

Greenwood made me feel guilt but also made me see the cause of it all — all the stupid myths that I had believed and the crippling effect that they had in my relationships with women. The insensitive, superior attitude that was mine so closely paralleled those that brought about the destruction of Esther Greenwood and, more importantly, of Sylvia Plath. And the woman destroyed — this Sylvia Plath — was the very writer who had opened up a whole new perspective on life.

Gradually I began to see that women were equal partners, and this gave me a new freedom I had never been aware of. I no longer had to keep up stereotyped roles and attitudes that I had been conditioned to accept (although some die hard). Life becomes easier when I can say 'I don't know' and then ask for help. Naturally, the years of conditioning still have an effect, but I hope it is diminishing. Perhaps one day in the future, with the help of women like Sylvia Plath and Margaret Atwood — and women I meet — I will be able to reverse the conditioning almost completely.

Sylvia Plath committed suicide, but it is more accurate to say that she was killed by the male ego. Her work symbolizes the dignity and intelligence of a woman, trapped within the confines of a role that was projected upon her by an inflexible

society, whose writing can influence and change others in a positive and healing way.

How many Sylvia Plaths will it take to bring the realization that women have been denied their basic freedoms and have long been involved in a one-sided war where traditionally the opposition had all the weapons? Isn't it about time all of us tackled the problem of the sex-role game, because aren't we all losers if we don't?

Through reading books written by this new breed of women writers, I am gradually realizing what a bill of goods I was sold — and bought. I see now that both men and women are caring, patient, kind and loving, and that both men and women have egos and are ambitious, competitive, intelligent, strong, and very often scared.

If only somewhere back in kindergarten someone had opened my eyes to this — or maybe even before, at home — or even later in high school. But in every area of my life — in school, at home, on the street — that old game of *roles* was played to the hilt. Sylvia Plath opened *my* eyes but how many of us are lucky enough to stumble on her work — more important, where do I go from here?

Is Anybody out there Listening?

Susan Wright



Photo by Lee Post

Est-ce que vous m'écoutez au moins?

Cet article est écrit par une étudiante. Après avoir participé à la réalisation d'un vidéo sur le sexisme en milieu scolaire, elle s'attendait à ce que ses camarades, ses professeurs, l'administration s'intéressent au sujet. Déception. Désillusion. Elle dénonce ici l'apathie, voire l'hostilité qui l'a entourée ensuite et son abandon de l'école traditionnelle. Le vidéo en question est disponible à. . .

In 'Is Anybody Out There Listening?' five highly articulate senior high school students discuss, with a teacher, some of the many examples of sexism which they find in their school. The colour videotape includes discussion and illustration of guidance materials, text books, teacher attitudes and Physical Education budget allocations. This 30 minute tape will be of interest to Ministries of Education, student councils, teachers and teacher training institutions, participants in women's studies courses and concerned parents.

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The experience of writing 'Is Anybody Out There Listening? A Study of Sexism in a Secondary School' was undoubtedly the most profound and important of our high-school years. Not only did we learn about sexism in the secondary school, we gained insights into the education system and the people within it. The things we discovered about administrators, our teachers, and our fellow-students seriously undermined any faith we previously had in the school system.

The title of our report, 'Is Anybody Out There Listening?', was a reflection of the despair we felt as the full impact of



our research initially hit us. Women were considered as inferior creatures in all areas of high-school study. Our textbooks and other learning materials ignored them entirely, or reported inaccurately on individual women's activities; the guidance counsellors' office was filled with brochures portraying men and women in stereotyped roles, and the physical-education funds and space were divided so that women received one-seventh as much money as men students, and less than half as much gym space. As we concluded, 'both male and female students acquire this misconception of women as lesser beings'. We asked, 'How can a young woman develop into the fullness of personhood when she perceives herself as a member of a human subspecies?' We noted as well that male students were 'subsequently compelled to have impossible expectations of masculinity that are costly to self to fulfil.'

We were sure our conclusions were significant and would be greeted with serious concern by educators and students alike. Unfortunately, we were wrong.

We had hoped the reaction of our teachers would be one of concern and interest in correcting the injustices we had exposed. Rather, the majority were threatened by our work and felt our criticisms were directed against them. Many were openly hostile to us, telling us they thought it was 'garbage' and 'a waste of time'. These teachers can at least be commended for their honesty; others merely made personal attacks against us before their students, who were only too delighted to report it all back to us. It can be said that virtually no changes were made to ameliorate the situation at our school. In fact, we even wondered if heels hadn't been dug in further to protect the *status quo*. Were these the educators of the leaders of tomorrow?

Perhaps the most disheartening lesson we learned was about the students. The large majority showed little interest in our work and there were many hostile reactions. The best example of this is seen perhaps in the response of the Girls'

Athletic Association. They refused to fight for equalization of the grossly disproportionate physical-education funding, saying, 'We don't need as much money as the boys,' and they even attacked us as troublemakers: 'Everything was fine until you came along. . . .' This was only proof of what we were slowly coming to understand: the education system was not designed to teach us to think. Instead it was an institutionalized lobotomy, and all but a minority of our fellow students had been successfully lobotomized.

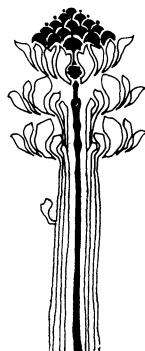
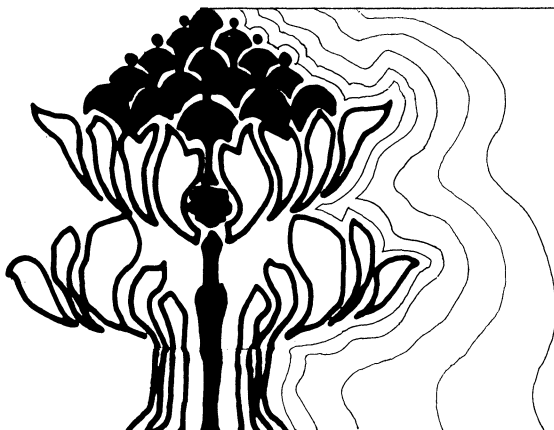
A depressing view? Yes. But it would be unfair to overlook the teachers and students from across the country who encouraged and supported our work. We made contacts with people waging the same struggle in their own schools and we gained much through our conversations with them. However, there simply weren't enough of these people. They couldn't prevent us from losing all the illusions we had about the school system, and we were forced ultimately to draw conclusions about the society that could produce such an institution. The total process so depressed and shocked us that we drew back into ourselves, crawled into our shells. Among those of us who didn't graduate that year, dropping out was a serious consideration. We couldn't bear to remain in a system that failed us so completely. Ultimately, two of our group opted to change schools, rather than remain 'at the scene of the accident'. One who remained arranged an independent study program designed so that she would have as little contact with the school as possible.

When the faith of top students is so completely destroyed, one has to believe there is something seriously the matter with the system. 'IS ANYBODY OUT THERE LISTENING?'

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