

Greta Nemiroff

Women and Education

*My hand delights to trace unusual things,
And deviates from the known and common way,
Nor will in fading silks compose,
Faintly the inimitable rose.*

ANNE, COUNTESS OF WINCHILSEA
1661-1720

The second caution to be given her (and which is most absolutely necessary) is to conceal whatever learning she attains, with as much solicitude as she would hide crookedness or lameness. The parade of it can only serve to draw on her the envy, and consequently the most inveterate hatred of all he and she fools, which will certainly be at least three parts in four of all her acquaintance. The use of knowledge in our sex (beside amusement of solitude) is to moderate the passions and learn to be contented with a small expense, which are the certain effects of a studious life and, it may be preferable even to that fame which men have engrossed to themselves and will not suffer us to share.

LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU to
her daughter, LADY BUTE. 1753

As a society, we North Americans like to imagine that we offer equal educational opportunities to everyone; I suppose that by now it is a known fact that we do not. Indeed, every time we examine our educational structures and concepts, we find glaring inequities which had been overlooked before. Often it is difficult to identify and deal with those inequities because they have initially been created by our blindest and most deep-rooted prejudices. For example, none of us is indifferent to the opposite sex; we all have opinions and feelings. Many of our concepts are based on our image of the opposite sex, and often our sexuality and that of others raises great anxiety. At

other times we may feel love and desire, and sometimes revulsion as well. But whatever their nature, they are genuine feelings and their intensity makes it most unlikely that we will ever willingly examine their source or be automatically able to give up those customs which we as a society have created to deal with these important emotions. It is my purpose here to demonstrate how important our concept of sex-roles has been in perpetuating a situation of educational and vocational inequality between the sexes to the detriment of the whole society. I will then explore some steps to redress these inequalities and, I think, towards the creation of a more viable and less lopsided philosophy of education.

i. the developmental base of sex-role stereotyping

The moment a baby is born, we want to know: a boy or a girl? The hospital reinforces our preconceptions by providing a pink or a blue blanket to facilitate identification of the child, and our friends send the happy parents flowers and plants beribboned in pink or blue. Indeed, if it is a little girl, she will receive pretty but uncomfortably frilled white or pink dresses; the little boy might receive minute golf suits or baseball jerseys. As the girl grows up, she will lust after "Barbie" and her magnificent wardrobe for all occasions. Tennis, she will learn, is simply a matter of the white outfit, and roles can be assumed and discarded as quickly as one changes one's clothes. The male child will hanker after "GI Joe" or "Big Jim," and he will learn that life consists of excitement: stalking the white tiger, being out at sea on a raft, adventures on the moon, international intrigue — both countries and secrets can be penetrated with any one of the gadgets provided in the \$10.95 kit. "GI Joe" indicates direction and purpose; "Barbie," in her French Provincial Barbie house, prophesies all too clearly the concept of the housewife, the woman who is married to her house in a static existence.

Small children learn that little girls are made of "sugar and spice and all things nice" while little boys are made of "rats and snails and puppydogs' tails." Superficially, it seems that the girls come off better. Yet, when one thinks of the food epithets attached to women, it is important to reconsider the intent of this simple rhyme. Women can be sugar, honey, a tomato, a cherry, the apple of one's eye, and many other things. But sugar melts in your mouth, and spices are insubstantial. Although they indubitably add something to life (variety within the double standard?), spices do not provide nourishment. On the other hand, rats are fast, dangerous and self-sufficient. Snails can retreat into shells and protect themselves, and puppydogs' tails . . . well there seems to be a wistful phallic anticipation in all those wagging little tails. Miss Muffet is scared from her tuffet by a spider; Jack, though, is so nimble and quick that he can play with fire and win. One might remonstrate here that, after all, those

are old rhymes and not applicable to the present. Yet, in a book written as late as 1970, the same role differentials were reinforced.¹

Boys are Presidents. Girls are first ladies.

Boys invent things. Girls use what boys invent.

Boys are doctors. Girls are nurses.

If their interest lies more with fairy tales, children will learn about female rivalry from Cinderella, who gets it from both her stepmother and stepsisters, and triumphs against them by getting the prince. What counts is patience. What is a hundred years of sleep if indeed the prince will arrive, hack his way through the undergrowth (!), and wake the maiden up with a kiss? Fulfillment for women is being woken up (to what, one wonders?) by a kiss. The man, on the other hand, only captures the maiden's heart on his way to bigger things . . . perhaps the slaying of a seven-headed dragon.

