

Girl Talk

When the women on the *Gazette* first got together to talk about publishing a women's supplement, some of us felt it would be better if all the staff were involved in the issue. It grew, and grew, until it was drastically changed, from first being a twelve-page insert to finally including all the pages in a regular issue. We've gotten support from some of the male writers at the *Gazette*, and they have become involved in the planning of the issue as well. The women on the *Gazette* wanted, however, to write an editorial about their feelings, towards both the issue and what it means to be a feminist on a student paper. The following is an edited version of our three-hour conversation.

I'm really disappointed that this women's paper came up so late in the year, our third-last issue. That's really bad. There seems to have been a lack of interest in having a women's issues editor and a lack of interest in covering women's issues.

Do you think that's because the structure of the paper is set up so that there will always be a newspaper, but only once in a while will there be a women's paper?

Yes. It's a waging a losing battle trying to organize women's issues and trying to write about women's issues, because you don't get the support you need.

So how is this paper different? Speaking for myself, I took a lot more interest in this paper than in the others. I felt that I could make a contribution. Usually I'm restricted to typesetting.

I'd like to see more women's supplements, two at least, during the year. One of the main problems in the paper is getting writers involved. It's hard to just come in and join the *Gazette*. You come in the door and people don't even acknowledge that you are there. Meetings are hard, too, because there's so many people here you can barely get in the door, and then you have to stand at the back. Meetings are always the same, where two or three people speak, and they're all male. I know some women who came into the office and weren't encouraged to stay.

I joined the *Gazette* because I just moved to Halifax. I didn't know anything about the university, or Halifax, and I thought I could find that out. But working on a newspaper can also be very isolating. It's possible to write for a newspaper and have no involvement with other people. After handing in a few articles, I wondered if it was really worth the effort.

That depends on the structure of the paper too. If it's a really professionally-run paper, you can see yourself becoming slotted into one section or job, and hand in your copy and disappear for a week. I would like to see it more open, where we're friends, and do things together.

I was one of the only women here who regularly contributed to the campus news section and one of the reasons that might be is because the people you interview are hard to talk to. You feel on display as the reporter. I've encountered very sexist men. One interview I had was horrible. I had interviewed before (at another paper) but this person

was really sexist and rude. He was very patronizing. I hate it when people you are interviewing don't listen to you. I had to force every quote out of him. It was awful. It's also hard to deal with the DSU — some of the men are completely obnoxious.

The same sort of things happen at staff meetings. Now I tend to blurt things out more than I did at the first of the year, because then I thought I didn't know anything.

Is there any way men can write about us, write good stories about women?

I don't know. They seem to spit out the word feminist like it tastes bad.

What does it mean when a man says he's a feminist?

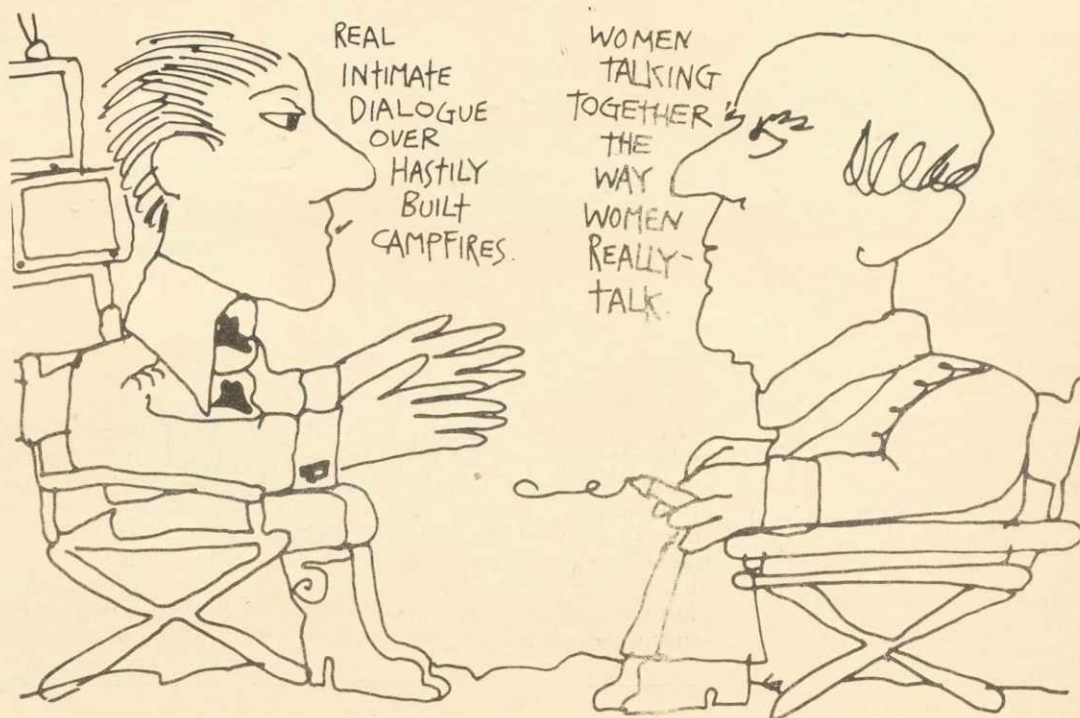
There aren't any. Some men say they are feminists. That's fine, because some are. But when they say they're feminist and start complaining about a woman's feminist perspective, it really bugs me. That makes me wonder about their feminist perspective. And they do that all the time.

