

Pittsburgh police, broadcasting a wanted description yesterday for a runaway boy said he was:

"Male, about five-feet five, 115 pounds, 16 years of age, wearing long brown hair, striped pants, a bright woollen poncho, has a gold earring in one ear and wears gold tinted sunglasses.

"He may be carrying a large shoulder purse," the police dispatcher said.

— Montreal Gazette, August 14, 1968.

Changing Sex Role Implications For Education

F. R. Wake

Occasionally there appears a social phenomenon so broadly expressed, so repeatedly presented as to require no specific documentation — agreement is found among many and diverse persons, on the basis of easily observable phenomena. Such seems to be the case with the changing sex role in North American society. Where, not so long ago, there was general belief that "men were men and women were women," and "vive la différence," now, with some unease, and occasional outright friction, there is recognition that "la différence" is slim and becoming slimmer. A perusal of contemporary society indicates that women are dressing more and more in a style resembling that of men, e.g. shirts, shorts, long pants and, in an overall sense, are tending toward undress (nudity), a style once distastefully assigned to males only. Too, an increasing percentage of women enroll at colleges and universities. More and more traditionally-male work positions are filled by females (armed services and government). There is a rapid increase in legal rights of women (e.g. voting, handling of finances). And if all these changes were not enough, there is now a Royal Commission examining ways of assuring an even closer approach to equality.

The foregoing illustrations are changes in sex role from female to male — but not all change is in this direction. Many a high school teacher, many a college professor has been stunned on entering his classroom to find beads around the neck of a male student; frilly shirts are worn by some young men; the nursing profession has

been infiltrated by males and although the number graduating with an R. N. dropped from 90 (1.3%) in 1963 to 23 (0.3%) in 1966 (as also did enrolment in schools of nursing), the enrolment for nursing assistants has increased from 2.6% to 4.7% of total enrolment between 1964 and 1966. On a less formal basis, men are found doing chores at the laundromat and openly admit to helping with dishwashing, housekeeping, and cooking. A report from the U.S.S.R. indicates that wives are demanding (if you please!) that husbands assume responsibility for *half* of the housework.

It appears obvious that "sex role" as a concept will disappear in the foreseeable future (i.e. twenty-five to fifty years). It is unlikely that comfortable old phrases such as "it's a man's world," "no woman should be asked to work that hard" will be in common currency. Instead, there will be work, jobs, education, recreation — all free and open to both sexes on the basis of equal opportunity — and certainly the rules for behaviour should not be difficult to construct.

Toward a Single Standard

However, in the areas of custom, values, social and emotional behaviour, patterns tend to arise rather than be determined rationally. Thus, while "one role" will be achieved, it appears that greater change will be made toward the male role than the female. (Perhaps, all along, women particularly, but also men, really have believed "it's a man's world.") Not only is this seen in the matter of clothing, of adoption of uncouth language, of increased aggressive behaviour, of living apart from family although in the same city, but noticeably in the matter of physical sexuality. Researchers in the field of sex behaviour have found that in the last forty years or so, woman has changed from a passive love object (expecting no sexual satisfaction, often repelled by sexual activities, holding to the stand that nice women really didn't have sex desires) to an aggressive, demanding role, very like that of the male from long time back. Thus the female today (often to the dismay of a placid partner) can initiate sex activity, may have equal or better book knowledge, knows her "rights" and even aggressively asserts them. Most important of all, at least for those who hold to old-time standards, she has discovered sex-for-the-sake-of-sex. Until recently there has been a strong tradition among women to be attracted to a man and subsequently, if *sufficiently* attracted, to indulge in varying degrees of sex behaviour (early statistics on pre-marital sex in women

regularly note that often the non-virgin indulged only with the man she was about to marry). The male, however, was known for an ability to enjoy sex with any reasonable partner and without deep or lasting attachment. Nowadays, the female finds it easier to forego the emotional and accept the physical. In short, the rapidly approaching single sex standard is almost certain to become very like that of the male.