By the time children reach school, these expectations have been well sown. While studies clearly show that neither motoric hyperkinetic nor passive introverted dispositions are sex-linked,² boys are rewarded for being active and aggressive, and girls are rewarded for docility. Children spend approximately 1,000 hours per year in the classroom, and so schools can form a very influential environment. In the textbooks there is a prevalent hidden curriculum. As children learn how to read, they also learn that Dick is the eldest and therefore dominant child in his family, and that he can whiz around on his bicycle and lead a very active and consequent life. Jane and Baby Sally spend a lot of time on the sidelines watching, and perhaps helping their mother in the kitchen.

Studies have shown that in both sexes, IQ increases between the ages of six and ten occur most frequently in "self-assertive, independent, competitive" children, while they regress in "passive, shy, dependent ones."³ Thus, the expectations of boys in elementary schools, and in the society at large, already predispose them to a greater vocational choice than women. Even the range of career expectations varies enormously according to sex. In a study in the United States in 1970, seven hundred fourth, fifth and sixth grade girls were asked about their ambitions; 97% stated that they wished to be teacher, nurse, secretary and mother. Interestingly, none of the respondents fantasized about their choices but 15% of the boys in a control group provided alternatives of pure fantasy, and the rest gave a wide range of choices.⁴ Since girls are most clearly rewarded for passivity, it is no surprise that a recent child's book, *When I Grow Up*, after talking at length about women TV producers, dentists, lawyers, doctors, etc., concludes with this couplet:

But oh a mother is best of all,

With lots of children big and small.⁵

These values and expectations are further reinforced by the media. In metropolitan Washington, D.C., a study monitored four networks over 660 hours of one week in order to find out how sex-role stereo-

typing might be projected. In the programs, the men had lead roles for 508 hours, and the females for only 53 hours. Programs were headed by 655 men and only 77 women. There were 42 movies that week; five had female leads which were: an evil love goddess, an evil amazon, a psychopathic child, a gangster's moll, an unwed pregnant girl. There were 37 male leads which included flying aces, journalists, steel tycoons, Western heroes, police heroes, detectives, pilots and gangsters.⁶ From exposure to this kind of programming, the clear conclusion would be that men run things, men have the choices, and men have most of the power.

It is in adolescence that this situation culminates in deep internal conflict for girls. It has been found that often those docile little girls who are so well rewarded for their neat printing and their names in the top right hand corner, begin to regress academically and expect less of themselves. The results of one study of junior high school teachers' attitudes towards students produced the following adjectives to describe good male students: "Active, adventurous, aggressive, assertive, curious, energetic, enterprising, frank, independent"; and to describe the female students — "appreciative, calm, poised, sensitive, dependable, efficient, mature, obliging, thorough."⁷

Thus, the young woman entering her pubescence, known to be one of the most difficult crises we face in our course of growth, is best rewarded for fulfilling expectations usually associated with the Blessed Virgin: calm and accepting in adversity, considerate of others, obliging. She is expected to be mannerly, as opposed to the young boy who is rewarded for frankness and assertiveness. It is obvious that there are opinions which men do not want to hear from women. Cooperation and good manners are preferable to enterprise and honesty. One might argue here that teachers of *both* sexes were solicited for their attitudes. However, I would answer that gender does not matter in this particular case, as all teachers at this level have been certified by schools of education which operate on a male bias. The young woman clearly perceives that it is her job to accommodate herself to the male expectations perpetuated by our educational structures. After all, whom is she supposed to appreciate if not the other sex? With whom is she expected to cooperate? As one psychologist has pointed out:

If a young woman's plans for personal achievement endanger her attractiveness to male peers, she is likely to change her plans toward a more modest and more traditionally feminine goal. . . . Any assertion of her autonomous self is likely to be abandoned if it is pitted against a love relationship, even when the relationship has little guarantee of permanence.⁸

The young adolescent woman, then, must make a choice in early adolescence and under considerable pressure. If she decides that she prefers male appreciation to personal achievement, she can pay with serious and far-reaching consequences:

