

SPECTRUM

MEANOIA

Public versus private life: A case for de-gendering

by John Valk

In a recent article, Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at Calvin College (Michigan), asks: "Should Private Morality Go Public?" She argues that throughout history certain people, notably women, have been identified largely with the *private* sphere—activities encompassing family and sexual life. Men, on the other hand, have been identified almost exclusively with the *public* sphere—the marketplace, academy and political forum.

This public/private split, part of the liberal, post-Enlightenment tradition, now bears the brunt of the contemporary feminist critique. That critique, she states, emerges from a variety of academic disciplines, and it is one with which she expresses a positive though qualified sympathy.

Liberal feminists, she states, felt that women's subordination was simply the result of laws and customs blocking their entry into the public sphere. The proposed solution is to recognize women as men's social and intellectual equals and give them the same civil rights and educational opportunities. However, family and sexual life still remains private, and free from bureaucratic regulation. Here, she argues, the basic public/private distinction is not changed in any qualitative way.

Radical feminists, on the other hand, rejected this classical liberal division. They argued that it simply reinforced the oppression of women. Patriarchy, which begins in the home, fans out into public spheres. In turn, it reinforces men's control over women's bodies through a variety of socio-cultural institutions, as diverse as prostitution, rape, foot-binding, clitoridectomy and reproductive technology. Only when gender relations in more private domains are overhauled will any public/private changes be of lasting benefit.

The Socialist Feminist critique focuses on the "gendered division of labour." To the extent that society regards men as the permanent paid labour force, they do the stimulating work and receive higher pay. Women, on the other hand, are still largely bound by the private sphere. They are treated as a reserve labour pool, do drudge work and receive lower pay. While the private does become somewhat public, both are permeated by economics. Capitalism and patriarchy re-enforce one another.

The Psychoanalytic Feminist critique focuses on how patriarchal attitudes are reproduced psychologically from generation to generation. Because parenting has become almost synonymous with mothering, a "reproduction of mothering" is nurtured in women. As a result, they form relational bonds more easily and slip unreflectively into mothering roles. A "reproduction of misogyny", on the other hand, is nurtured in men. Having no regular access to same-sex identity (absent fathers), they develop a less secure gender identity, which in turn breeds defensive and usually unconscious hostility towards things womanly. In this way men continue to reproduce the very conditions—a gendered division of labour along public/private lines—that contribute to their own misogyny.

The Ethical and Epistemological critique focuses on that traditional stereotyping which produces phrases such as "man of reason" and "woman of emotion". It questions not women's ability to attain accepted male standards of rationality, but rather the limits of these standards, and argues for the strengths of previously denigrated and privatized "women's ways of knowing". The aim is qualitative change in public life so that it is "as much shaped by women's cognitive, moral and social styles as it has been by dominant male styles." It aims also to make men more fit for nurturing

children, both for psychological, ethical and practical reasons.

From all these critiques it is clear that sexist ideology exists, and where. Reforms are needed, many insist, not only to achieve gender justice, but also for global expediency: "the preservation of the planet may well depend on [women], given the tendency of male epistemology to create war-mongering and environmental pollution.

According to Stewart Van Leeuwen, however, what is absent from much of the feminist critique of the public/private dichotomy is a meaningful discussion on the role of religion or spirituality. Liberal feminists relegate religion to the private realm. Social feminists dismiss religion as irrelevant. Radical feminists regard religion as one more manifestation of patriarchy in men and false consciousness in women. Those who do incorporate religion frequently advocate a women-centered spirituality which easily slides into a feminist triumphalism.

These positions are not adequate, argues Stewart Van Leeuwen. For that reason some Catholic, Protestant and Jewish feminists have re-examined the public/private split from a renewed theological, anthropological and ethical framework.

Male dominated theologizing has stressed self-sacrificial love (*agape*) as the pinnacle of Christian virtue and associated it largely with the private realm. This effectively turned women into *agape* specialists and released men, in their public life, from its demands. Christian self-sacrifice frequently translated into the sacrifice of women for the sake of men, and often the home became a dangerous place for women and children. Not infrequently violent and sexual abusive behaviour towards women was excused. Victims were told that as Christians they were "to bear it, or at best to forgive and forget."

Feminist critics argued that mutuality rather than self-sacrifice was required. This mutuality rather than self-sacrifice was required. This mutuality demanded a re-integration of private and public life. It involves envisioning new patterns, such as alternative career paths for men as well as women, flextime and/or reintegration of workplace and home, etc.

