

THE NOT SO MYSTERIOUS WAYS OF MYSTIFICATION

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According to my reading of *Men in Feminism*, in the Modern Language Association, male interest in feminist issues is already considerable: MLA men lecture and write in the feminist mode; want to be acknowledged for doing so; and ask that discussions of male responsibilities and roles be placed on the feminist agendas. The task of defining roles for sympathetic males in what is otherwise understood to be a woman's "do-it-yourself" movement may be a real problem for our MLA sisters. But back in the NAEA, we have a different set of problems and, I would submit, a unique opportunity for men to join with women - not as "helpers," "honorary feminists" or "sympathizers" - but as co-equals working together to liberate ourselves from the mystifications of membership in this low status, feminine-identified field we call art education.

The first step in any genuine movement toward the liberation of self and others from the oppressions deriving from group membership is a heightened awareness, a "click," or what is known as a raised consciousness. In this sense, consciousness raising can only take place among individuals who are in fact members of the group in question. As art educators, regardless of our sex, we would seem to meet this minimum requirement. If to work in a low-status, feminine-identified field is to share, on some level, the oppression experienced by women in our society, it also makes us vulnerable to the mystifications that tend to plague members of any stereotyped, low status, or oppressed group. (What is mystification? A mystification is an interpretation of a problem which does not really get to the source of that problem and which, if acted upon, will probably intensify, but in any case certainly not solve that problem.) Drawing for the purposes of analogy on my own pre-feminist experience, I find many signs of mystification in myself as well as in the expressed thoughts and behaviors of other art educators, both male and female. And why not? We know that individuals belonging to low status groups tend to internalize this status and suffer from a lack of self-esteem. If women tend to feel inferior to men, why shouldn't art educators tend to feel inferior to artists (and maybe soon, if DBAE is successful), inferior to art historians, art critics, and aestheticians as well?. But feelings of inferiority hurt. We seek relief from them. We devise clever methods of escape which avoid, because this, too, will be painful, the raising of consciousness with regard to our shared situation as members of a low status, feminine-identified profession. In the spirit of consciousness raising, then, I will quickly suggest a few of the mystified and mystifying escape games some of us have played as women and some of us, both male and female, now seem, to be playing as art educators.

Reactive Stupidity

Women know how to play dumb, taking advantage of, rather than challenging a stereotype that is used to justify our oppression. As a ploy, it can get us out of a lot of work and can be used as a cover for subversive activity aimed at undermining authority. If women are supposed to be dumb at math, then YOU can balance the checkbook; if we aren't mechanical, then YOU can fix that flat tire. JUST SO, if art educators, male or female, are flaky, then we can close the classroom door and do our flaky thing. The stereotype anticipates our inability to master bureaucracy and we will be understood, if not entirely forgiven, for our late or inadequate lesson plans, our failure to evaluate student progress, our forgetfulness with regard to filling out these tedious forms.

The Double-Bind

We feel damned if we do, and damned if we don't. Women who play the feminine role to perfection, are viewed as poor candidates for public leadership positions. Exhibiting behaviors that would qualify us for such positions, we find ourselves pitied or suspected for being unfeminine, unnatural. JUST SO, art educators, male or female, who devote themselves to being good art teachers often find they are held in contempt as failed artists. When we set up our easels in the classroom and go to work in earnest on our painting, we are criticized for neglecting our students.

Super-Woman

To avoid the frustrations of the double-bind, the super-woman takes on both the feminine and masculine roles, striving for perfection in both. Thus, I might hold down a demanding job, then come home and wash, cook, clean, and nurture as if I were a full time homemaker. JUST SO, we super-art-educators, male and female, try to perform at high levels of excellence, not only as teachers, but as artists, as researchers and maybe even homemakers as well. Having risked our health and sanity as super-art-educators, we can, in good conscience, begin to regard ourselves as(yes).

Exception to the Rule

Women who feel like exceptions to the feminine stereotype, often claim they don't like women and find men's companionship more stimulating. We exceptions learn to listen to mother-in-law jokes without feeling insulted. Through heroic efforts we feel we have broken the stereotype (at least for ourselves) and would like to put as much distance as possible between ourselves and women who reinforce that stereotype. JUST SO, those art educators, male or female, who aspire to exceptionality in art education, must learn to listen to sneering remarks about our field without flinching. We must learn how to be "present-company-expected." A few years ago at an NAEA conference, an art education graduate student told me her thesis director and would-be mentor advised her that AE was a

rinky-dink field and that if she wanted to be a big frog in this small puddle, she need only publish and present at conferences in more prestigious fields. Last week, a friend of mine in art studio confided that she was puzzled to find the work of a printmaker from a big name art school so tight, so unimaginative, so 20-years-behind-the-times. She said, she discovered why when she talked with him over lunch. In the past, he had earned an EdD in Art Education from XYZ State. To her, this artist, even still, was just an art educator.

