from asking plaintively, My God, what *do* men want? But we do think it may be more productive to let men see to their own concerns.

We're not suggesting we exclude men from courses or meetings, nor are we urging we be harsh to our male colleagues. However, each of us needs to consider the following questions about the activities of women's caucuses, our courses, professional organizations, guest lectures, and publishing.

1. Is a discussion of the "adverse" effects of sexism on men one of our major responsibilities?
2. Must we consciously encourage such discussion?
3. Must we carry out such discussion ourselves even if men do not really want to bother devoting time to it?
4. Why do we feel we have to do that?
5. While it may be a successful political tactic to demonstrate to some mixed civic and church groups that men have nothing to fear from the women's movement, aren't we overdoing it? More importantly, is that really true?
6. Are we wasting our time speaking to such groups at all? Are we accomplishing anything or providing free entertainment?
7. On the other hand, are women's studies courses and the women's movement a real threat? If so, to whom? Why? What are the implications?
8. Are we too apologetic about what we think and do? Aren't we too grateful for men's suggestions? Aren't we too generous with our time and talent, or is that possible?
9. What obligation do we have to educate our male (and non-feminist female) colleagues? Will students criticize or stop taking their courses when they realize how incomplete and biased they really are? Do the students care?

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FEMINIST MEDEA PREMIERES

The Westbeth Playwrights' Feminist Collective will present Seattle playwright Gloria Albee's feminist *Medea*, directed by Patricia Carmichael, at the Westbeth Gallery Theatre, 155 Bank St., January 17-19, 24-26, 31; February 1 and 2. Friday and Sunday the performance begins at 8:00 PM, Saturday at 7:00 and 10:00 PM. Admission is \$2.50.

Gloria Albee is a new regional writer discovered in Westbeth's nationwide search for women playwrights. Her *Medea* was produced earlier this year at Western Washington State College. *Medea's* director, Patricia Carmichael, has directed previously with the Augusta Civic Theatre and the Caravan Theatre, where she has been producer and director since 1949.