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WOMEN, MEN, AND EDUCATION IN A CHANGING WORLD

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WOMEN, MEN, AND EDUCATION IN A CHANGING WORLD

When anyone talks about change, there are many people who feel afraid. People fear chaos and uncertainty, both of which may accompany change. Fears of technological change are expressed in innumerable science fiction books and films; fears of changes in governmental systems are expressed in fantasies such as George Orwell's 1984. Fears of feminism may be expressed in comic books, films, dystopian fiction, or conversation. Women and men who fear feminist ideas have nightmare visions of female-dominated societies where women treat men as many misogynist men have treated women or where, to their horror, women find ways of not needing men at all anymore.

But change is not always to be feared. It may cause stress and sometimes pain, but hopefully it also produces growth. Although the 1980's seem relatively quiet compared to the 1960's and 1970's, we are living through two revolutions that have touched, and will increasingly touch, the lives of every one of us. One revolution has to do with the use of computers (which, in addition to many other functions, now replace typewriters, older forms of record keeping, and to some extent xerox machines); the other revolution (which is every bit as big) has to do with changes in the way females and males live together on this planet.

The most recent women's movement, reborn about 1968, has brought about considerable change. Even writers for popular mainstream

publications like Newsweek have noticed. In an article about "Rock's New Women" in the March 4, 1985 issue, we could read this radical statement: "Slowly, inexorably, the burgeoning women's movement changed the whole climate of the culture." But is the women's movement, in fact, the root cause of the changes we are experiencing?

The women's movement does create change, but it is itself a response to a changed reality. It is primarily an adjustment mechanism to help both men and women adjust their attitudes to fit the new social and economic situation of a large number of the world's women. Many of these changes for women have occurred because of advances in medical care and technology. Because of decreases in the infant mortality rate in many countries, women can bear fewer children and still have a reasonable number survive. Thanks to the availability of contraceptives backed by legalized abortions, women in industrialized countries now have fewer pregnancies than their mothers or grandmothers; hence, they are much less likely to die in childbirth. For these and other reasons, women live about twice as long as they did a hundred years ago. Add to this the ideal of zero population growth and you have the fact that a smaller percentage of a woman's lifetime is spent raising children. She is free to turn to other activities. Furthermore, the right to a college education, gained gradually by women over the last hundred and fifty years, has led to higher expectations: women want to do more than spend their lives reproducing. Likewise, rising material expectations have convinced couples of the need for two incomes. Finally, changing

mores find divorce preferable to suffering, battering, lack of sex, or incompatibility.

The grass roots phenomenon labeled the women's movement encourages women and men to alter their attitudes so that they can adjust to this new reality. And for those who want to go back to the "good ol' days," were they really so good? Don't we need the changes advocated by the women's movement?

We need the women's movement because we live in a sexist society. What is sexism? The dictionary defines sexism as "the economic exploitation and social domination of one sex by the other, specifically of women by men." Most Americans understand racism more clearly than they do sexism, because within our lifetimes, we have been talking about it for a longer period of time. Therefore, it is helpful to compare sexism with racialism and racism. The dictionary defines racialism as "a doctrine or feeling of racial differences or antagonisms, especially with reference to supposed racial superiority, inferiority or purity; racial prejudice." Racism is defined as a "program or practice of racial discrimination, segregation, persecution and domination, based on racialism." The concept of racial superiority claims that whites are "by nature" (that is, biologically) superior to people of color. Parallel to that is the belief that the male sex is superior to the female sex, that females are "by nature" inferior, for example, physically, mentally, emotionally. The concept of racial purity that forbids mixed marriages has its parallel in the widely held belief that males must be kept "pure," untainted by anything feminine. If a young boy or

even a grown man displays any characteristics deemed to be feminine he is called a sissy or a faggot or, in some military circles, a "slit." Likewise, one can see clearly the similarities between racial and sexual discrimination, domination, and exploitation.

