

SPECTRUM

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Maybe if all the guys stood up

I have followed with interest the exchange of blows in the Brunswickan recently over feminism. The ongoing debate fascinates me, and, by times, enrages me. The recent pieces by Brian MacDonald ("Stand-Up , guys" February 14) and last week's new Column "The Min's room" particularly grabbed my attention.

Partly this was because I feel a certain amount of sympathy with people who feel excluded and oppressed - the basic theme of both articles. Accompanying that feeling came a certain eye-blinking amazement. After all, who is really oppressed in this society? And who can really not understand the frustration and rage women feel when they start to confront the reality they face?

Both of these articles were in response to the "Wimmin's Room" column, and both of them had few kind words to say about the column, the people who wrote it, and feminism in general. Mr. MacDonald found that the column is "discriminatory", "offensive" and that "many of the more vocal women are bigots". The "Min's Room" debut wasn't quite so strong, but it too sees the "wimmin's" column as degrading to men.

The interesting thing about both pieces, and it is a point that should not pass unnoticed, is that though none of the articles denied the systematic discrimination against women or the daily violence and threat of violence that all women face, both the articles complained about the ways "radical feminists" approach the issues. Mr. MacDonald even went so far as to urge that men "stop sitting back and taking the abuse". In other words, there might be a problem here, but we don't like the way you feminists are addressing it.

Well, Mr. MacDonald, maybe all men aren't rapists, but could you please point out the ones that are so that I can be mad at them? After all, the women who write the wimmin's room, like all of us, face odds of about 1 in 4 of being raped by a man at some point in our lives. Probably some of them have even been raped, or been the victims of incestual abuse. Certainly the less "serious" but clearly more pervasive symptoms of sexism have affected these women's lives. Who can't understand their fear and distrust of men?

And is it so unfair for women to direct anger against men? After all, the system as it exists now certainly benefits men. And, there are very few men who have done anything to try and change that system. Part of this is undoubtedly

lethargy, but just how much is the selfish and self-interested turning of a blind eye?

I wonder if Mr. MacDonald can even imagine what it is like to be afraid to walk home at night. To always be afraid. To always have to be aware that if you study late, you're going to have to arrange for a walk/drive home. Does he know what it's like to have daughters and to wonder if someone is going to molest them? What it is like to look at every male friend and think, is it safe to be alone with him? Will he rape me if I kiss him? Can I trust him with my child?

Or, how about the general abuse women encounter just about every day of their lives - the stupid jokes, sexist remarks, comments in the classroom, - all of it. My guess is Mr. MacDonald would be pretty upset if he were a woman, judging by how thin his skin seems to be. My guess is his version of the "wimmin's room" would be a sight more vituperative than it is now.

I'm sorry our world is so screwed up, and I don't imagine for one minute that sexism doesn't hurt men. All I know is that it doesn't hurt them in the same ways, or nearly as much, as it hurts women.

As for Mr. MacDonald's call for men to "be heard", bravo!! I've been thinking the same thing for a long time. Just where are all the men complaining about violence against women on this campus? And where are all the men who are concerned when professors make derogatory remarks to female students? And where are they when their "peers" are running down women, or chiding them for not having a sense of humour when it comes to topics like pornography, sexual harassment or rape? Where

are they when professors joke about wife battering, or when other male students decry "feminist bitches"; and where are they when their fellow male students leer or make unwanted, inappropriate or threatening comments to their female peers?

In all the concern for innocent men whose reputations may be damaged by false allegations of sexual harassment or rape, where is the concern for the hundreds of thousands of annual rape victims? Amidst all the jokes of wife batterers, where is the recognition that everyday women are maimed and killed by their lovers?

I don't know what the solution to sexism is, but I am pretty tired of being told that talking about the problem is going to lead to a backlash. Talking about the issue, it seems to me, is only a problem because so many men don't want to admit it exists.

It does exist, and if it were only a small minority of men who were perpetrating it, it wouldn't be such a prevalent problem. All men aren't guilty, nor are they guilty in the same degrees. A buffoon is not a rapist. But one in twelve men admits to acts that legally constitute rape.