Change commonly occurs at the expense of tension, friction, heartache, even hostility and such is the history of change in sex role. Woman had been assigned the role of homemaker, child-rearer and such historically-recent offshoots of these as school-teacher, welfare worker and so on. Since she entered the labour market late, she was accorded low status, low pay, was considered unreliable (owing to emotional outbursts and monthly indispositions) and physically or mentally incapable of doing a man's work. (The obvious disproofs such as intellectually accomplished females or peasant women working in the fields were not strong enough to deny the generality.) But women continued to accept jobs outside the home and to demonstrate the abilities necessary to match male performance in many and varied tasks. For example, female entrance into the business field may well have begun with the development of the typewriter and the discovery that, in general, females manipulated the machine better than males. Gradually women began to make plain what many must have thought secretly for years: namely, they were the equal of males.

So they began to compete, and as they competed they adjusted to the mores, the culture of the male world. They met resistance, hostility and manoeuvring on and away from the work site. A man whose promotion was threatened by a female soon came to see her as masculine and deserving of masculine treatment. Not only did he speak of her and treat her as another male in the office — on his way home in the bus he kept his seat and let her stand.

Thus the working female discovered that in playing the male role, she could not simultaneously play the female — and, in fact, she could not easily hop from one to another. If she married, her husband probably would expect her to become a traditional housewife. Furthermore, if children did not appear within a short period of time, then she was suspect (selfish, barren, not a woman). If she did set up a home and have children but, having tasted success in a man's world (and needing money), she wanted back in, then she

aroused condemnation as an unnatural mother, a heartless woman. Outside criticism was strong but, more important, her guilt if her child failed at school, or became ill, was harrowing. Perhaps as much to the point was that tenderness, thoughtfulness and respect, once paid her for little effort on her part, mainly because of accident of conception, suddenly departed as in a wind. And, to many, these were the glories of being a woman.

As for the single girl, she has suffered at least since Biblical times. The opprobrium attached to the words "old maid" or "maiden lady" was so severe as to cause acute distress in the state of spinsterhood. To the bright, competent young girl, the joys of a business or other working life became too great to abandon, but to be unmarried was a state as tragic as work was good — so many tried to combine marriage and work. Too often the results were costly, for such females, victims of a modern style shot-gun marriage, made poor wives. Worse than that, once married they came under pressure to bear children, which they did, although not caring for children, even their own. The result of this tragic sequence was seen in unhappy parents and short-changed children.

The accumulative agony of the recent and continuing transition in sex roles has not been documented, but the outcome could be predicted. It has become necessary for society to permit a woman to choose the masculine role with honour and respect, to be able to marry and have children, or marry and not have children, or not marry — any one of these with peace of mind.

So the process of sex role change, though rapid and certain, has been pursued against a background of male and female resistance. Women, vacillating between the advantages of male and female role, fought to assume the former but retain the latter in reserve for tender moments. We are nearing the threshold of "one role" — what preparations must be made?

Sex Education

In any such preparations, the part played by formal education is crucial — sex education is part of many high school curricula; dress and grooming are discussed in health classes; more and more emphasis is paid to vocational choice, potential, training; social science now is taught in high schools.

To a great extent, these programs are johnny-come-latelys. Rather than a boisterous entrance in public and high school pro-

grams, they have edged their way into the curriculum, pushed by some enthusiastic parents and teachers, held back by others. Not only has the problem been one of the suitability of the school for imparting such information, but one of how to implement the program when it is desired. The vocational guidance teacher who sees a class once a week, and each individual twice a year for twenty minutes, must have the qualities of genius to bring the needed thought and information home to his class. Furthermore, when his background should include teaching experience, study in the social sciences, knowledge of business, industry, and the professions, most of his time could well go into just keeping himself up-to-date.

Similarly, finding someone to teach sex education can be difficult. It is not enough that an enthusiastic adult volunteers to do the job — he or she must possess extraordinary characteristics of broadmindedness, empathy, special knowledge and patience. Presumably such persons are available in any large school system, but presently appear to be in such small numbers as to require inter-school scheduling (not impossible but not easy, either). The single school may well wait for years before the key person becomes available for the task.

The matter of vocational guidance and sex education have been stressed when they really are but examples. If sex role change were to occur in geometric rather than the arithmetic progression it now appears to follow, the strains on teaching resources could be great — for example, a high female demand for training in agriculture (or engineering or law) might raise the need not only for classroom and laboratory space but for dormitories and certainly for increased staff (some of whom, by popular demand, would have to be female). A similar situation, perhaps even closer to panic, would result from a male demand for nursing careers. It is obvious that, to a certain extent, such "demands" will follow the number of jobs available, but history has shown that the number of job openings and persons available by no means always jibe.

