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Self-Portrait: Feminist Dean

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NEWS FROM THE CAMPUS

On the basis of our travels and correspondence, we can say with confidence that new women's studies programs continue to be organized. At Western Michigan University, for instance, at Oberlin, at Ohio State University (from which we receive the excellent library bi-monthly, Women are Human), at Kent State University, at Case-Western Reserve University, at St. Olaf College, at the University of Texas/Arlington, there are official or unofficial faculty women's studies committees working this year either on the writing of a formal proposal or on its implementation. At two eastern women's colleges—Wheaton and Simmons—a lecture series will focus on aspects of women's studies in order to inaugurate new feminist directions for each college. And a series of spring conferences will augment area-wide interest in women's studies. At Barnard (May 11), the focus will be on scholarship; on the Flint campus of the University of Michigan and at Northeastern University in Boston (both on May 4) the emphasis will be on the future of women's studies.

In two states, Michigan and California, women in higher education have organized formal groups in order to share information and resources and perhaps to move towards some useful action. The Michigan Women's Studies Association (Fredrica K. Bartz, Corresponding Secretary; University of Michigan-Flint, 48503) founded one year ago, is the first organization of its kind. With dues a modest $5.00 per year for faculty, $2.00 for students, it has attracted 250 members interested in state-wide meetings, in exchanging bibliography, receiving a newsletter, and perhaps in publishing a journal. California Women in Higher Education (Lucy W. Sells, Acting Coordinator, c/o Women's Center, Building T-9, University of California, Berkeley 94720), another state-wide organization, has a somewhat broader mission—"devoted to maximizing opportunities for qualified and qualified women in California higher education." They aim to achieve affirmative action for women and minority groups. Dues are also $5.00, but the group asks for a contribution of from $5.00 to $50.00, based on a graduated salary scale. Two excellent publications are available: "A Fact Sheet on Women in Higher Education"; and a long paper by Lucy W. Sells called "Strategies for Achieving Affirmative Action."

Two other pieces of news from California suggest the high level of motion of women in that state. First, the Commission on the Status of Women has released a new report (March 1974) that attempts to separate "myth" from "reality." Copies are available from the State of California Documents Section, P.O. Box 20191, Sacramento 95820, at a cost of $1.43. And perhaps most important both for women's studies students and as a significant strategy for affirmative action, the California Fair Employment Practice Commission (P.O. Box 603, San Francisco 94101), part of the Department of Industrial Relations, has issued a call to faculty able to teach "full semester courses on affirmative action and related subjects to meet the needs of those involved in or planning to enter the personnel field." A course outline and bibliography called "Affirmative Action Curriculum" are available from them. The idea is one significant response to those who do not yet understand that women's studies can prepare undergraduates for real jobs.

Finally, we wish to report that our recent mailing to some 15,000 department heads, deans, administrators, and faculty has brought in a response sizable enough to delay publication of Who's Who and Where in Women's Studies. We shall have at least 1500 new courses to add to those already in our files, and we estimate that the volume will contain a total of more than 4,000 individual courses. The cost of the volume, we regret to announce, will have to be raised somewhat to meet the additional size as well as the increased cost of paper, etc. We expect to have it ready during the late summer or early fall.

See Box on page 7 for list of new women's studies programs and coordinators.

SELF-PORTRAIT: FEMINIST DEAN

The following was a presentation at the Modern Language Association's convention in December 1973, under the heading, "Life Styles of Academic Women." We hope to print other portraits in future issues.

The token number of women in administration is increasing in a token way, at least in state and land-grant universities, according to a report from the National Association of Universities and Land-Grant Colleges. Eight hundred and sixty-four women held major administrative positions in 1972-73; while two years earlier, in 1970-71, sixty percent of the state universities and land-grant colleges surveyed had no women administrators who met the criteria of the survey and "The median number of women in top-level administration was zero."