These feminists, careful to avoid triumphalism, make mutuality and public/private disintegration their goal. Self-sacrifice will receive priority only due to the fact that we live in a world distorted by evil and limited by its finiteness. However, self-sacrifice will be most appropriate for those with more, not less power. In the case of conflicts of interest, basic human needs must be met first, with those in greater need having claim over others. Furthermore, no group has the exclusive right to decide the essential needs of others. Occasions of sacrifice are to be balanced over all groups in the longrun. However, sacrifice should be considered largely as disruptions of God's intended creational *shalom*.

What can be gleaned from all this? Perhaps four things, according to Stewart Van Leeuwen. First, the goodness of all creation, including bodily creation, is to be emphasized. Second, human distortion—sin if you like—is all-pervasive. Third, mature liberation movements are able to acknowledge their imperfections, and realize that further progress demands honest realism. Fourth, individuals and groups ought to listen, sincerely and undefensively, for prophetic biblical truths in feminist theories, as well as the residual sexism in their own, with a view to bringing both fully under God.

Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen will be speaking on campus Wednesday March 24 at 12:30 pm in the Student Union Building, Room 103. All are welcome and admission is free.

THE WIMMIN'S ROOM

Daycare on campus

OPINION/ Kilfoil is upset with a student council that only represents a select group of students.

by Valerie Kilfoil

For any of you who have been following the speeches in the upcoming student election, you will know that the issue of daycare has become a major one. There have been two very vocal battles between myself and presidential candidate Jamie Van Raalte during two public forums. There have also been some very stupid and very ill-informed comments from some of the other candidates on the issue.

I have been on the UNB Daycare Committee for nearly a year. What I can tell you is that nearly three years ago the Maritime Higher Education Committee allotted \$225,000 to UNB to establish a daycare. For nearly a year, the committee has worked hard at putting together a feasible and realistic plan for the opening of a daycare in the fall of 1993. We have our core funding, we have a daycare design and a scale model built, we have a site picked. We have answers to any questions students or the administration might have.

However, what we do not have is a commitment from the UNB student union. Despite the fact that they have been kept up to date on everything the Daycare Committee has done, the majority of student union representatives have refused to give their support either financially or morally. Yet, at the same time, they claim they represent students.

Well, personally, I feel that is a load of crap. The attitude on council is that because not one of them has children, or not one of them is a mature student, then daycare is not important to students at UNB. They ignore the fact that 35 percent of students on this campus are mature (over the age of 21). They ignore the fact that the bulk of mature students do or will have daycare needs. They ignore the fact that the numbers of mature students on this campus have continued to increase at a fast and steady rate.

Personally, I don't give a shit about any of the bands the students union has brought in. I don't give a damn about winter carnival. I am not the least bit interested in Alcohol Awareness and learning to drink responsibly because I did that years ago.

However, I do realize that these events, and others like them, are very important to a lot of students. And that is why I don't mind that some of my student activity fee is put toward these events. But I also think it is time for the student union to realize that there are whole groups of students out there who have other issues that are very important to them. And I think it's time the student union truly represent all the students that elect them. That means representing single mothers, single fathers, couples who have children, international students, students with

limited financial resources and minority and disadvantaged groups I'm fed up with a council that only represents a select group of students that happen to share their particular perspective.

It pissed me off when candidates like business representative candidate Jennifer Lawson says that she doesn't have kids so therefore daycare is not important to her. I find it insulting as a mature student that not one of the candidates for business representative even knew what a "mature student" was. Jennifer spent a lot of time saying how well she felt she could represent the business faculty yet at the same time she stated that mature students hardly exist in the business faculty. Well, news flash, Jennifer. Business has one of the highest enrollments of mature students.

Then there was Jamie Van Raalte whining about how much a daycare will cost and that it will only serve 60 kids. Well, first of all, the Daycare Committee has asked for \$50,000 from the Student Union to furnish the daycare of build a bigger and better model that our \$225,000 will allow. That works out to about \$2.50 a student. I don't think too many students on this campus will be too upset about chipping in \$2.50 toward a daycare that will be here for decades to come and will serve thousands of children over the years.

Students on this campus have proven over and over again through their overwhelming response to the Christmas Match Program, to Bridges Polar Dip, Lady Dunn's Dance-A-Thon, Jones House Mud Dive and many other fund raises efforts, that they care about social issues. And a feasibility study has already "officially" proved that students want and need a daycare.

And I resent comments like "There haven't been any students coming into the student union asking for a daycare." Well, how many students walked in and personally asked for a winter carnival, or a specific band or a SUB expansion. A student union that is in touch with the students it claims to represent would look at the studies that have already been done, the numbers of students who would need a daycare, the social consciousness of the students as a whole and it wouldn't ignore the fact that there is already \$225,000 in funding secured and a plan of action all ready to go!

Second, the Student Union has a surplus of \$30,000! Can you imagine! Clubs and societies have had their budgets either cut or frozen. Student groups with proven financial records have been denied short term loans to fund special events. We have the chance to have a

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