Blaming the Victim

If women get raped, it is their fault for being in those places, at those times, wearing those outfits, etc. JUST SO, male and female art educators who are exceptions to the rule, will claim that only incompetent art educators who are exceptions to the rule, suffer from problems related to low status. "My principal knows I do a good job and I get all the money that I need for supplies. What's the matter with you?" Blaming the victim in art education can be one way of expressing our exceptionality. Because I am an exception to the rule, I can, with impunity, make fun of mickey mouse art education courses; holiday based art projects; the art of the art teacher; (you name it). If once in a while I meet someone who hasn't heard about my exceptionality and I get treated as if I were just another art educator, than I will know who to blame. Not you, not me, but all those art educators who fit the stereotype. But still, life in art education can sometimes seem bleak even for us exceptions. Occasionally we may indulge in a day dream or two.

The Cinderella Fantasy

Mystified women dream of being rescued from their degraded and powerless positions and rewarded for their passive beauty and goodness. They don't dream of being rescued by other women but by a powerful member of the dominant class. Other females will either support us in this fantasy or be regarded as potential competitor; after all, there aren't enough Prince Charmings to go around. Like it or not, some of these other women will have to be wicked step mothers, ugly stepsisters, or fairy god mothers. JUST SO, the Cinderella fantasies of art educators, both male and female, have been recently stimulated by the Getty courtship. Will we be saved from who and what we are? Are some of us, even now, being cast as the impotent father, the wicked step mother, the ugly sister? Are some of us standing in line to be glass-slipper-fitters? Are others of us busy as fairy god mothers preparing to transform art education, to make it attractive and worthy of the great rescue? Is someone watching the clock? (I don't think we could take seeing another band-wagon turn out to be just the old, familiar pumpkin ...)

These are the ways of mystification. For art educators as art educators (male or female) the only known antidote is a raised consciousness of our shared group membership - and all this has meant and might yet come to mean.

ON THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF MEN IN FEMINISM: TAKING A HESITANT STEP THROUGH THE MINEFIELD OF PHEMINISM IN ART AND EDUCATION*

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[T]he real point at which change must come, exactly ourselves, the end of "masculinity" -which, of course, is the end of "woman" too (Heath, 1987:5).

Barthes one day in conversation: "you study what you desire or what you fear" (Heath, 1987: 6)

The relationship of men *in* pheminism¹ is an *impossible* one. On the one hand, the "proposition" of the preposition is intrusive; it signifies break and enter with all the multiple meanings that this entails, from virginal to criminal *reproachment*. On the other hand, the "preposition" of the proposition is an illusionary one, both in its flirtatious invitation to men and in its very non-existence of being, for there is no *inside* nor *outside*. Men are "implicated" in this relationship by virtue of both their difference and indifference which lie on either side of the "membrane" that separates the sexes. In other words, men have already committed the crime but are unaware of it. In the former sense, the crime of *in* difference, offers the contradictory discourses of woman as 'essence' as opposed to woman as a social cultural construction. Hence the Lacanian² question arises: "Does The Woman exist?" In the latter case, with the crime of *indifference*, the matter is facilely resolved as: the Woman does *not* exist! She is absent, the male's Other who lacks the Phallus.

If these are the politics of location, or should I say dislocation, as a mail/male, how am I to be delivered? First *in* in difference. Let me begin by quoting a recent analysis of feminist aesthetics by Rita Felski (1989), who, in my opinion, has danced through the minefield brilliantly. She writes:

It was argued earlier that no convincing case has yet been made for a gendered aesthetics, for the assertion that men and women write in distinctively different ways or that certain styles or structures in literature and art can be classified as inherently masculine or feminine (p.156).

This is particularly annoying for a feminist politics unless a strategy can be found: 'to be' or 'not to be' a woman, that is the question! and for this question to be answered depends on the contextual signification which is site/sight/cite specific. Let me explain.