Fall 1974

Campus News: University of Texas/Arlington

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WHY DISCUSS MEN IN SEXIST SOCIETY?

Can we ever stop worrying about men? When we teach women's studies courses, work with women's caucuses in professional organizations, or speak to various groups about feminism, we often do more than our duty. In addition to dealing with the problems of women, we also consider those of men. Recently, however, both of us have begun re-evaluating our efforts. Our experience with a particularly bothersome workshop, "Women and Men in Sexist Society," started us thinking.

As co-chairwomen of the Midwest Women's Caucus for the Modern Languages, we were responsible for organizing five workshops for the 1973 Midwest Modern Language Association meeting. At one of the Caucus working sessions the previous year, someone had suggested that we sponsor a workshop on men in sexist society. To give those of us present some slight credit, we objected to that exclusive topic, and we did progress from "men and women" to "women and men." But that was superficial progress for which we need not congratulate ourselves. We did not even approach the conclusions both of us have come to since then: specifically, that women's organizations do not necessarily need to sponsor workshops concerning the problems of men; and generally, women are far too ready to acquiesce not only to men's demands for inclusion in the women's movement, but also for extra compassion, warm understanding, and impeccable fairness.

While our conclusions are negative, we think the reasons for them are well worth discussing since they relate directly to our professional lives. We especially question the deference and readiness to apologize to men that we have observed in both ourselves and other professional women. We might do better to allow men to work on their own problems rather than treating them with such exquisite consideration and tact that we are still sometimes like mistresses and mothers in classrooms and professional organizations: our rhetoric is different, we don't light their cigars or blow their noses, but we still worry about men's feelings excessively.

Our deference to men is closely related to our admirable wish to be fair. Having suffered from male chauvinism, we are afraid of being considered female chauvinists. Nevertheless, this desire for fairness often leads us to dismiss our own interests and commitments. It leads us simply to waste time.

Our experiences in organizing "Women and Men in Sexist Society" will help to illustrate our point. The suggestion for the workshop came from a man—a nice man, a feminist, someone whose ideas we wanted to treat fairly, but also someone whose feelings we did not wish to hurt by suggesting we would rather work on something else. Other women were equally indifferent to the topic of men in sexist society; two Women's Caucus—Midwest Newsletters appealing for volunteers to chair or participate in the workshop brought no response. Nevertheless, we proceeded through a long series of letters, phone calls, and personal conversations, attempting to find some male participants. With one exception, all the men declined, including the one responsible for the original suggestion.

Curiously, neither of us suggested canceling the Workshop. While pushing the vacuum cleaner on a Saturday afternoon, one of us finally thought of discussing our recruiting problems and subsequent misgivings with those attending the Workshop. She pulled the plug, called the other, and soon it seemed to both of us not only appropriate but necessary. By persistence and ingenuity, we had finally discovered how to give men their expected due. But we had also discovered a pattern.

We believe that our wish to be fair to men and the consequent waste of time and straying from more important matters can be observed in classrooms, social gatherings, talks to civic and church