

‘‘Women’s Lib’’

Joseph Mack

a sketch exercise based on historic periods

© 2015

5112 Longwood Dr
Durham, NC, 27713-8010
(919) 401-2047
jmack@austintek.com

FIRST DRAFT
12-JUN-2015

ACT ONE

ROBYN: Undergrad female student

JUDY: Undergrad female student

The two women are friends. They have been radicalised by news and TV coverage of recent protest marches. Until now they haven't wanted to be involved.

COP1:

COP2:

script consultants: Jocelyn, Guy, Anoo, Dave.

 Authors comments:

This was initially inspired by the bra burning and anti-Vietnam war marches of the 1960s. I was reminded of this after watching "More American Graffiti" just recently. However this piece could be anytime, *e.g.* the Pussy Riot!

It was written by a guy (me). I did this with Dave Tillery at No Shame (ie two guys, both ex-hippies from the '60's, playing women), to make it clear to the audience that this was a man's view of women's lib. So often I see women on stage/in films with lines that I can't believe a woman would write.

This piece is to show that women's lib is not just a matter of shutting up the male assholes; it's a problem with the whole of society. Women accept their oppression, not willingly, but they do. The oppression of women is no different to the oppression of men which sends them to Vietnam. Women won't get out of their oppression, while men can be sent to Vietnam. Men and women are in it, all of it, together.

What if the Pussy Riot! had occurred in 1965? In Russia, it's women's patriotic duty to have children. In the back of my mind was also the Arab Spring, and the demonstrations at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago.

I set the scene gradually, so that the audience doesn't know what's going on. The audience accumulates information about the situation, in the same way as the two women are doing.

 FADE IN

1. EXT. PENNSYLVANNIA AVE, WASHINGTON DC, --- OUTDOOR, DAY

Two women (possibly played by men) nervously approach from the side of the stage, moving across the back to the middle of the stage, and then approach the front of the stage, looking into the distance ahead. Neither looks at each other very much. They scan the distance for a couple of beats, fidgeting nervously, not knowing what to expect next.

When they talk, they mostly look straight ahead. They talk loudly, so they can be heard over the cacophony of the people gathering for the protest.

If played by women and clothes are a consideration, the women should dress preppily, to show that the upper middle class has become disaffected too.

The women should exhibit obvious nervous mannerisms and gestures. The actors should use different gestures, to differentiate the women. If you don't have a gesture, try a any of these. *e.g.* holding arms by side but opening and closing fingers sequentially; *e.g.* grasping purse/handbag, *e.g.* touching face (both hands rubbed vertically downwards over cheeks) *e.g.* tugging at hair. *e.g.* shifting weight from one foot to another *e.g.* jumping up and down a little bit on the spot *e.g.* hugging self. *e.g.* hugging self and shivering

As the intensity builds (*e.g.* when the cops call on them to disperse), the women should assume more intense gestures.

ROBYN

Judy, they're across the whole road.

JUDY

Are you going to burn your bra in the parade today Robyn?

ROBYN

I don't know Judy ... I've never been to a protest before ... Are you?

JUDY

This is my first too. I don't know either.

ROBYN

Judy, they're taking off their name tags.

JUDY

All the women who burned their bras in yesteray's parade were arrested all the women and put in jail.

CONTINUED

ROBYN

Do you think they'll arrest us today? The jails must be full by now.

JUDY

I wonder what they'll do with us all? They've arrested so many of us by now.

ROBYN

They arrested all the men who burned their draft cards in the parade last week. This morning's paper says they're sending them all straight off to Vietnam. The govt says that no further protests will be tolerated.

JUDY

Robyn, they're picking up their shields.

ROBYN

My mother has been watching all of this on TV. She's angry. She says that all the women who burned their bras are going to be sent off to be married and have babies.

JUDY

Your mother is always so happy. She's always at the bake sales, when we were in school together. She's always in the kitchen happily smiling and making cookies and brownies for all of us. It's not like her to be angry at all.

The two cop's voices should come from the opposite sides of the stage, as if from loud hailers. The actors should cup their hands around their mouths to mimic the sound of a loud hailer. They should call up towards the ceiling. The two cops voices coming from different directions, are to show the protesters that they are surrounded.

COP1

Disperse!

COP2

Disperse!

COP1

This is an unpatriotic and illegal gathering.

CONTINUED

COP2

This is an unpatriotic and illegal gathering.

COP1

Go Home now! Anyone who burns their bra will be arrested!

COP2

Go Home now! Anyone who burns their bra will be arrested!

COP1

This is your last warning!

COP2

This is your last warning!

COP1

Disperse!

COP2

Disperse!