In order to avoid social criticism . . . many gifted women conform to societal values of femininity, which include the belief that women are emotionally and intellectually inferior to men. Gifted girls and women learn to appear dumb. However, the role playing of feigned stupidity is frustrating since it denies cognitive fulfillment. Somewhere around the age of forty, the level of frustration mounts to the motivation point. By this age, the love and belongingness needs (child bearing and so forth) have been relieved or satiated. It is at this point that the suppressed cognitive needs (as expressed in esteem, careers, and self-actualization) indicated at age fourteen, bubble to the surface.⁹

Furthermore, the young woman who makes the choice to try for a career and sacrifice her peers' esteem often follows this pattern:

The girl who persists in successful academic competition has in some way decided that the reward is great enough for her to gamble with peer acceptance. For the majority of girls, excelling in academics gets to be threatening to social prestige. Some girls know what they are doing. It is the public quality of success which is probably most threatening. In addition to fears of being rejected by their peers, when girls perceive that successful competition is based on aggression, a personal quality identified with boys, their feminine self-percept may be jeopardized if they continue their effort to achieve.¹⁰

The intelligent young woman is often in a position of living a double life. Sometimes she will feign stupidity in order to avoid facing the conflict brought on by fear of success. If she is anxious to succeed academically, she will nonetheless be afraid to lay claim publicly to the rewards given by society to achieving students. In the United States in 1971, 50% of all high school diplomas were awarded to women. Yet 75% of all qualified students who did not get to university were also women.¹¹

In Canada we also have indication that adolescent girls lose interest in schooling at a more accelerated rate than their male counterparts. In 1970-71 a study showed that from the ages of six to fifteen, approximately the same percentage of girls as boys in that aged population attended secondary schools; that is 97.8% of the female population and 97.7% of the male population. However, from the age of sixteen onwards there is a difference in trends in full-time secondary school attendance. At the age of seventeen, only 69.5% of the male population and 64.2% of the female population attended school. At eighteen this is further reduced to 38.2% of the males and 26.9% of the females. While it is of course notable that a large segment of the total population does not complete high school, it is also clear that girls drop out more than boys. While a larger percentage of the male than female populations in this age group continued in high school beyond the 9th grade, a larger percentage of women who continued graduated in 1971.¹² In that year, only 69% of the males in the graduating classes in Canada graduated while 77.6% of the females did.¹³

At the university level the total number of undergraduates has

tripled in the decade 1961-71; in addition, the total percentage of the related age population at the university doubled in that period.¹⁴ In 1961, 3.3% of the women in the university age group attended university while in 1971, 9.8% of the women in this age group attended university.¹⁵ This looks very hopeful if we forget that 77.6% of the available women graduated from high school. Surely more than 9.8% were qualified to continue? For the male population in that age group, the figures in that decade moved from 10.2% in 1961 to 17.4% in 1971. Yet the difference between male university attendance and the 69% of the male high school graduates is slight compared to the greater discrepancy in the case of women. Furthermore, and totally out of line with the high school figures, which show a higher drop-out rate for women than for men after the age of fifteen, we see that only 37.3% of all undergraduates in Canadian Universities in 1970-71 were women.¹⁶ At the Doctoral level, 26/321 or 8% of the Ph.D.'s awarded in Canada in 1961-62 went to women. In 1970-71, 151/1625 or 9.2% of the Ph.D.'s awarded in Canada were awarded to women. So, although the total number of Ph.D.'s has increased five-fold, the percentage of them awarded to women has barely changed.¹⁷

It might be argued here that universities are not the only post-secondary educational institutions in Canada. This is true. However, the figures for women in the non-university setting are no more encouraging. In 1960-61, 2.9% of the males in the 18-21 age group continued full-time in non-university institutions; in that year 7.1% of the women in that same age group attended these institutions. However, in 1970-71 there was a change in trends - 7.6% of the males in the 18-21 age group were continuing at this level where only 7.4% of the females were.¹⁸ That is, in that decade the attendance of women in the relevant age group only increased .3%. Finally, in 1960-61, 70.8% of the students in post-secondary non-university level institutions in Canada were women, while in 1970-71 this has dropped to 49.4% of the student body.¹⁹