Free Vocational Choice

Since, over the years, many of the professions show little change in percentage of membership by sex, it would appear that there is small cause for concern. Between 1950-51 and 1964-65 inclusive, female enrolment at university level in agriculture rose from 4% to 6%; in arts, from 27% to 32%; engineering 0.2% to

0.8 law 4% to 5%. Pharmacy, however, showed a 12% to 37% increase. In the same period, female students in nursing dropped from 100% to 99%, but in Arts (Fine and Applied) the decrease was notable, 80% to 63%. It appears as though rapid change is possible and were the sex role barriers to disappear, conceivably there could be dramatic change. Working against this possibility are well-established (and well-concealed) selection methods which tend to slow down induction of large numbers of one or the other sex into certain training. While there may be good reasons for preferring one sex to the other in certain jobs, logic suggests that many persons with great potential are the victims of sex discrimination. Clearly the gross difference in the percentage of female physicians in the U. S. S. R. and Canada raises awkward questions for Canadians.

It is obvious that a vital aspect of vocational choice consists in making a student feel at home with the choice. Where a girl feels that an interest in mathematics or geological science is apt to alienate not only males but also her girl friends, then she well may shy away. The same problem exists for males. One Canadian city high school has offered hair-dressing courses for at least fifteen years. In that period only one boy has asked about the course (he did not enter) — yet there is no rule against male enrolment. Seen against the background of male employment in beauty parlours, the data are contradictory. Perhaps even more exciting, one large high school system has seen fit to set up a cooking class for boys within its domestic science program. These boys are not training to be chefs, they simply are learning to cook — a traditional female role. Apparently, the school atmosphere is such that they feel free to partake of this training. Soon, a new class in another school is to begin. At university level, the female engineer may have to weigh the advantage of new easy acceptance into the program against an equal ratio of sexes (thus less attention from her male classmates). Some day, perhaps, a class in child psychology may have more male than female participants!

These examples hit hard at two important points — first, the tragic loss in ability and performance, the high cost of frustration over the years from the interference of sex role with the potential of the individual. We never can know how many brilliant female minds or clever male fingers were deprived the opportunity of full expression, not because of poverty, ill health or other environmental cause, but only the simple one of belonging to the wrong

sex. In a world clamoring for exploitation of its resources, to deny talent its full expression is too high-priced a luxury.

Second, the example of the boys' cooking class shows that schools can lead in breaking down old prejudices. Co-operation between teachers and school counselors can create a climate in which pursuit of one's fancy is not just possible, but encouraged. (Perhaps the place to begin a breakdown of such prejudice is in teachers' colleges and universities. A very liberal academic administrator tried to name female deans, other than Deans of Women. Failing to come up with a single name, he said, with half a twinkle in his eye "Well, you can't have a woman dean!"). And a talent-hungry world will seize the opportunity to give the applicant a chance, regardless of sex, if it is aware that a continuing stream of applicants is assured.

Always there will be limitations — for want of size, few women will play professional football — but then few men the size of women play football either. No man will bear a child but many will look after children and care for the home in which they grow.

Backlash or Freedom?

Of course, there's always the possibility of backlash — the prospect of no sex role may become sufficiently revolting to both sexes as to promote a deliberate return to the old system. There is the curious fact that in the United States, the percentage of women who marry has risen steadily and steeply since 1940 and the largest increases are among the better-educated. It may be that while the searchlight is on sex role change, there is an undercurrent of reaction such as to slow and eventually stabilize sex roles, allowing men and women to retain differentiating characteristics apart from the most obvious. Perhaps sex roles will not be obliterated, merely modified. While this possibility cannot be denied, the apparent strong satisfaction achieved by so many women outside the home to-day makes it highly unlikely that they will abandon what appears to them to be substantial gains in freedom and a sense of self-worth. In fact, the increase in percentage of married women, mentioned above, can be seen as an indication that social attitudes to working married women have changed and that a combination of two roles, home and work, now is possible.

At the present pace, it should not take more than a generation to remove educational and social barriers so that the individual has a freedom of choice unknown in recent history. Not only the individual, but society, should profit.