The types of administrative positions identified in this 1972-73 survey were: (1) President or Chancellors, (their Assistants); (2) Vice Presidents or Provosts, Associates or Assistants; (3) Deans; (4) Administrative Directors; (5) Associate or Assistant Deans, Associate or Assistant administrative directors. In 1972-73, seventy percent of the women holding administrative positions were classified either as Administrative Directors or as Associate or Assistant Deans or Assistant Administrative Directors—the two lowest classifications included in the survey. For Deans, of the 166 women in these positions, 52 were Deans of Nursing, and 28 were Deans of Home Economics—those fields account for forty-eight percent of the total number of women Deans.

In 1972-73, I left a job as Assistant Professor of English to become one of those "other 86" Deans. This pattern is, I think, going to become increasingly common, in spite of the statistics I have just quoted, for a couple of reasons: First, the number of jobs available in administration is still growing in most institutions, while the number of tenure slots available in English and the foreign languages is shrinking and tenured people in those fields are being let go; and second, administrators who hire new administrators are somewhat freer to hire a woman on their own responsibility (if they find one they "like") than are department chairmen, who need the consent of their department. In the English department where I was an Assistant Professor, I had—and I knew it—little hope of tenure, and that's one reason I made the switch to administration. But the other reason I made the switch is because I knew, in a women's undergraduate school, an unusually fine undergraduate Dean—who left me with the feeling that administration was a serious and gratifying job, and who was, in retrospect, my first role model.

I am Dean of a new college—William James College—now halfway through its third year. We are one of four undergraduate and one graduate Colleges of the Grand Valley State Colleges. All of us share the same campus, the same facilities, and the same central services; all of us compete for pieces of the same budget; each of us has its own faculty, its own curriculum, and its own educational goals. My job, as Dean of William James College, is a schizophrenic one: (1) inside the College, to love, cherish and nurture William James—which is organized in a semi-collective way; and (2) outside the College, to represent William James in the Councils of Deans and Vice Presidents who make up the central administration of Grand Valley, to fight in these groups for the resources and policies William James needs to continue to develop, and even to survive. I'm trying to suggest with the language I'm using the difference between the two kinds of administrative jobs, the first in a somewhat unconventional structure, the second a conventional administrative job. Both kinds of administrative jobs raise problems for me as a feminist, but totally different problems.

The original faculty of William James College (seven men) set out self-consciously, in their first year, to create a non-hierarchical institution where decisions would be made collectively by consensus, and where most administrative responsibilities would rotate so that each (continued on page 12)
member of the faculty would gain experience in dealing with them. There was a conscious effort to incorporate into the governance structure and into the curriculum the maximum personal choices for both students and teachers which characterized the alternative education movement in the late sixties. The original faculty did not make a conscious choice to hire women, but they looked for people who shared their vision, and women came. In the second year William James College had six women faculty and a woman Dean; by the third year, I had appointed a second woman Dean, and there were eight women faculty. Women still comprise less than one third of the total staff, but because we are not "token" women, and also, I'm sure, because the two Deans are women, the sexual games which have characterized every other academic situation I have ever been part of—the sexual role playing, banter, verbal pseudo-seductions—never developed.

There are problems for a feminist, even in what I see in my expansive moments as a post-revolutionary society (I mean one where my values are for once the majority values). There is a problem with the original notion that most administrative responsibilities would rotate so that each member of the faculty would gain experience in dealing with them; sharing of such tasks is, in fact, happening less and less as we move from the spirit of the late sixties into the seventies. Fewer and fewer faculty, it seems, take these institutional responsibilities seriously. I think more and more seriously about whether this is related to the sexual politics of William James College—the fact that the two Deans and two of the five program coordinators are women. What does this mean to the male faculty member? Numerically, men still outnumber women by more than two to one, but in the governance and administration of the College, women exercise more than their appropriate percentage share of power. Men exercise less, and I am raising the question of what this means—to the possibility that men and women can ever work together truly as equals; to the health of William James College as an institution; to the politics of the feminist movement.

The second problem relates to the constraints on feminist activity within the College, within the cluster of Colleges, and in the community. In this situation where feminist values are supported within the College, we are all—secretaries, Deans, faculty—too used-up in the work of developing the structures and curriculum of the College to work in more than a scattered and avocational way as feminists. We have women's studies courses, for example, but not a program. And we don't begin to do what we should in the curriculum or in the advising we offer to our young women students.