When I first joined the paper, it was through the peace group on campus. We wanted someone to do a story for the paper about the group and its activities, and the men on the staff got me to write it, because they didn't have enough time. I joined then, for different reasons than just wanting to be a writer. The paper then was all men. We had arguments about pornography in the office. Sexist jokes. Atmosphere stuff that I resented. And I got pinpointed immediately as someone who didn't like that sort of humour. So the men would start up when I came in, making all sorts of comments to make me feel uncomfortable. The whole thing blew up over the word 'cunt', because I told them I didn't like the way they used it. So they used it more when I was around.

It seems like feminism is a joke to men. At first everyone says there is no sexism, and then the women start recognizing it. Even if there's a lot of women on the paper, there's no guarantee that it won't be sexist.

Some experiences can really make you avoid talking about sexism. Sometime's it's easier not to say anything, so you won't become the end of the jokes. Anything else you say is worthless, because they've already labelled you.

I think the environment here is a lot better than other places where women work. One of my



roommates goes to TUNS, and people pick up on everything she does. Every minute of the day she's fighting sexism. I don't expect any rude comments or sexist comments here when I come in. In fact, I expect them not to.

What's funny for me is that while I consider myself a student journalist, if it weren't for my friends, I wouldn't be working here. It's not as if my friends make all the difference, but they must count for a lot. It's just not my forum. I'm not even that comfortable here, because I do find a lot of sexism at the *Gazette*. I get so frustrated when I hear my closest male friends saying sexist things. I can say that something they are doing is sexist over and over again, because I'm giving a second chance to my friends, but they don't change.

I think that women on student papers do a lot of the practical work. They write the stories, they typeset them, they lay the out and they proofread them. The men on the staff are appreciated more for their 'ideas', but the women do the hard work. We are not the idea givers, or the planners. Just take this paper for example. We're not getting much support from a lot of the men. It's almost like they're taking a vacation for this issue. If it were a regular paper, they'd be here.

Yes, they'd be writing editorials, talking at staff meetings...

There's a lot of resentment over this issue. Some men here think they've been unjustly accused of sexism. They always say to us, well, why don't you say what you mean. It's hard to do that when you are always being shot down.

And it's more than just a lack of communication. It's like when you say something, well, they might not listen, but if a man says the same thing, they are taken seriously.

Part of it is having a male editor. People look at the editor, and group around the editor, because he is supposed to have all the knowledge.

Sometimes you have to step back and say, just because the editor says that, just because he is

male, and just because everyone around me is nodding their head, it doesn't mean it is right.

I've seen a lot of "kitchen conversations", and I see the men change the conversation after the woman leaves. It's o.k. to kid around, but when she's going, then they get into "real" conversations, about world events, about something we don't know anything about.

How can we change this? Do we just distance ourselves, and save our energy?

I don't think we should.

But sometimes that's all you can do. When we were talking to a

man in the Grawood 1 night during International Women's Week, he said, so what is all this about oppression. And the woman I was with sat there, for twenty minutes, very politely,

explaining. But he wasn't listening. He had already made up his mind that everything was fine. So at those times it's better to conserve your own energy. It's just not worth it.

Then how are we going to get men to change their minds, if we don't talk to them about it?

They have to change their own minds. It's their responsibility, and they have to realize that.

GAZETTE WOMEN'S issue

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Commentary should not exceed 700 words, letters should not exceed 300 words. No unsigned material will be accepted; but anonymity may be granted on request.

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