

WOMEN'S BODIES: the facts overcome the myths...

This is a crucial part of one of the greatest non-violent movements in the world, and it's happening in Columbia College. The "Women and Their Bodies" course taught by Judith Pildes is the first class at Columbia open only to women, and this is probably the first time in any "straight" school that women are receiving academic credit for taking it.

The women taking the course are majoring in different areas at Columbia. There is no predominant major. Most of the women are single. Most are sympathetic toward the Women's Movement, although only a very small percentage have had any active part in it. One woman said she was "anti-Women's Lib as a movement" before the course began. Now she is sympathetic, but still does not see herself in the role of a "political revolutionarv."

Even though the official course description makes definite political statements—"that the oppression and exploitation of women is based upon the physical reality of the female body" and "the political reality grows out of female biology"—most women took the course to find out about their bodies, not necessarily their political selves.

One woman was disappointed: "I thought the class would have more to do with the physical aspect . . . As it turns out (it) is based (more on) Women's Lib. But I still find it interesting, and am learning new things."

Most would definitely take another women's course if it were offered in the College. Some had specific interests, including a course on women in literature, as well as in other media.

Suggested course improvements from the women include having the class meet more often (it meets once a week for two hours) and/or for a longer period of time, thereby increasing the number of credit hours for the course; having a more comfortable physical setting; and class discussion of books pertaining to women. Even though most of the women seem to have taken the course for non-political reasons, they appear to be enthused with the class, inclusive of its political overtones.

Thus far, the course apparently has had no special, overt effects on the women's relationships with men. But women expressed the importance of being able to share and exchange facts, ideas and views with other women in an open atmosphere. Some said that taking the course has made them feel stronger, more certain of themselves as individuals, and closer with other women. They felt that "myths and fears women have about themselves" are being dispelled in the classroom. One woman said that now she knows what to rightfully expect and demand from her doctor in the way of patient care. Because she is pregnant, the most important part of the course for her, she said, is the portion on childbirth. Another woman said, "I realize a woman is . . . more than a baby-maker or housewife."

The women feel "a little more open and appreciative" because of the course. They can discuss things between themselves as women, and appreciate their own powers of self-awareness and their own uniqueness. Much of this has to do with the personality and character of the instructor, Judith Pildes.

Judith comes across as a strong, outspoken woman. She was once an elementary school teacher. She became involved in doing "Bodies" courses through her work as a paramedic and abortion service counselor for the Women's Liberation Union. She has a two-and-a-half year old son, and is in the process of ending a nine-year marriage.

The most important sources of her knowledge about women's bodies, Judith says, have been the actual examination and treatment of women, information shared in women's sessions, and her own experiences going through pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood. "Women really know about themselves," she asserts, "but they don't believe they do. They



believe in what other people say, i.e. doctors (who are mostly males, besides), before they believe in their own knowledge."

At the beginning of the sessions, there were questions as to why men were not allowed to take the course, or even sit in. "I don't believe all men are asses," one woman said. "I don't either," Ms. Pildes was quick to reply, "But women would not be able to discuss a lot of things about themselves as openly and comfortably if men were around." The women seemed to agree after more turning over of thought, although a number, understandably, still feel a bit uneasy about the obvious political convictions of the women's movement Judith fails to conceal. The women agree the "Bodies" course should be all-women, but would like to see a similar course for men taught by a man.

as well as a co-ed course team-taught by a man and a woman along the lines of human and social relationships between the sexes.

"In our culture," says Judith, "women can not let real feelings be shared in the presence of men." The "Bodies" course is an important step towards enabling women to express themselves freely because they have knowledge.

"It is important for people to control their lives," Ms. Pildes emphasizes. "One way is to control their bodies; and you do that by learning all you can, and sharing knowledge with others. Doing this is, for me, a step towards gaining a sense of liberation of spirit."

Judith covers "things all women should know" in the course: anatomy, medical care and treatment, vaginal infections and venereal diseases, abortion, contraception, childbirth, pregnancy, nursing, rape, sensuality, aging, etc.—it's all a matter of record. But she is also a new model for women. The women say she "gives a feeling of freedom and openness;" she is "sensitive, knowledgeable, humorous and understanding," "dynamite!"; "(her) approach and attitude (are) conducive to open discussion, and help to make the women in the class feel more comfortable and willing to discuss things;" "she shows that she won't be pushed around, and yet she maintains a good sense of humor. It is easy to feel strong around her." "I am able to say and talk about things to (her) that I could never even say to my mother;"

she is "full of knowledge, sympathetic, and very aware of herself;" "she doesn't come across as a 'teacher,' and that's good;" "never boring"—and if that's not enough, she is "a very nice person and a good instructor," as well.