Change is also needed, because we find in our society evidence of not just sexism but also misogyny. Sex crimes depicted in popular movies or reported in our newspapers substantiate this. Misogyny, of course, means hatred of women. The Nazi treatment of the Jews is acknowledged by most people to have been an outburst of social insanity rooted in racism, more specifically in anti-semitism. How many people are aware that the witchcraft trials and burnings of millions of women who were labelled witches was an outbreak of social madness rooted in misogyny? During a period of about 500 years, women were burned at the stake in Europe and the United States. Indeed this phenomenon did not come to a complete halt in the seventeenth century. Witchburnings still occur, for example, in Africa. Some were reported in two African villages a few years ago. Still other threats of physical violence are used to keep blacks and women in their place today. A black man was lynched in 1981 in Alabama; women are raped daily all over the United States.

Despite the women's movement, many Americans are blind to the sexism that permeates our culture. Still others think the problems of women have been solved; hence, they see no reason to pass ERA in order to give women and men equal rights under the constitution. So how do we know that we live in a sexist society? What evidence is there?

First, there is clear evidence of the political domination of women by men. We live in a patriarchy--a society ruled and run by men. To understand this more fully, imagine for a moment, what it would be like to live in a matriarchy. Suppose the following:

- that the President of the United States was a female,
- that the Vice-President of the United States was a female,
- that the members of the Cabinet were female with one or two exceptions,
- that all but one of the Supreme Court justices were female,
- that among the 435 members of the House of Representatives all but about 23 were female,
- that the Senate was made up of 98 females and two males,
- that, with very few exceptions, all the presidents of the colleges and universities, all the presidents of corporations, and the heads of churches and temples were female,
- that almost all the medical doctors and lawyers were female,
- that, almost without exception, the scientists and engineers were all female,
- that, with very few exceptions, the military officers were female.

I have just described a society that is as extremely matriarchal as our society is patriarchal. If 51% of the citizens in this matriarchy were male, wouldn't you conclude that it was a rather sick society? Our society is so patriarchal and sexist that even criminals discriminate against women for criminal operations, because they are considered to be outsiders.

Just as sexism is evident in the political domination of women by men, it is evident in the economic exploitation of women by men. In 1939, women earned 58 cents for every dollar a man earned in an equivalent job. By 1981, women earned only 59 cents for every dollar a man earned, an increase of only one cent in forty years. In 1985, a woman earned 63 cents for every dollar a man earned. Because of the women's movement, it went up four cents in four years. This is encouraging; yet it is currently predicted that in the year 2000 women will still be earning only 75 cents for every \$1.00 a man earns. As a consequence of this economic exploitation, 75% of the poor in the United States are female, and the average income of female-headed households today is only \$10,000. In 1984, fifty percent of elderly women were living on less than \$5000 a year; only 20% of the elderly men were in the same situation.

In addition to the sexism evident in political domination and economic exploitation, sexism is evident in the domination of women through physical violence. This violence takes place in the home as well as on the streets. In the home, approximately six million wives are abused by their husbands each year. Wife battering is the single major cause of injury to women, more significant than auto accidents, rapes, and muggings. Two to four thousand women are beaten to death annually. One-third of all women murdered are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends. Bride burnings are a major problem in India today. A bride burning occurs every twelve hours in Delhi, India. The husbands pour cooking oil on their wives and set them on fire;

then they can marry again and collect another dowry. In the United States, the police spend one-third of their time responding to domestic violence calls. Forty percent of police injuries and twenty percent of police deaths are caused by their being caught in domestic disputes. In the U.S.A., a woman is raped every six minutes. Teenage girls are the most frequent victims. One out of ten American women is raped, and one out of three is sexually assaulted.

I could go on to show the evidence of sexism in all the other areas of our lives. Sexist attitudes are displayed in literature, in films, on television, in advertising, in family life styles, in childrearing, in cartoons, in psychotherapy, in language, in the legal system, and on and on and on. We live in it to such an extent that it seems part of the air we breathe. It is so "normal" and so all-pervasive that many people--male and female--cannot separate themselves enough from it to detect its presence.