ii. two proto-typical female career patterns

I would now like to suggest that there are still two prevalent kinds of life-choices made by women after they have finished their secondary education. I will label them *Exhibit A* and *Exhibit B*. Exhibit A is found among that vast number of people who do not go on to university. Statistics tell us that in Canada it is likely that she will work from the ages of twenty to twenty-four, will leave the labor force to start a family and might return at age thirty-five, or wait until she is forty-five to forty-nine.²⁰ The predominant occupations for her will be: secretary, typist, telephone operator, housekeeper, domestic, waitress and hairdresser.²¹ Although our culture steadfastly denies this, even the woman who chooses the option of the

traditional female-work-and-home-making cycle in our society might find out that motherhood is an ambivalent role. She might also be shocked to find that although mothering is both demanding and rewarding, it is a role which atrophies when done best. That is, the mother who realizes and encourages her child's autonomy might be doing the best job. However, very often she is in the lonely position of depending on others for confirmation of her self-esteem, and our society puts enormous evaluative pressure on the parent. Childrearing is a role in which women make heavy investments and in which success is gauged through the success of the children. Living for children means living through children, and often crippling them and failing in the task.²² If the mother is anxious to work, to spend some of her time in an adult milieu, Dr. Spock will tell her:

Some mothers have to work for a living. Usually their children turn out all right, because some reasonably good arrangement is made for their care. But others grow up neglected and maladjusted. It would save money in the end if the government paid a comfortable allowance to all mothers who would otherwise be compelled to work. You can think of it this way: useful, well-adjusted citizens are the most valuable possessions a country has, and good mother care is the surest way to produce them. It doesn't make sense to let mothers go to work, making dresses in a factory or tapping typewriters in an office, and have them pay other people to do a poorer job of bringing up their children.²³

Dr. Spock goes on to exhort his women readers with this pitch:

If a mother realizes clearly how vital this kind of care is to the small child, it may make it easier for her to decide that the extra money she might earn, or the satisfaction she might receive from an outside job, is not so important, after all.²⁴

Thus, if the mother has been a "good" junior high school student, she will have been socialized into being a good mother according to Dr. Spock's lights. Although Dr. Spock has since recanted somewhat on the views he expressed in 1946 after the war, the book is still sold in the edition quoted. Interestingly enough, statistical reports tell us that the accommodating mother is most influential in perpetuating her role-concept in her female children. In a recent study on attitudes, 73% of the working mothers polled saw employment as a good option for their own daughters, as opposed to only 62% of the unemployed mothers. Working mothers did not see marriage either as a career in itself or as a guarantor of status in society.²⁵

The real "crunch" comes when *Exhibit A* approaches menopause. Her children have ceased to need her full attention, she has not developed her own work skills, and might find at the age of forty-five that, with one-third of her life left, she has nothing to do. This dilemma is well recognized in a pamphlet put out by the Ayerst-McKenna drug company, entitled *The Change of Life and You*:

Now is the time to dust off dormant skills, exploit or enjoy those postponed hobbies, explore community activities, and perhaps even take a part- or full-time job. There is a wide world of ideas from which to

choose. Try for instance, a new recipe, a new knitting or sewing project, a new hobby-craft . . . from a kit perhaps. Make something new for your home; slip covers, draperies, hooked rugs or braided mats, new bed spreads or blanket covers. Invite some new friends for dinner. Go to concerts, see new plays or movies. Try a new hairdo . . . all this may do wonders for the morale and give you an instant 'new look'. . . . You have at last reached a new maturity. The children are grown up, perhaps they are even having or about to have families of their own. You are at last emancipated from the mothering details of wiping, drying, feeding. Your husband is in his prime and his career and his life patterns are probably well established. Whatever struggles you shared with him in finding his niche are over. You, yourself, know your own mind. You now know what clothes suit you best, what you like in a home, what your favorite entertainment is. Uncertainties are behind you. You know what you like, who you are.²⁶

The identity of a woman of fifty who has lived through some very basic human experiences is reduced here to her taste in clothes (wasn't "Barbie" really a preparation for this?), her taste in interior decoration, and whether she prefers bridge to canasta. She is exhorted to enjoy a maturity which she has not been allowed to achieve; but it is defined to her as replaying the childhood games of house and glamour that she should have outgrown many decades before. It is interesting and perhaps chilling to note that —

