d.n. soapbox

ralph by ron wheeler

Couple is exploring new lib

A disappointingly small group of students heard a progress report Wednesday on one couple's exploration of the sexual equality movement.

And in a way, the sentiments of the articulate Feigen Fasteaus echoed the stance of the entire movement.

Quick-witted; chatty Brenda Feigen Fasteau told the audience she is no longer angry; she no longer feels the utter impotence of being in a situation she can't change.

"I don't feel the way I felt in those days," she said of being a Harvard Law School student five years ago, caught in a bastion of male supremacy where women were ridiculed in class and banned from the squash courts.

"As trivial as that may seem, I was angry at the institution. It was important that I vented that rage, that I realized the importance of women showing their anger."

Perhaps she was implying to students that anger lies behind most of us; that dealing with the irrational institutions of a still sexist society is what remains ahead.

Assume then that we are beyond oppression of a sex; that women deserve and will demand an equal status in society. What does that leave for men?

As Marc Feigen Fasteau noted, more men are appearing in his audiences (probably about 30 per cent at the Wednesday speech). Maybe they realize the problem really embraces their roots.

"You may wonder why I'm here," Marc said in opening, speaking slower and a little less strident than his wife, but with a message just as immediate.

"Men pay an enormous price for playing the male stereotype—and not all of it is even related to women," he said.

What does it mean to be a man, a "John Wayne image of a man?"

"Strong."

"Silent."

"And boring."

Leaving a carefully chosen array of socially-acceptable feelings for a man to express—and the resultant frustration of not being all that one can be.

"What is so striking to me, is it makes you ask just what is so important about the ceremony of brandy and cigars?" Marc said of the nether regions of power denied women in past years.

"If you add one woman, the image is gone. Before you could say, "I'm here, and that means I'm a man. If a woman is a member of a group, then men feel it doesn't prove anything."

Men are being shaken to the roots, to the assumptions on which they were raised.

"I'm not saying we should give up being tough, playing football, but just those aren't the only feelings we have, not all the time," Marc concluded.

So where does that leave men and women, at a state university stuck out in the middle of nowhere and yet everywhere?

Marc pointed out that men, too, will "have to go through their anger phase." Perhaps they will and realize their full potential. Some already have.

Brenda exemplified women who have moved on, who have attacked oppression and who have made peace with society. Making waves and yet secure enough to enjoy a partnership with someone else and thrive on it. And in Brenda's case even to be justifiably proud of motherhood—well chosen and deliberate.

Yet a reminder serves to illustrate that everything isn't fair yet.

"I couldn't believe my fortune—to be in one of the two states that has rescinded their support of the equal rights amendment," she said.

"We've got to fight back—my advice is we can't let it go. Our fear is that if twenty states decide to rescind the amendment, Congress may decide it hasn't been properly ratified. . . .please unelect people who oppose the amendment."

Social changes, private and public, are involved. Equality is a chance, as Brenda said, for a "greater dream than an equal share of the pie."

"It's terribly important that we be what we want to be. We can't be restricted by pictures in our head."

Vince Boucher

con/pro

House FDA report must not gather dust

By Neil Klotz

A U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee has issued a damaging indictment of the way the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approves drugs for consumer use, charging the agency with inefficient, lax and illegal procedures.

The little-known report, based on a study by the House intergovernmental relations subcommittee, rakes the FDA for a number of questionable practices involving use of advisory committees to approve drugs. In particular, the subcommittee found that:

–FDA attorneys dissuaded an advisory panel from recommending that Alka-Seltzer (which contains aspirin) be taken off the market as an antacid. The panel was concerned that regular use might lead to aspirin poisoning or cause permanent damage to the stomach lining.

After the panel reversed its decision and approved the drug, the panel chairman reported that he and his colleagues had been subjected to a "necessity of twisting and distorting scientific facts to make it fit legal language requirements."

–The FDA rejected the advice of its own staff medical officers that further experimental use of the contraceptive Depo Provera be stopped because of cancer risks and the danger of permanent sterility.

Instead, the FDA asked an advisory board panel to evaluate the drug, then withheld the information generated by its own scientists that showed a cancer rate in users almost twice as high as claimed by the manufacturer.

–The FDA convened an advisory panel to consider approving the drug DES as a "morning-after" pill even though the chief manufacturer of the drug hadn't applied for approval because he thought he couldn't prove the drug was safe.

The advisory panel initially concluded on the basis of several cancer risk studies, that there was "insufficient evidence for its efficacy and its safety." Three months later the FDS called the panel back and told it the drug could be found effective on anything more than a "scintilla" or a "smidgeon" of evidence.

After the panel reversed its recommendation, the FDA then prematurely announced to doctors that it had approved the drug for contraceptive use and, according to the House report, it permits the drug to be shipped interstate illegally to this day.

The House subcommittee also found that significant conflicts of interest embroil the experts on FDA advisory panels.

"The pool of experts in drug investigation is quite limited so that the same experts may serve both government and industry," the report said.

In addition, the subcommittee criticized the FDA for composing its panel primarily of doctors, a group that makes decisions "more favorable to the practicing physician than to the public at large."

For instance, doctors on FDA panels have talked about watering down warnings on drug labels to make it harder to sue them for malpractice. The report quoted one FDA committee member as saying, "Now, is it not our duty to get the practicing physician as much legal defense as we can?"

Finally, the House report found that the FDA's entire review process for nonprescription drugs may be illegal.

In 1972, the FDA decided to review all non-prescription drugs on a category-by-category basis. At the same time it suspended prosecution of new drugs put on the market without legal approval until that drug's entire class of products had been evaluated.

Even when the FDA's own scientists and medical officers recommended action against an allegedly unsafe drug ingredient, the agency still wouldn't act, said the report.

In a recent case an FDA advisory panel found that aerosol anti-perspirants, which contain zirconium, can cause lung disease, and recommended that the FDA commisioner "take immediate steps outside of the normal OTC (over the counter) drug review process to stop movement of these agents in interstate commerce."

The commissioner refused. More than a year later, the drugs, which include Sure, Secret, and Arrid XX aerosols, remain on the market while the FDA's drawn out appeal and comment processes go on.

To the extent that FDA's review procedures allow illegal interstate commerce in such products, the House report said, "they contravene stated purposes of the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic act and are therefore not legal."

Although the report did not look at the evaluation of non-prescription sleeping pills by the FDA, the Sominex drug scandal embraced many of the same abuses. In fact, the most disturbing part of the House subcommittee report is its familiarity, for it shows that blatant conflicts of interest and criminal unconcern for public safety are not periodic lapses, but have marked much of the FDA's work for the last decade.

Mixed with the mounds of other reports issued to the full House, the FDA report may well languish unnoticed. Although public outrage could provoke changes in the FDA, the commercial media probably would be too busy chasing the primaries and snippets about the Central Intelligence Agency to notice the report or bring it to their readers' attention.

Whether any congressman or congresswoman will, in the public interest, take on the powerful drug indsutry lobbies and try to legislate FDA reform remains to be seen. A $10 billion industry doesn't go down without a fight.