Because of feminists--male and female--changes are occurring. Sometimes we feel there has been a great deal of change--for instance, when we see a policewoman or a female mail carrier or construction worker. Only sixteen years ago, employment ads in newspapers were still divided into Help Wanted--Female and Help Wanted--Male columns. Yet change also seems to come very slowly. Women struggled from 1848 until 1920--seventy-two years--just to get the vote. Ironically, for years after that, history books omitted any mention of the Suffrage Movement and simply stated that women

were "given" the vote in 1920, as if women had passively received the vote as a gift from generous men. Similarly the ERA Amendment was introduced in 1923 and sixty-three years later, it has still not been ratified. That twenty-four women out of 535 in Congress should be the highest number in history is still disappointing. Nor is continual progress ensured. For example, in 1920 women received 15% of the doctorates and 18% in 1930, but in 1950 and 1960 this number had dropped to ten percent (Graham 19). Similarly, many victories that took years of struggle are currently being undermined by the Reagan administration. Therefore, change can be in either direction--either towards or away from equality.

Anyone--male or female--who wishes to improve the status of women is a feminist. Feminists may be found anywhere on the political spectrum from conservative to radical. Contrary to what most people think, it is the conservative feminists who want to be like men and accept the existing masculine value system; they want equal pay, equal work, in short, their piece of the existing pie. It is the radical feminists who are pro-feminine--that is, advocates of the positive feminine (more nurturance, flexibility, cooperation) not the negative feminine (passivity, weakness, dependency). They advocate the feminization of society--that is, the incorporation of the positive feminine values, usually relegated to the private or domestic sphere, into the public sphere. This would require a transformation of our institutions and priorities.

What most feminists want is equality both in the home and in the workplace. The extent to which a male-female relationship in the

home is equal may be measured by whether or not you would deal with finances, child care, and housework in the same way with a friend of the same sex. Behavior in the workplace may be similarly tested. The well-known historian Gerda Lerner states that feminism "is a system of ideas and practices which assumes that men and women must share equally in the work, in the privileges, in the defining and the dreaming of the world" (Lerner 33).

When we begin to think about "the defining and the dreaming of the world," we move into the intellectual world of scholarship and teaching. There again women have encountered sexism, at first because men opposed any education for women (80% of the women in Asia and Africa are still illiterate today) or because men wanted to restrict women's education. Medical doctors boldly predicted that females who studied would drop dead or that their energy would go to their heads and cause their uteri to shrivel up, making them forever childless. Women in the early nineteenth century had accepted a separate and different education, but as Oberlin and Antioch went co-ed in 1837 and 1853 and the women's colleges were founded from 1861 on, women finally had the right to the same education as men.

About 1965, however, women began to realize that there was a deeper problem with the curriculum than had heretofore been recognized. As philosopher Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out, "the founders and great figures in 'our' tradition were using 'mankind' and 'humanity,' 'man' and 'human'" as if there were synonymous. Yet their statements were not, in fact, meant to include women. Minnich asks: "What kind of theory of knowledge, or justice, or equality, or

education, or politics . . . can emerge from an effort of thought that omits half the human race and does not consider that a problem? (30). St. Thomas, Aristotle, Plato, Rousseau, and Nietzsche, to name just a few, viewed women as less than man. What they regarded as human was what was male. St. Thomas pronounced woman to be a "defective man," "an incidental being." Aristotle said "we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness." Plato said that in all things "'a woman is inferior to a man.' The problem for women, according to Plato, is that they are governed by their wombs, not their brains." Plato wrote that "'The womb is an animal which longs to generate children. When it remains barren too long after puberty, it is distressed and sorely disturbed, and straying about the body and cutting off the passages of the breath, it impedes respiration and brings the sufferer into extreme anguish and provokes all manner of diseases, besides.' Plato's cure for the 'wandering uterus' syndrome was for the woman to get pregnant immediately." Rousseau, a great believer in freedom for men, said that females "'must be trained to bear the yoke from the first, so that they may not feel it, to master their own caprices and to submit themselves to the will of others.'" In Emile, he wrote that a woman "must learn to be passive and docile, modest and chaste, 'to submit to injustice and to suffer the wrongs inflicted on her by her husband without complaint.'" Friedrich Nietzsche wrote: "What inspires respect for woman, and often enough even fear, is her nature, which is more 'natural' than man's, the genuine, cunning suppleness of a beast of prey, the tiger's claw under the glove, the naivete of her

egoism, her uneducability and inner wildness, the incomprehensibility, scope, and movement of her desires and virtues" (T & W 11-14).