. . . by far the greatest hazards of menopause are psychogenic or culturally induced, and these are not so simply dispelled by a few pills. A psychiatrist working in China reported to me that she never had seen a menopausal psychosis in a Chinese woman. This she attributed to the fact that in China the older woman has a secure and coveted position. Unlike the situation of older women in our society, she acquires an added dignity and power at this time. This would indicate that menopause disturbances are largely psychogenic.²⁷

It would seem, then, that the young woman who innocently opts for the low-conflict role of wife-mother very often is simply deferring the confrontation. She is setting herself up for a crisis by repressing her ambivalence to the role of mother; and she is also setting herself up for a real dilemma when she approaches middle age. I think the dilemma is beautifully expressed in a short poem written by a student of mine, a woman in her forties who came back to school when her children had grown up:

Letting Go

*Hush my baby, do not fear
Mommy won't leave you, she will be near
She will hold you close, not let you fret
Won't let go—no, not yet.*

*Mommies must not go away
They must watch their children play
"Catch me, dress me, tuck me in,
Put a band-aid on my chin."*

*Little girl, little girl, do you know
What makes dogs and green grass grow?
This is a hat, that is a car,
Tomorrow is near, the moon is far.*

*We have been on ferris wheels, boats and trains
Learned that horses are steered with reins —
No easy task it is to know
When to hold tight, when to let go.²⁸*

When I read this poem to a class, only the mature women in the course realized that it was written from the point of view of the mother. The students thought it was about their problems in breaking their dependency needs in this most pleasurable, poignant and yet delicate of relationships.

Exhibit B goes to university for various reasons. Often her going is predicated on what is known as "in case" education. She might, it is thought, sometime suffer any number of personal tragedies: spinsterhood, widowhood, a sick husband, a husband who runs off with the babysitter, or a husband who does not make what the middle class understands as a "living." It is very difficult in a culture such as ours, which emphasizes instant gratification, to proceed with arduous intellectual projects on the premise of "in case." When she is in university, it is dubious that she will receive counsel on her earning potential. Probably she will not be told that in 1970 only 7% of the women who worked in the United States earned more than \$10,000, while over 40% of the working men did.²⁹ Most likely, she will be counselled into a "compassionate" profession such as nursing, elementary school teaching, dietetics, home economics, or social work.³⁰ In these jobs she will macrocosmically parallel the work of *Exhibit A*. However, rather than being a housekeeper for a family, she will be one for society at large. I am not arguing here that these jobs are not gratifying and useful in themselves; but they are conceptualized in a very limiting and stereotyped manner. In Canada, a country rich in natural resources, the basic professions women are counselled into deal only with human resources and thus do not yield much income. The lack of positive encouragement into a diversity of choices creates for women what the *Harvard Report* of 1970 describes as a "'Climate of unexpectation'; fear of discrimination, awareness of their real difficulties in working out career patterns and the assumption on the part of some faculty members that women don't 'pan out' contribute to the hidden sexist curriculum in our post-secondary institutions."³¹

Exhibit B will find many institutional barriers which make it difficult for women to survive, much less achieve, in the university environment. There are often different admissions requirements for women, as compared to those for men. Some programs are even characterized as "inappropriate" for women and advertised ex-

clusively to men. Furthermore, while indubitably outstanding achievers of both sexes do indeed get admitted into university, studies have shown that on the lower end of the academic scale, men are markedly preferred over women. An example of this practice is Princeton University where in 1970, 22% of the male applicants were accepted and only 14% of the female applicants were. Furthermore, 97% of the female applicants had high school leaving averages greater than B plus, while only 86.5% of the male applicants had left with marks above this average. Princeton defends its quota system and will continue it because the university claims that women select different course patterns from men. More women would necessitate extensive faculty changes.³³ Financial aid studies have indicated that although as many scholarships in Canada are awarded to women as to men, men get more dollars.³³ In an American study in 1972, it was shown that while men receive almost twice as much money in scholarships as women do, women receive twice as much money in loans.³⁴ Most financial aid is restricted to full-time students, and often women's lifestyles are more conducive to part-time study. Aid is never provided for childcare, although married men are often given consideration for dependents.³⁵ Very often, post-secondary institutions provide more part-time employment for men than for women. In an American study in 1972, it was shown that in the university, 64% of the men had part-time employment in fields related to their studies and that only 49% of the women with part-time jobs had this option. Thus, men got more on-the-job training than women and consequently were ultimately more employable.³⁶