The indignance of men to the wimmin's column reveals a meanness and insecurity that is a little off-putting to say the least. The flack women get when they speak out about how they feel is destructive; it scares them, embarrasses them, (after all we were all taught that it is unfeminine to make waves) and it silences them.

The men who wrote don't like the "wimmin's room" approach, but they suggest no real alternative. Politely pointing out sexism

The Wimmin's Room

by
Ann Gushurst

doesn't work (all too often you are apt to get the look that says, 'come on honey, what is your problem?'). Saying nothing doesn't work at all.

Part of the problem facing women is that it is so easy to ignore sexism: when you do, you can pretend it's not going to hurt you, and when you don't, you are likely to get hurt. Is it really all that hard to understand why women need a space for themselves to address their problems? Excluding men from meetings and being mad at men might just be thing women have to do to regroup themselves.

Women should not be made to walk a tight rope between not offending men and trying to change things for themselves and other women. They should not be sorry that talking about the reality that they face because that makes a lot of men uncomfortable. Men should feel uncomfortable.

By all means, Mr. MacDonald, stand up and be heard. I would be willing to bet a great deal could be accomplished by a handful of angry men. And hats off to all the men who stood up and were heard: the ones who have marched for women's rights, the professors who wear ribbons to commemorate the Montreal Massacre, who consciously use gender-neutral language, and who are trying to change the system. Thanks also go to my fellow students who stand up against other male students when

they're being sexist. And to all of you men out there who have done this, you cannot know how significant and touching is the hope you give your women friends each time you do.

These men are perhaps the most profound part of the solution, and what is most disheartening is that they are so few in number and so reluctant to get involved.

Oppression, rape, violence, and discrimination, are the silent but concrete realities that women live with. In general, men are reluctant to even admit that this is the situation as it exists now. They have ignored the fight for women's liberation and they have denigrated those that participated in it. At worst they have actively created these realities. Clearly, they have, passively or not, benefitted from it.

Has it ever occurred to Chad and Andrew and Brian that perhaps the biggest reason women have drawn the line between the genders is for these reasons? If there is a line between the genders, just who, exactly, drew it?

Maybe it's about time that the blinkers were taken off. Maybe women need to know that there are men out there who don't like the situation any better than we do. Maybe if all the guys "stood up" they would not only understand the rage of the "wimmin's room", they would do something to try and heal it.

Mexican Free Trade

The Centre notes for the Spring of 1991, a publication which comes out of the Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice, reported on the detrimental effects any deal will have on Canadian and Mexican workers: "The thing is that the majority of Canadians are opposed to a free trade deal with the U.S. and Mexico. After all, Mexico has never been a big trading partner with Canada. And we both tend to export the same kind of things to the U.S., so this head-long rush to the bargaining tables doesn't seem to make a lot of sense." reported Joe Gunn, co-ordinator of the Central America team for the Jesuit Centre, which travelled to Mexico in October of 1990.

"The move by Mexico to get a

free trade deal is part of the strategy to restructure the Mexican economy. Basically, the Mexican government wants to throw the country open to market forces. Mexico has embarked on an economic restructuring program of privatization and deregulation. The standard of living has fallen by 50%" reported Gunn. Also important in the whole context are the 'maquiladoras'. "Maquillas are factories, usually doing assembly work from imported components that are exported when finally assembled. They operate within a deregulated free trade zone on the Mexico - U.S. border and they flourish because they offer the cheapest wage rate in the world. - 60 cents an hour. And they also

The Global Eye by David Gorham

offer horrible working conditions to workers. Unions and human rights are repressed. Mexico is hoping that a free trade deal will open the borders, deregulate the economy and encourage the growth of the 'maquiladoras' by attracting foreign investment."

John Dillon, writing in the Fall 1991 issue of *Global Village Voice*, pointed to three impediments to a better living standard for poor Mexicans under the proposed North American Free Trade Agreement:

"1. Debt ; 2. Demographic Growth ; 3. Rural Depopulation". "Since 1982" said Dillon, more than half of Mexico's trade earnings have been handed over to foreign banks to cover interest payments on its foreign debt. Mexico has turned itself inside out in an effort to increase export earnings. The structural adjustment program (SAP) imposed by its foreign creditors has involved devaluation of the peso, unilateral lowering of import barriers, severe wage
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