ROBYN

Mom married Dad when she was 18. All us kids arrived shortly afterwards. Mom wanted to go to college and have a career. She's 45 now and has done nothing but have babies. She's going through menopause. She thinks her life is over and it's too late to start again. She regrets not doing any of the things she wanted to do. She wishes she'd gone to college. She says she's spent her whole life making other people happy. No-one ever tried to make her happy. She says that all they want women for is to cook and have babies. She's not happy at all, despite what it looks like.

JUDY

Robyn, they're moving towards us.

ROBYN

Judy are you going to stay?

JUDY

My Mom married straight out of high school too. Once she talked about being a ballet dancer. It sounds like she really liked it.

(MORE)

CONTINUED

JUDY (CONT'D)

After she married Dad, she never danced again. I've never been able to get her to talk about it. When I was little, she wouldn't let me take ballet lessons. All my friends were taking them and I really wanted to do it with them.

ROBYN

Oh My God, Judy, they're firing tear gas at us. Are they crazy? There's only women and babies here.

Both women turn to look at each other.

JUDY

Robyn, the men are being sent off to die in Vietnam. They can't separate us. They're arresting all the women back here at home. They're sending the men off to die in some godforsaken foreign country. This country belongs to all of us ... both the men and to the women. We can't just stand here doing nothing. We have to do something!

Judy initiates taking off her bra without removing her blouse. Robyn follows. They put the bras over their shoulder while they retrieve a cigarette lighter from their purses. They hold the bras up vertically and light the bottom of the bra. They watch as the flames grow higher, consuming the bra.

The tear gas cloud hits the two women. They react first to the stinging of the eyes, then the tears, then the sharp tearing in the throat and the stabbing pain of breathing. They collapse on the ground incapacitated, gasping and coughing.

Pause. Allow the audience to see the two women gasping and struggling.

Two male cops enter slowly and carefully from opposite sides. They have one hand over their mouth representing a respirator. They breath loudly through their hand like Darth Vader. The other hand is held above their head holding a truncheon. They move slowly, bent over keeping their heads low to the ground to avoid the tear gas, sweeping the ground visually, by moving side to side, as if they are looking through fog. They each find one of the incapacitated women and arrest her roughly (*e.g* kick the woman), ignoring that she's helpless from the tear gas.

CONTINUED

COPS

"You're under arrest!"

FADE OUT

After talking to Anoo:

To prepare me for being a woman on stage, Anoo had me walk around as an undergrad woman, as if I was walking around the campus. I decided to imagine myself as a friend Judy, who I'm in frequent e-mail contact. Do I see anyone I know? I imagined myself being on the SU quad and waving to someone over there. I physically waved my hand. I imagined crossing paths with women I know. How do I greet them? They lean their heads forward when greeting me. They get a good look at my face, to see how I am. (Maybe they're just checking my makeup. For whatever reason, they want an accurate idea of my state.) I later realise that putting your head down is a low status pose (as against leaning your head back and looking down your nose).

How do I walk? What expression do I have on my face? I said I smiled. I said all women smile all the time and I always wonder why. Is it to look non-threatening? Anoo said not all women smile all the time. I wasn't convinced. As Judy, I smiled.

At the gathering before the protest, how do I feel about the people there?

If you'd asked me how a woman walks I wouldn't have had any answer, but it only took a few seconds of walking as a woman for me to see my version of how a woman walks. She walks more carefully, keeping her body and head more upright minimising movement of the upper body, I assume to avoid jiggle. Women students often carry their notes/books in front of their chest. This way you loose use of both hands, something I wouldn't tolerate. Is it to minimise jiggle, or to stop people from seeing it when it happens? At the time I wondered if women realised that holding their books that way emphasises their boobs, which are pushed up. As well there is a discontinuity between the colour/texture of the clothes and the books which sticks out from the woman. My eye was always drawn to the line demarking the border. I also saw the similarity between holding the books and holding a baby.

Steps are smaller. You don't stride purposefully as a man does. You walk to avoid drawing attention to yourself. It seems I know a lot more about how a woman walks than I thought.

My version of Judy expects everyone to be glad to see her. Other women greet her solicitously. It isn't always genuine, that's a separate layer, but it is always externally courteous. The people Judy sees are glad to see

her.

My version of Judy's world is quite different to mine, where men are always in competition. There the default interaction is intimidation, backed up by the threat of violence.

At the assembling demonstration, Judy looks out onto a world where everything could be right and should be right. She still expects to be treated courteously and with respect. She knows that everything that's happening today is because people aren't acting rationally. She knows that things will go wrong. She may wind up in jail, she may be treated roughly and with little respect. Through it, she will remember who she is. (My version of) Judy's understanding of herself will not be shaken by anything that happens. If she's treated with disrespect, she will cry about it to regain her self respect. Judy regards crying as a normal thing to do. She will not internalise the disrespect.