Universities prohibiting the transfer of credits can be discouraging to women whose mobility is often due to their husbands' career patterns. The absurd rivalry between what are usually accredited institutions, and their mistrust of each other, have been a great barrier to the completion of studies for many women. Often an age limit is imposed upon applicants. Thus, if *Exhibit A* does want to return to school at age forty-five, she might be discouraged from many programs although she has almost twenty years of work ahead of her after her first degree. The time-tabling of a full-time, uninterrupted study sequence is often discriminatory against women:

Higher education, at all levels, must cease its current punishment of failure to follow an academic pattern consecutive in time and specialized in content, if able women are to contribute fully to the future. Far from damaging the excellence of education, an acceptance that the intellectually productive periods in a woman's life may be different from those of a man will produce a response from the feminine student to her perceptors that is impossible when that student is forced into an ill-fitting masculine mold. We can accept the different life patterns of men and women while rewarding them equally for planned, purposeful progression.³⁷

Exhibit B will also have many dispositional barriers formed during the developmental educational process recorded above, and they

will be further reinforced by the university which is a traditional male stronghold. Women students are presented with very few female role models in their chosen fields of interest. A recent study of co-ed American universities demonstrates that the average student in a four year program at such a university has only a 5.5% chance of having even one woman teacher in the course of study.³⁸ On the administrative level, of the 141 women college presidents in the USA, 133 are members of religious orders.³⁹ Thus, in the normal course of events, women students in coeducational universities are unlikely to be faced with many examples of opportunity. The importance of role-models has been very convincingly expressed, I think, by a student at Dawson College's New School:

It is so important, I think, for a girl to have a wide variety of successful women to emulate. Emulation is something which occurs constantly. Whether or not one is aware of it, he/she is always choosing characteristics they would like to have, people they would like to be like. It is a matter of picking and choosing bits that will combine to form a whole. As I have stated before, the problem is a lack of inspiring women. We learn very little about women in our schools, we cover few women writers and artists and do not learn of women living in interesting and fulfilling ways. It is so important for young women who intend to do something like paint or write to be able to identify with other successful women. The more women artists Jane is aware of, the more confident she will be of her own competence.⁴⁰

If the young woman forges ahead to graduate school, she will be more likely than her male colleagues to report emotional strain (34% of the women versus 25% of the men) sufficient to warrant consideration of dropping out of school.⁴¹ Teaching styles are also aimed at males. College teaching often rewards aggressiveness; that is, the student whose presence is made known by persistent questioning or response to the professor is often rewarded and reinforced by extra professorial attention. Males have been socialized from the days of their baby golfsuits for this role. Since university women often feel so ambivalent about their role, they often conclude that "they lack ability in various fields when, in fact, what they lack is the ability to structure their thinking in the way men have defined."⁴²

iii. the disciplines in the male academy

The concept of the disciplines upon which the university is built assumes that there are absolute and innate truths and methods on which curriculum must be formed. Yet, the traditional disciplines can also be seen as schema and categories projected onto an empirically conceived of world by a male-dominated culture. For example, with language as our academic base of expression, we are often unaware of the biases implicit in our language. Most students use *Roger's Pocket Thesaurus* which is based on the larger Crowell edition first published in 1923. Here they will find that the word "manly" is

cross-referenced under "adolescent," "strong," "male," "brave," and "upright." "Womanly" has no cross-referencing at all, and "woman" itself is followed by "woman hater," "womanhood," and "woman-kind" as well as "womanly." Under these headings there are sixty-six synonyms relating to males and only thirty-eight relating to females. The word "manly" is given as a synonym for "manful, masculine, male, virile and in the prime of manhood." "Womanly" is used as an adjective for the female adolescent and, as it turns out, precedes the word "marriageable." The language itself perpetuates the image of woman as weak and unimportant while men are very important and associated with both power and virtue.⁴³ If, as Wittgenstein says, "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world,"⁴⁴ our language itself limits the image of women and their expectancy of self-determination. Without an awareness of the limitations our speech enforces on our imagination, we cannot hope to reform our institutions into an encouraging environment for women.

