

Hostility draws line between genders

by Zhanna Vesterman

A lot of analysis and talk occupies a generous spot in the media these days. A huge chunk of it is hostility, which I can prove to be very dangerous. As



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a feminist, I feel the need to contest some of the negative attitudes rising on the issue of "male" — "female" roles.

First, I want to address this absurd business of protesting men wearing white ribbons in showing their compassion for the 14 women killed in Montreal. No one needs to study history or psychology of women to know that shooting people is wrong, to know that the families of those women have suffered, to imagine the fear that went through the minds of the people there — in other words, to feel compassion.

Who is to say that this compassion is not sincere? One young man who was in the room with the women massacred committed suicide shortly afterwards, because he couldn't bear the feelings of guilt and helplessness.

It is wrong to criticize every gesture that men make, to give them a set of rules by which to play, to restrain them. Women who are waging a war against men are going to create an

undesirable cleft between the two sexes. Let us not isolate the male population because of the misfortunes that occur as a result of our physical differences. Let us not provoke any unnecessary anger or resentment towards us. Let's not have them say, "I can't do anything right by them," and then have them ignore us when our claims are legitimate.

I wish there was no rape and murder of women, just as I wish there were no bombing of planes, abuse of children, and famine. Let's condemn attitudes, not people.

Too much time is wasted making wars and sticking labels. In the passion of taking sides, we will wipe out freedom of speech, freedom of relationships, and whatever form of trust there is left in our society.

The truth is, it is impossible to have

a positive relationship with an enemy. Who knows how things should really be? Who knows, even, if women do occupy only a secondary role in Canada? It seems to me that we have tons of options and opportunities. It also seems to me that there must be some reason why more men than women commit suicides.

Mutual education is a good way to

keep on modifying and improving things. Still, let's allow for a little mystery, a little difference, and a little trust. Let us simply not force anything on anyone, let us punish criminals, and try to prevent further harm.

Zhanna Vesterman is a fourth year Political Science student.

Let down by punchless Steinem

by Carrie Brodi and Sharon Achtman

While most of Toronto sat anxiously awaiting a world series victory, a minute group of Torontonians sat together in Convocation Hall with more pressing issues on their minds than baseball. As Gloria Steinem jokingly remarked in her introduction, "I see that there are quite a few people here who are not members of the 'jockocracy'."

She was here in Toronto for a benefit in honor of Interim Place of Mississauga, a temporary women's shelter for spousal abuse. The proceeds of the evening were generously donated for the shelter's betterment, which can justify the lofty twenty dollar admission fee.

The lecture was extremely relevant, yet one couldn't help feeling a certain ambiguity over what was said, and what was actually being felt.

The operative emotion after listening to a forum on violence against women should be rage, and that rage should be transformed into a fight for change. Because of the lack of energy in the room, the much-needed passionate anger was absent.

There was an obvious absence of women of colour and younger feminists in the audience. It wasn't surprising that Steinem attracted the leather-pant-wearing, finely coiffed, "distinguished", older women of white feminism.

Steinem has remained a constant mainstream pop-icon for women's

rights, and was referred to as the 'Glamour Girl' of feminism by Susan Faludi in Backlash.

But she lacked life, and her speech was redundant at times, and not too revolutionary. The concept of the inner child is slightly rehashed, but still an important issue. However, it is stagnant when addressed to an audience that is there mainly for nostalgic purposes.

It seemed that many of the women attending the lecture were there primarily to reminisce and reconnect with a role model that spawned on a generation geared for change. However the Feminine Mystique, 'Fuck-off-and-do-your-own-laundry' school of thought appeared to have lost its radical cutting edge. Of course, the work and warfare these women struggled through should not be negated. Steinem was the founding architect of the second wave of feminist activism.

The focus of Steinem's lecture was the profound connection between global violence and domestic violence. "What happens to men is called politics, what happens to women and children is called culture. Really, it's all the same," said Steinem during her talk.

Through a disturbing analysis of both George Bush and Saddam Hussein's abused childhoods, it is evident that the transition between boyhood and manhood for both men had tremendous political implications. Steinem asserts that all learned dysfunction of childhood, unless

properly understood and exorcised, will follow one into adulthood and manifest itself out in negative ways. In the case of world leaders this is a most dangerous combination.

The most important point of lecture was probably the idea that violence against women and children is extremely political. Through feminist politics like Steinem's, we are just starting to realize the astounding consequences of child abuse and domestic violence.

She also talked about the necessity of including men in the process of social change. The point has often hindered feminist activism in the past. "The big change of twenty years ago, was understanding that women can do what men can do. The change in twenty years is understanding that men can do what women can do."

You go to a lecture for two reasons — to be educated and to be inspired. We were slightly educated, but not inspired at all. Instead, we were discouraged. How could we have been inspired, when people were rudely leaving in droves during the question and answer period, the most exciting part of the lecture. This is especially very unusual for a feminist lecture, which usually consist of energetic and heated debate. This one left us feeling lukewarm.

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• graphic by Sadaf Siddiqui

White ribbon campaign abused

by Jeff Clayton

Is the White Ribbon Campaign an act of solidarity with the Women's Movement's December memorial and campaign against male violence — or is it a smartly dressed Bullshit Baby from one of Uncle Remus' tales?

I wore a ribbon last year. A friend told me about the idea, and gave me a cloth to tie around my coat sleeve. It seemed like a good idea at the time.

But things went wrong with the campaign, and in the end, it seemed to have been more harmful than positive.

I was offended when the politicians wore white ribbons for television, but figuring that they were bound to use any idea wrongly if it made them look good, I let that slip by without too much worry.

The main problem was a point of anger and real disgust for me, and much louder and clearer. The media coverage that I saw during the week of talks, walks, and gatherings focussed almost entirely on the males that attended. The idea of the "white ribbon" was a hot angle to concentrate on. It allowed news programs to downplay the profound grief and anger of the week into a problem whose solving was apparently well underway — and what a fine bunch of gentlemen were doing it!

Organizers of the white ribbon campaign recieved the ma-

jority of interview time. Visuals of walkers at a candlelight vigil were "high lighted" by a little white ribbon at the corner of the screen.

For a campaign that was supposed to be, as I heard it, complementary and supportive, it was certainly tainted by the end, and the hypocrisy of the PM and the MP's was now apparent on many other levels.

I give the organizers some benefit of the doubt — I find it hard to believe that they meant to foul things up that much. But if this group wants to be involved this year, they need this message: Shut Up! This is not your time, and this week is not about you. Organizers and members of the white ribbon campaign need to resist the temptation to get their backs rubbed with hero medicine.

The media need to be told to talk to the organizers and supporters of the main events. Their urge to focus on the men present needs to be quietly and forcefully resisted.

I do believe that men speaking out against male violence towards women is a very positive step, and important. But these men need to be less clumsy, and they need to understand how capable they are of detracting from something important. And no whining — deal with it, quietly. Or stay home.

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