Anoo asked if Judy was outraged by the events surrounding the past demonstrations. Anoo seemed convinced that Judy would be outraged. My version of Judy wasn't; my Judy was determined. Judy is determined and relentless that everyone know the right way. Anoo asked me for a physical pose to show Judy's determination. I gave the black power salute (fist clenched), like was given at an Olympic medal ceremony once (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1968_Olympics_Black_Power_salute).

Judy's view of the world doesn't include outrage. There is a sensible way to do things and that's that. No matter how badly other people behave it will not change Judy's position on what is right. If you become outraged, you are only behaving like them. They can treat her badly, but they haven't won; she still maintains her position. Judy doesn't see any other way of behaving towards people.

I expect this attitude is the one that results in mothers saying to their boys "if Johnny hit you, would you play with you next time?" "no" "well do you think he's going to want to play with you now that you've hit him?" "I don't care". It's takes a while to get through to boys.

Women don't understand what's going on there. They've figured out how to stop it in their sons, but they don't understand it. When you hear women's libbers talking about why men go to war or why men fight each other, they say it's because men are stupid. This isn't received well by men, most of who have been oppressed to go off to war (to save their women and children). No man will accept that being prepared to save the lives of women and children back home is stupid, especially coming from the women for whom he has spent his youth preparing to lay down his life.

If you asked Judy when she was standing there as the demonstration was assembling, why men/society was sending cops out to arrest her and rough her up, she would not think

they were being stupid. She would think they were just not behaving optimally (rationally?). Society does not have this concept of people behaving optimally. If she's pressed to give an answer as to why men (cops) are doing this to her, just to shut up the questioner, she might reach for "they're being stupid". Well yes this is true, in the sense that anything sub-optimal is stupid, but Judy knows more than that. She not only knows that it's sub-optimal (stupid), but she knows what is optimal.

She does not know why the men (cops) are behaving the way they are. She does not understand that they are behaving optimally for their oppression. But she does know that there's a better way.

Women telling men that they are stupid for going off to war (or treating women badly), has never stopped men from going off to war (or treating women badly). It is not addressing the problem. It's addressing the sub-optimal part of life, not the optimal part. Men don't like being told they're stupid. They're oppressed and they think they're saving society.

I told Anoo that women's lib for me was 50yrs of women telling me I was an asshole.

Anoo said "fun wasn't it?"

I said it only alienated the people like myself who were prepared to help. I decided to stay out of the firing line for 50yrs until the shouting was all over.

If you read women's blogs in England, they aren't calling men assholes.

If you look in Australia (book by Anne Summers, Whores and God's Police), they didn't have an ERA. They didn't call men assholes. They got legislation passed incrementally. The women said "if we're allowed to do X, we should be allowed to do X+1". The legislators looked at each other and said "well sure, I guess so" and within about 10yrs Australia had all the things the ERA was after. The lobbying work was all done by people who no-one has ever heard of, even now. They didn't want to be known, they didn't want to be a spectacle. Being a spectacle would interfere with their purpose. They stayed with their purpose. Afterwards they're silent about it. They don't declaim their role in removing oppression. It won't help the people who tackle the next stages of oppression. Read Gene Sharp on removing oppression. You don't want to set up the next layer of oppressors to be ready for a fight. You want their power taken from them without them realising what's happening, till it's all over and even then they may not figure out what happened. It may just look to them like times have changed.

In the US women wanted all or nothing, and used celebrities to convey the message. These celebrities didn't know anything about oppression or women's rights. They didn't

represent anything about the ERA to the populace. The people running the ERA thought they could treat the populace as if they were selling toothpaste to easily manipulated consumers. These consumers, who'd been called assholes for decades by the people wanting the ERA passed, found they were regarded as easily manipulated late night TV viewers. They told the ERA to go to hell. The women running the ERA program wanted all or nothing. They got nothing. You need a better backup plan. You don't always succeed. You have to plan for failure to be acceptable too.

50 years was lost by women in the US calling men assholes.

The women in the US didn't link their oppression (and its powerful symbol of bra burning) with the oppression of sending men off to Vietnam. Both oppressions are the same. Women should have been burning their bras to end the Vietnam war. The women who thought that burning their bras was only about women's lib missed the point.

American's women's lib is telling men they're assholes. It made sure the ERA didn't pass. RC did it too; it destroyed RC. In other countries, womens lib is everyone's lib.

I put on this piece with the women played by men. I wanted the audience to know that this was a man's view of women's lib. If women played it, then it would just be another TV show where women actors are mouthing lines, written by men, who don't know how women see life.

THE END