History as a discipline defined within the academic structure has been strictly circumscribed by the male vision. As early as 1928, Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. wrote:

An examination of the standard histories of the United States, and of history textbooks in use in our schools raises the pertinent question whether women have ever made any contributions to American national progress that are worthy of record. If the silence of our historians is taken to mean anything, it would appear that one half of our population have been negligible factors in our country's history. Before accepting the truth of this assumption, the facts of our history need to be raked over from a new point of view. It should not be forgotten that all of our great historians have been men and were likely therefore to be influenced by a sex interpretation of history all the more potent because unconscious.⁴⁵

In the past two years there has been an encouraging increase in the number of projects undertaken in historical research on women. However, I am not satisfied that we are getting to the heart of the matter at all. It seems to me that more often than not, scholars are proceeding with the same methodology, preconceptions and criteria of validity that have been established to study men's history. For example, in a recent article, a young historian asks, "Did women have a Renaissance?" We have all learned that the Renaissance represents the "rebirth" of civilization, Humanism, and the proliferation of great works of Art. Yet, it is this historian's argument that this period also sealed woman's fate politically, intellectually and economically. For, she argues, it was the era of the "bourgeoisification" of society; at this time the nuclear family, with its concomitant oppression of women, became the most valuable economic resource for an aspiring male. So, what was a moment of glory for men might have been a tragic event in the history of women in Western Civilization. The author goes on to say:

Such questions would never have been asked within the context of tradi-

tional political and economic history, nor would they emerge in ordinary considerations of intellectual 'revolutions.' The Renaissance becomes problematic only as a question of social history, and it is precisely that field with which the women's movement has merged to create a wholly new way to regard the human past. The conjunction of women's studies and social history provides a place for the historian who wants to study the lives of unfamous, unremarkable, and supremely human events.⁴⁶

Whether or not one agrees with the assertions of this historian, it is clear that what Schlesinger sees as a cause, that is the sex bias of male historians, is not only a contributor to the lack of research data, but the very bias which perpetuates as criteria for historical research concepts of objectivity and cognitive factuality which preclude significance being attributed to the kinds of questions posed here. For example, little work has been done on the history of birth control, sexual reform movements, child raising and courtship.⁴⁷ Because these topics involve material of a subjective nature, there is not yet a serious methodology which can, on its own, take into account and weigh such information. In order to study birth control, for instance, one must have some understanding of physiology, endocrinology, social courting practices, psychology. However, our disciplines in the university tend to be rigidly defined.

There must be a total rethinking of curriculum and the foundations of these disciplines in order to provide the information and methodology required for the pursuit of these topics and also to recognize their viability. Perhaps our failure to deal with these basic issues is the reason that although there are presently over 1,000 Women's Studies courses being given in North American universities, there are very few undergraduate majors or graduate degrees given in the field. Furthermore, while single university departments based on specific disciplines might be amenable to giving "women's courses" under their aegis ("Woman and Literature," etc.), I am doubtful that universities, financed and managed by males, are going to be eager to share the wealth with women on a more equitable basis by creating Women's Studies departments. It seems to me that at present Women's Studies is being used by male-dominated universities as a trade-off against greater and more demanding confrontation. I would like to argue that, if the foundations of the disciplines are re-evaluated vis-à-vis their relation to the subject of women, there must result some change which is long overdue in the educational structure. The act of analytic reconsideration itself will cause a change of consciousness. This change of consciousness will permeate the attitudes of the entire educational structure. For, it is important to stress that Women's Studies is not only a matter of subject, but it is even more an attitude. Thus, Home Economics, traditionally a course for women, is not necessarily Women's Studies, but could be seen more as a course in the survival tactics which perpetuate the oppressive male-dominated society. It is also essential that in re-examining the foundations of

our educational precepts we dispense with the fixed notion that all cognitive material is the domain of men and all affectively oriented material belongs with women. While it is important to examine the roots of this role orientation and also essential to approach it openly, we might take into account Jung's notion that the most enriched person is the one who can explore both the animus and anima within the self.