This traditional belief that "female" does not quite mean human is reflected in a statement made by the roommate of one of my students. Her comment was: "I like being female; I don't want to be a human being." This preference is also understandable, for, as the dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Patricia Graham, says, equality requires that females take full responsibility for their adult lives, hence "our excuses are gone." Women will not be able to fall back upon their prescribed roles or male definitions and stereotypes anymore. They must bid goodbye to being dependent or idealized. As Graham says, we will have to "decide what we will do, whom we will be" (32). To have choices is scary, but it is also exciting.

One important choice that women are making today is to assume responsibility for the kind of education they want. The first women's studies course was taught in 1965, and the first two women's studies programs came into being at San Diego State University and at Cornell University in 1970. In 1977, the National Women's Studies Association was founded with the aim of having "'a breakthrough in consciousness and knowledge' that would 'transform' individuals, institutions, relationships, and, ultimately, the whole of society" (Boxer 661).

All this came about because women began to ask some embarrassing questions: Whose history are we studying? Does it really "cover the

whole human race?" Or does it exclude the vast majority of the population? "Who has decided what is great, what is important, what we need to know--and why have they decided it in just that way?" Who decides what gets recorded? Women asked, too: "Who has been excluded, who has been exploited, who has been oppressed, why and how and to whose benefit?" (Minnich 27-28). Women began to say that all people have a right to study their own history and culture. Therefore, the curriculum must include the scholarship and perspectives of all those women, minorities, non-western and third world peoples that had been omitted by the western, white, upperclass founders of "our" tradition. In short, women are requesting a "democratization" of the content of the curriculum and the inclusion, too, of multiple perspectives. Only in this way can we move closer to a fuller, more honest truth about what our history and culture have been.

This challenge, coming to the disciplines from women's studies, upsets many basic theories, assumptions, methodologies, and structures. Women cannot simply be added to the disciplines. Much of what has been taken for granted--definitions of art and economics, characteristics of historical or literary periods, definitions of greatness, the use of masculine pronouns, and the Judeo-Christian world view upon which our educational philosophy has been based--all this and more must be reexamined, re-thought, and transformed if statements about what is "universal" and what is "human" are to be more accurate. If we want the whole truth, we must honestly pursue that goal.

We do indeed live in a changing world and the fact that women make up more than 53% of all students in college nationally must be acknowledged by all students, faculty, and administrators, indeed, by all Americans. On a global scale, the status of women in respect to education is extremely depressing, and we must not forget that, but at least here in the United States as many young females as males are now being educated, and this does mean a significant, indeed, revolutionary change.

In Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest, Carol P. Christ explains briefly why a feminist perspective challenges and transforms the traditional world view:

As women begin to name the world for themselves not only will they create new life possibilities for women, they will also upset the world order that has been taken for granted for centuries. . . . The subordination of women not only has been taken for granted . . . but the assumption of women's secondary status also has influenced philosophers' and poets' perceptions of the nature of authority and hierarchy, and of the relation of spirit and flesh, humanity and nature, body and soul. All of these subtle and not-so-subtle relationships will be challenged and . . . transformed as women begin to write out of their own experience. (24)

The new world view articulated by feminist philosopher/theologians such as Mary Daly, Rosemary Ruether, Elizabeth Dodson Gray, Marjorie Suchocki, and Carol Christ is wholistic. It challenges, in Christ's

words, "the adequacy of the dualistic, hierarchical, and oppositional ways of viewing the world." To clarify, Christ tells us that traditional philosophers have viewed the "dualisms as oppositions in which the inferior continually threatens to overwhelm the superior. Hence, the name 'war' is given to the relations between the spirit and the flesh, freedom and nature, man and woman, reason and emotion, and 'man' is warned to remain perpetually ready to do 'battle' with flesh, nature, woman, and the emotional realm." When feminist women question their own subordination, they also question this dualistic, hierarchical, oppositional way of thinking. For, "if women are different from but not inferior to men, then perhaps nature is different from but not inferior to spirit. Indeed, what has been called irrational--emotion, intuition, and sometimes even poetry--may not be inferior to the modes of thinking that have been called rational" (25-26). In a recent biography of geneticist Barbara McClintock, a feminist scientist Evelyn Fox Keller demonstrates how narrow definitions of the scientific method--that had to be rational and objective--prevented scientists from understanding the discoveries that resulted from Barbara McClintock's wholistic, organic approach to her corn plants. Only recently, years after she concluded her work, did she get the Nobel Prize.

