

# CAN THE REALLY SWING?

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## ABSTRACT

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## FULL TEXT

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# REALLY SWING? by Kathleen D. Fury

*The YW has come a long way, baby—but is it prepared for the angry young feminists and militant young Blacks who are knocking on its doors? Here's a look at a revolution nobody seems to know about*

In 1969 a young woman named Pepper Schwartz took the summer off from her doctoral studies at Yale to visit her husband-to-be, John, at his home in San Francisco. John's mother, a long-time board member of the local Young Women's Christian Association, offered to introduce her to "some of the nice young girls at the Y."

Short, dark-haired and enthusiastic, Pepper Schwartz is not the sort to turn down new experiences, but she remembers thinking only, How boring! At the YWCA, she figured, she might meet some little old ladies in tennis shoes or a Bible-thumping minister's daughter, or be invited to join a class in cake decorating. But because she liked John's mother and didn't want to hurt her feelings, she accepted the offer.

Today, five years later, Dr. Pepper Schwartz, 29, is an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Washington, the co-author of a book titled *Women at Yale*—and a member of the National Board of the YWCA.

What she discovered five years ago at the San Francisco YW came, she recalls, as a "total shock. I was just amazed at the women I met there—wonderful, angry, dynamic young feminists who were a diverse mixture of class and color and who were determined to use the enormous resources of the YW more productively."

Schwartz's initial surprise is understandable. The YWCA long has had a reputation as a staid, traditional organization—as American as motherhood and apple pie, and about as exciting. The image, YWCA-ers believe, is a legacy of the '50s, when the organization reflected the colorlessness of American life in general and the lives of American women in particular. At that time, what you could get at the YW was a swim, a class in cooking, a pamphlet on hygiene and an inexpensive cafeteria meal.

But times have changed for American women, and the YW has kept up with and sometimes even caused the changes. No longer having (if indeed it ever had) the gray eminence of "ladies' clubs," the YWCA regards itself, with ample justification, as a women's movement—in its own bureaucratic parlance, a "change agent."

The University of Washington YWCA in Seattle is a case in point. In a second-story office a few blocks from campus this YW, though it has limited staff and space, supports an incredible variety of activities. Four years ago the university YW began to sponsor forums on sex and sexuality, and these eventually grew into what is now the Aradia Clinic.

The clinic is located at the back of the building, in a warren of rooms designed and built by women architects and carpenters. Here any woman can come for

free medical help dispensed by either the staff doctor (male, currently) or the paramedics (female), who have been trained to do preliminary screening and lab tests as well as to educate and give reassurance. At Aradia Clinic, any client who is interested in learning about her body—and all are encouraged to do so—is handed a mirror and flashlight so that she can observe her own pelvic examination.

At the clinic entrance hangs a huge, hand-lettered poster that lists Aradia's prices for various gynecological remedies and birth-control pills and devices beside a list of regular drugstore prices. "It will give you a basis," the poster explains, "for seeing how much establishment doctors and pharmacies rip you off." In 1972, the clinic's first year of operation, 840 women used its services; by the next year the figure was over 1,000.

In a small office at the front of the building is the Women's Divorce Co-operative, where a counselor is available to help women who want to arrange an inexpensive, do-it-yourself divorce or simply need advice and a sympathetic ear. Last spring so many women were calling Divorce Co-operative for help that the YW grew desperate for volunteers to answer the phone.

Nearby are the desks of the staff and volunteers who run the free abortion-referral service, one so successful that it's believed to have virtually eliminated