iv. towards women's studies programs in the universities

There are, then, three general conditions necessary for the continuation and development of Women's Studies programs: a fund of empirical data must be collected on women; new theories must be formulated and tried in order to conceptualize both the old and new knowledge of women; and there must be an effort to create a balance of knowledge in the presentation of the sexes within the existing disciplines.⁴⁸ Additionally, it is important to explore and formulate structures which will embrace the multidisciplinary approach to Women's Studies. The necessity for this has been well described by the American scholar, Sheila Tobias, in her description of a course which she gave on the "Sociology of Women," in which she touched on literature, economics, law, history and psychology:

I found myself often in the course of a single sentence touching on a number of disciplines. More than that, I was teaching the tools of the several fields . . . statistics, literary exegesis, macroeconomics. I am no genius. It is merely that one masters what one needs to make sense of the material, and in three years I have mastered large parts of quite a number of fields.⁴⁹

Pedagogy or teaching methodology are subjects taken for granted and rarely discussed in themselves or as criteria for staff-retention in the university context. It is naively assumed that people with extensive scholarly training will automatically know how to formulate meaningful courses of study and teach them well. This, as any student can testify, is far from the truth. Perhaps Women's Studies will provide these institutions with an occasion for self-examination, and for the over-due analysis of the rigid categorization of knowledge in the traditional disciplines. While university departments, which are for the most part organized along disciplinary lines, are often very serious about defending the "integrity" of their disciplines from unwelcome poachers, this integrity is often breached by these same departments in practice and in the name of research. Women's Studies does present a great pedagogical challenge, especially to those institutions which handle their rising costs by scheduling enormous undergraduate classes. Since women are not a matter of indifference to anyone, there is often a highly charged atmosphere surrounding the study of them. Schools of Education should, I imagine, consider

formulating as part of their required curriculum for all levels of teaching, courses addressed to sex-role stereotyping, a re-evaluation of co-education, and the viability of teaching disciplines as isolated realities. It is also important to examine the effectuality of approaching knowledge from a purely cognitive set. This latter attitude has often been important in the derisory attitudes institutions have exhibited to Women's Studies, ridiculing the field as some sort of advanced crocheting course. From the point of view of pedagogy, Women's Studies provides us with an excellent opportunity to examine the effectuality of our methods of teaching and providing students with a meaningful educational experience. There has already been some preliminary work done on the effects of Women's Studies courses on students' attitudes. Some of the effects reported by women were:

Increased valuation of their own intellectual potential; increased awareness of male orientation of other courses; increased awareness of faculty attitudes; more positive feelings about personal potential; reorientation of attitudes and views; depression; anger; increased awareness of male chauvinism; feeling of the studies having a personal relevance.⁵⁰

Men's effects were reported as having to experience being in a position of non-authority and non-reference; they expressed surprise that they find it so difficult to identify with oppressed women; they are frustrated at their failure to find solutions which work to everyone's advantage.⁵¹

My own personal experience in teaching Women's Studies over the past four years at both the university and collegial levels makes me want to pool my experience with others and help formulate some general attitudes and ways of dealing with certain problems in what can be an emotion-laden situation. We are all frail barks and cannot sustain too much public intrusion into our self-images without succumbing to strain and depression. I have always found that there is a general progression of reaction in my students: initially they are intrigued by the subject; then they become conflicted about their roles, and then angry. If they are men, they become angry at me, a woman teacher, and also at their female peers; if they are women, they become angry at men and often derisory about them. However, in those cases where I have considered the course of study to be successful, I must have radicalised those students (that is, reached the root of their attitudes and changed them). But even more than that, it is essential to show viable life alternatives to students of both sexes and all propensities. If Women's Studies, on its first encounter, is a perilous passage, we must conduct our students safely back to shore, even if to a different beach head from the one on which they started out. We can only do this, however, by learning how to create situations of minimum risk and in that way leave room for great personal expansion.

As we know, America was around a long time before Columbus, a European male, "discovered" it. So women have been around a long time before we discovered ourselves publicly. I think this discovery has given to scholarship and educational foundations a new continent to explore. We are so fortunate to be alive now, at this moment in history. We are a community of scholars, but even more one of men and women, with a continent to explore both within and outside of ourselves. We are presented with a refreshing opportunity to reexamine and shape the future of the educational premises on which our society will proceed.

footnotes

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