Some women were more reserved in their opinions of Ms. Pildes. If many were heartened to find such a strong woman, a few, at least, felt overwhelmed by her biases. But from the start Judith told the class: "I can't help being what I am. But I'll let my prejudices be so obvious to you so that you can decide for yourself where things are at and where they're coming from."

The major importance of the "Bodies" course does not seem to be in terms of words or things, but rather in its stimulation of the consciousness of women, viz. it isn't wrong for women to feel certain ways or want certain things in their relationships with other people. Women have a right to evolve as human beings in society. They need to know everything about themselves, and to know—absurd as it may sound—that it is perfectly all right not to be something other than what they are. The "Bodies" course provides a healthy, intelligent atmosphere for that knowledge to grow.

Ms. Pildes will be teaching a co-ed class in Contemporary Women's Consciousness during the three-week intensive mid-term at the College, January 28–February 16. Other related classes may be accepted in the near future into the college curriculum.

TAI CHI CHUAN

...the soft overcomes the hard.

There has been a change in the attitudes in recent years towards the Eastern cultures. More and more people are being influenced by it. Martial art schools have cropped up in every town. The "Y" teaches Yoga classes. The expense of meat has forced people to prepare Eastern dishes which require less or no meat.

Tai Chi is an Eastern dance which few people know about, but is readily gaining favor. It was created by the Taoist Priest Chang Sang-Feng about a thousand years ago, when observing how a snake warded off a magpie. The snake continuous coiling yield space so that the magpie could not strike it. Chang Sang-Feng concluded that the circle must be the strongest form in nature so he formulated Tai Chi around the "Yielding Principle."

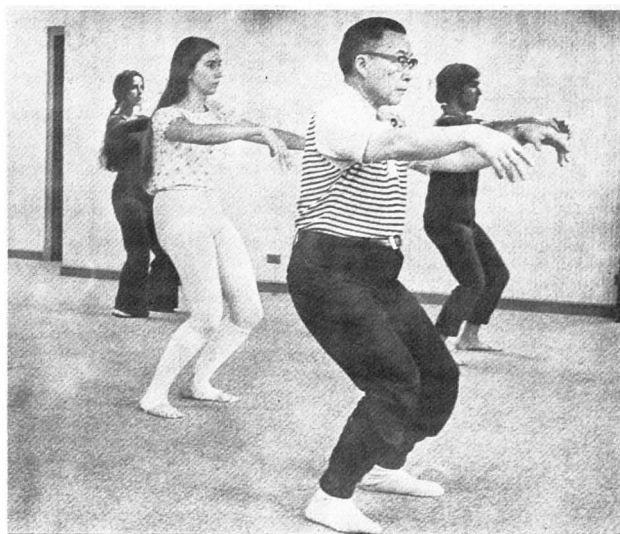
Tai Chi is a slow, meditative dance and exercise which calms the spirit and masters the body. All motions are round, the joints are loose and the waist limber. Strength is rooted in the feet and legs, controlled by the waist, and expressed through the fingers. This is combined with slow breathing through the nose. Inhaling when practicing Yin or the passive role, and exhaling when practicing the aggressive role or Yang. All the movements are named from nature such as "Grasp the birds tail, Stork spread his wings, and Push the mountain into the sea." In nature, the yielding living is soft and the non-yielding dead is hard and brittle. A thin stemmed flower can not be overcome by a strong wind because it yields, unlike the dead limb on a tree which cracks under stress.

The weak overcomes the strong;
The soft overcomes the hard;
This is known by all;
But practiced by none!

Loa Tze 570 B.C.

Tai Chi is taught at the Columbia College Dance center under the direction of Mr. Herbert Lui, who has practiced it for seventeen years. Mr. Lui teaches the long form which

emphasizes health and lasts forty minutes. This form takes between one and three years of continuous practice to learn and is very enjoyable.



Mr. Lui teaching Columbia students the Oriental art of Tai Chi at the Dance Center.