The new feminist world view advocates an egalitarian rather than hierarchical model of relationships. Rosemary Ruether concludes that "there can be no liberation for [women] and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination." It is necessary to

transform the "world-view which underlies domination" and replace "it with an alternative value system" (204). Man will have to learn to respect both women and nature and cease to regard them as having been created for his "use." What theologians refer to as the hierarchical ladder is what in the Renaissance Period was called the Great Chain of Being (with God at the top, below Him the angels, then man and still lower women, then children, then animals, and on down to plants and minerals). This hierarchical system must be replaced by one that can be represented, not by a ladder, but by an egalitarian circle. No longer should everything be seen as "up or down, dominant or subordinate, superior or inferior, better or worse" (Gray 19).

Concerned about ecology, women are also questioning the macho-like attitudes of scientists that stress mastery and conquest at any price. Women are questioning the ideal of infinite progress if it requires infinite exploitation of resources; and they question scientists' right to do research (for example, nuclear or DNA) no matter what the political or biological dangers. Feminists are suggesting that in scientific as in economic, social, and political planning, justice and a concern for the future will require changes in our values and priorities.

A respect for women and a respect for nature should be accompanied by a general respect for life as it is expressed in the philosophy of nonviolence. The survival of life on this planet may well depend upon our ability to bring into being not only social justice, conservation efforts, and pollution controls but also disarmament and a general acceptance of the principle of nonviolence.

The world spends 1.3 million dollars for military purposes every minute and in that same period thirty children die for want of food and inexpensive vaccines. The cost of a single nuclear submarine equals the annual education budget of 23 developing countries with 160 million school-age children. What is called the feminization of society--the promotion in the public world of positive feminine values--should include strategies for making aggressive and violent behavior an unacceptable way of settling differences. There are many ways by which attitudes towards violence could be modified through what and how we teach.

In short, this new world view which has emerged from the women's movement and from women's studies research emphasizes the interdependence of all people, the interdependence of people and nature, and the sacredness of all life. Its vision is organic, wholistic, and non-hierarchical. Its focus is upon the quality of our institutions and of our relationships. Increasingly, feminist theoreticians and writers are stressing that our very survival depends upon our shifting away from the world view of dualism and domination and upon our conscious movement towards the androgynous vision. We would teach almost every course differently if our goal as educators was to help bring about greater social, economic, and political equality and a greater respect for life.

We live in a changing world. The question is will it change for the better or for the worse. Will our quest for mastery, superiority, and dominance lead us into a world-wide holocaust--the destruction of all people, of all nature, of the planet itself? Or

will we try instead to create societies based upon the principle of equality and the sacredness of all life? In the 1980's Eve's curiosity and thirst for knowledge has meant a revolution in epistemology based upon the overthrow of Adam's egotistical world view that women and nature were created for his use. To see himself as equal with women and nature in an interdependent organic system reduces man's overbearing ego in the same way that Copernicus and Darwin reduced it. Just as seeing the earth, not as the center of the universe, but as one of many tiny planets revolving around the sun reduced Man's ego and just as Man's connection with the apes humbled his sense of being wholly special and different, so too must the feminist insistence upon an egalitarian, interdependent model for relating to all people and to nature change the myth that assumed Man or Adam was God's chosen One and all else had a lower status in the Chain of Being. Men may not immediately feel good about their loss of superiority and privilege, but ultimately it will mean living without the guilt of the oppressor, exploiter, and warrior. If we have the courage to pursue our ideals, equality will make love and peace and the ecological salvation of the planet possible. If we all become agents for change, we will fear change less. If the epistemological and philosophical challenge of women's studies to the traditional curriculum is heeded, we can hope to move from men's studies through women's studies into human studies. Do men and women have the courage to end the fear of woman and her curiosity embodied in the psychologically revealing story of Adam and Eve? Can we welcome women scholars and women's studies into the center, into what

is called the "mainstream"? The Director of a Ph.D. program in women's history, Gerda Lerner, describes the current situation in this manner: "Women are challenging educators to end the distorted, one-sided view of civilization and history academics have called universal. . . . Women's Studies is the cutting edge of a cultural transformation which will enrich the intellectual and actual lives of men and women now and in the future" (49).

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