

Patricia Sexton.
WOMEN IN EDUCATION.
Bloomington, Indiana:
Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1976.
189 pp. \$5.00.

Patricia Sexton's *Women in Education* is one of a five-volume series entitled "Perspectives in American Education", published by Phi Delta Kappa in 1976 as a tribute to the American Bicentennial. In the introduction to *Women in Education*, Lowell Rose predicts that all five books in the series "should be read and heeded as valued guidelines for the years ahead, hopefully at least another two hundred" (p. vi).

Two serious shortcomings prevent *Women in Education* from meeting these expectations. The first difficulty rests with the analysis of the elementary and secondary school scene. Sexton believes that sexual discrimination in education begins in earnest only in the later years — with higher education, professional schools, and vocational training. The elementary and secondary schools she finds basically egalitarian in their treatment of boys and girls. Students of both sexes in "modern elementary and secondary schools . . . compete on an equal footing and . . . pursue essentially the same courses of study" (p. 5). This equal footing thesis is controverted by guidance counselling in the schools, text-book images of females and males, differential social standards for girls and boys, and district academic expectations on the part of teachers. If Sexton is correct, it must follow that none of these features is sufficiently important to detract from the essentially egalitarian standards of the school. And indeed, the author's position on this issue is that stereotyping "in texts or teacher behavior is discriminatory and lamentable where it occurs, but perhaps not very influential" (p. 63). Sexton fails to recognize the socialization trends of the compulsory education years as a foundation for the less subtle discrimination of later years. That is, she does not take cognizance of the link between elementary and secondary schools which train girls in "proper" female behaviour — submissive, unassertive, supportive, dependent, nurturant behaviour — and higher education or professional schools which deny women admission and eventually job opportunities on the grounds that they are not sufficiently independent or aggressive and are too closely bound by family ties.

The second serious problem is unfortunately not unique to *Women in Education*. Sexton shares with many writers a view of women's roles and contributions to society which is at once short sighted and denigrating. Historically, a low value has generally been placed on the work of women, and Sexton's book reflects this tradition.

According to Sexton,

Historically, the education of women has been fashioned around the tasks and roles they perform in the society, just as male education has been. The roles of women, almost to the present day, have been limited chiefly to domestic ones — the bearing and rearing of children, cooking, making clothing, and keeping house. It has been assumed that these domestic tasks are so simple to perform, and so easy to pass on from one generation to the next, that they require no special preparation, knowledge, or schooling. Given these roles and these views of the limited complexity — and social contribution — of the roles, it is little wonder that the education of women, almost until the modern period, has been so universally neglected (p. 23).

It is not clear whether Sexton regards limited societal options as a justification for similarly limited educational options for women. Neither is it clear whether she agrees that the typically female roles — rearing children, cooking, sewing — are indeed so simple “that they require no special preparation, knowledge, or schooling.” Evidence that Sexton does devalue the traditional female roles is her suggestion that improved domestic curriculum should diverge sharply “from the traditional home economics courses which often teach *virtually obsolete skills, such as sewing and dressmaking*” (p. 65, my italics). One wonders what Patricia Sexton wears!

Educational authorities believed, but believed falsely, that the traditional tasks of women had been adequately handled in the schools. Schools have typically relegated the acquisition of competence in child care, which is one of the most important roles in any community, entirely to chance. They have typically provided no instruction in family planning, birth control, or realistic family budgeting. Although marriage has traditionally been considered the ultimate goal of all females, no school curricula deal with the terms or the legal status of the marriage contract. Although most females are expected to fulfil themselves through child bearing and child raising, our schools utter not a syllable about the physiological and psychological concomitants of these activities.

The integrity of the book is only partially salvaged by a section dealing with the historical background of women in education and another which summarizes recent legislation relating to women's rights, both of which are interesting and informative. Since it was not until February, 1974, that the prohibition of female membership in Phi Delta Kappa was terminated, perhaps we may expect bigger and better things from this society in the ensuing years. I cannot, however, recommend their *Women in Education* to educators, administrators, or women in general.

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