The central political question William James College raises is whether an alternatively-managed institution can survive as a unit of a conventionally managed institution; in a year and a half, I have come to the conclusion that the answer to that question is probably "no." Already we see a movement away from collective structure and collective responsibility within the College, and there is little I can do to push us back in our original direction, even leaving aside the sexual politics of our situation. Our reality is that demands which are external to us, demands (sometimes legitimate) of central administrators and of students, force us to focus on products (clarifications of our policies and procedures) and to let our own group process go.

In the central administration of the Grand Valley State Colleges (Deans, Vice Presidents, President), I am the only woman, and this presents me—whether I am a feminist or not is immaterial—with the standard set of token-woman problems. First, and most serious, my values are the minority values, since the assumption at this level of administration involves a hierarchically-ordered institution, where individuals have both the authority and the responsibility to manage the units they direct, where competition is seen as basic to human nature, and where competition among units is seen as basic to a healthy institutional life. Less serious, but always with me, is the fact that my language is the minority language. The pronoun of the group is "he" and the metaphors of the discussion are drawn from sports and business. It is nothing more than the old familiar problem: nobody bears me ill will individually, and it's not that I'm not listened to; what happens is that (1) the assumptions about the institution on which the administrators operate and (2) the language in which agendas are discussed, and (3) the ordinary social arrangements of life (at receptions and cocktails parties is it politically correct to talk with my Vice President or with his wife?) all work to isolate me. But these are the standard problems of women and most of them are the standard problems of minority men. I have developed substantial empathy for the token Black men who share my situation, which I did not have before I took this job.

One strength I have, which my male peers in the administration do not have, is a strong consciousness of myself which can't be touched by anything that happens to me in the Board Room because it grows out of being a woman in a male world. I stand (or sit—in the case of the Board Room) outside the alliances and rivalries of my male colleagues in the administration, outside the male pecking order altogether. I don't choose to stand outside. Perhaps I would make that decision (one of my male colleagues has), but I don't have that choice, so there is always a part of myself that is not emotionally invested in the job, and I have come to think of that as an important source of strength.

I feel pressure most of the time as a woman administrator, from within the College, and from without, but I'm aware that this is work that I'm very lucky (because I'm a woman) to have been granted the chance to do. I'm also aware of how frequently this work conflicts with my feminism. Sally Gearhart, in an essay about the cost and benefits of working as a lesbian feminist within the established Church, lists four minimum conditions which have to be met if she is to survive as a feminist within the Church. I have been struck with how directly what she says applies to my own situation as a Dean within the educational establishment. If any one of these minimum conditions is missing, says Ms. Gearhart, it is the obligation of a feminist to remedy the problem or to leave the situation.

1. Within ourselves, we must maintain our feminist consciousness, which means not only a lifetime commitment to other women and to ourselves, but a minute-by-minute priority for that lifetime.

2. We must have a support group of women within the institution where we work, women with whom we are in daily contact, and there must be a clear sense on everyone's part that this group is the priority for surviving as a feminist inside the structure.

3. An absolute condition of our staying within the institution is the certain knowledge of our ability to risk and to know when to risk. We need to be prepared every minute to say or do whatever outrageous thing is necessary with the foreknowledge that we may lose money, position, and prestige. More important, we have to know, really know, that when we choose not to do the outrageous thing, not to make the challenge, we act out of wisdom and not out of fear—it is strategy that stops us, and not ego.

4. And last, every single day, leaving the institution must be seen as an option, and every day the price of our leaving and the price of our staying must be calculated. (To be published Summer 1974, in Loving Women/Loving Men by Sally Gearhart: Glide Publications, 330 Ellis Street, San Francisco 94132.)

I find those statements extremely moving in my work as a Dean. I meet at this time only the last of those four minimum conditions, but I believe in them all, and I think they tell me, as I think they tell all women who work in established structures, the directions in which we ought to try to go.

Adrian Tinsley