

*speaking
clearly*

THE WOMAN STUDENT

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Although most educational leaders are aware of inequality of opportunity for women in higher education, many find it hard to get excited about it. The Newman Task Force concluded that, "Our study found that discrimination against women, in contrast to that against minorities, is still overt and socially acceptable within the academic community" (1971, p 80). And so it is.

Research is quite clear that women are still underrepresented in the college-going population, with the national ratio of entering freshmen men to women now standing at ⁵⁴55 men to ⁴⁶45 women (ACE, 1971). The bastions of male predominance at the undergraduate level are the private universities and the public community colleges, where the ratio is 60 men to 40 women among entering students. It is interesting that the greatest imbalance should exist in the most selective and the least selective institutions.

Open Door Colleges

Open door colleges can hardly be accused of practicing discrimination in their admission policies. Discrimination occurs as a byproduct of the fact that community colleges serve large numbers of students from the lower socioeconomic levels. It is in this conservative segment of society that women's roles are most clearly stereotyped. Mothers who have attended college express no difference in their desire for college educations for sons and daughters--98 percent want college for their sons and 97 percent for their daughters. Mothers with a grade school education, however, are more likely to want college for their sons (73 percent) than for their daughters (60 percent)(Froomkin, 1970).

Not surprisingly the largest reservoir of academically well-qualified young people who are not now attending college consists of women from the lower socioeconomic levels. Whereas 25 percent of the high-ability (top-quarter) males from the lowest socioeconomic quarter fail to enter college, 40 percent of their equally able sisters fail to continue their education (Cross, 1971a). Included in the low socioeconomic group are black women, but as a group, they seem to be responding more rapidly to the new opportunities for further education than are white women.

Selective Institutions

Let us now turn our attention to the other end of the continuum and see how women fare in the male dominated universities. Here the situation regarding the pool of potential students is quite different. The universities draw their students largely from high school graduates who rank in the upper-half academically and socioeconomically. Among this group, women enter college at the same rate as men. So why do we find a 60/40 male/female

ratio in universities where women able to meet both financial and academic requirements apply in sufficient numbers to create a 50-50 ratio? One need not charge out and out discrimination in admissions (although one can document blatant examples of sex discrimination rather easily). Many practices of universities--in housing, in space quotas, in departments, etc.--serve to place a ceiling on the number of women students that can be accepted. The complaint of both men and women students at selective universities that the women are "too intellectual" for the men stands as testimony to the obvious inequity of the total selection process.

Academic Ability

Although I suspect most educators know that intellectual capacity is not a sex-linked characteristic, many still feel that it is somehow more satisfying to engage the "male mind" in disciplinary enquiry than the "female mind." Interestingly enough, many professors espousing this point of view are also staunch supporters of the validity of grades as a measure of intellectual competence. Just how they explain the fact that, by their own judgment and standards, women are better students than men is something of a mystery. From grade school through college women receive markedly better grades than men.

Grades are coming increasingly under fire as a measure of academic prowess, however, and critics often point to the lack of intellectual excitement present in the conscientious conforming grade-getter, which is the frequent stereotype of high school and college women. Chauvinists

of both sexes feel that men are better able to deal with big ideas and abstractions, whereas women handle day-to-day problems in a more practical manner. But research measuring the personality trait called "intellectuality" fails to support the stereotype. Evidence indicates that women are slightly more interested in aesthetics and in working with ideas and abstractions whereas men are more interested in theory and the use of the scientific method (Cross, 1971a). While cultural expectations may push males and females toward somewhat different emphases in academic choices and behavior, a careful review of the research available on academic interests, abilities, and personality characteristics indicates that there are not important differences between men and women in their potential for academic accomplishment.

GRADUATE WOMEN

Graduate study poses different problems for women than those encountered at the undergraduate level, and they sharpen the conflicts between the traditional roles of women and alternative roles. Lewis (1968) succinctly presents the arguments that are frequently heard.

Many graduate and professional programs for which members of both sexes commonly apply tend to discriminate against women, and many authorities believe they have good reason. Women are poorer bets than men to finish such a program, and those who do are less likely to use their education productively. A university feels some obligation not only to educate individuals but also to be of benefit to society; thus, if an admissions committee must choose between a capable man and a capable woman for a place in its program, the choice can logically be made in favor of the man. The woman who is thereby rejected may, of course, be the exception who would have finished and who would have made a worthwhile contribution, but her more casual sisters have prejudiced the committee against her (p 212).

The argument appeals to many rational men and women everywhere, and yet it is a little akin to setting out to solve discrimination against blacks by observing that society has tolerated conditions that have resulted in very few blacks completing graduate study and making

professional contributions. Since, the argument would continue, they have not demonstrated professional productivity in the past, they seem poor bets for the future. But there are research reasons as well as moral reasons for not accepting the three major arguments summarized by Lewis at face value.

Differential Admissions

In the first place, women cannot afford the luxury of indignation over the rejection of women who are as capable as the men who are accepted, until the problem of the rejection of women with superior academic qualifications is solved. An increasingly popular method of dealing with the question of discrimination against women is to base acceptances on the proportion of women applying. Thus at Berkeley, 31 percent of the applicants are women and 29 percent of the acceptances are granted to women. On the surface that doesn't look too bad until one considers the fact that women who get as far as making an application for graduate study at Berkeley are highly self-selected. Under the equal rejection rate system, a department may be--and usually is--accepting men with poorer credentials than some of the rejected women.

On the whole, women would be better off if judged solely by their credentials than they are when admitted under quota systems. Lannholm's (1968) survey of admissions policies showed that most departments reported that they assign the greatest weight to the undergraduate record. And women do have the edge on grades.

Completion Rates

The second portion of the argument for differential acceptance rates to graduate school has to do with the likelihood of the candidate completing the degree. The argument is that so many things can happen to interfere with a woman's commitment to graduate study--marriage, pregnancy, moving from the area when her husband moves, etc.--that a man is a better bet for a long-range contribution to society.

Actually, there is very little information available on completion rates for men and women. On the surface at least, research indicates that when all fields of study are combined women are somewhat more likely to drop out of graduate school and they are also slower in completing their degrees. But since fields that attract women, such as humanities and education, have significantly lower and slower completion rates than the sciences for example, its hard to tell whether it is the subject or the women that are responsible for the statistics. The lone study that does make comparisons between retention and completion rates for men and women in the same field of study shows much less difference than is commonly assumed.

Productivity

The third aspect of the rationale presented by Lewis is that even when women do get their degrees, they are less productive than men. But the charge that women who receive doctor's degrees do not use their advanced training is no longer true, if indeed it ever was, and the figures indicate that it may now be dropped as an argument deserving serious consideration.

Research from several sources reveals truly startling numbers of women Ph.D.recipients working ten years after receiving their degrees--over 90% and most of these women work full time. So women are doing something with their training.

The status of measures of Ph.D.productivity, whether for men or women, is so dismal that I have some conscience about lending respectability by repeating mere counts of numbers of articles and books published, but the evidence here is that it seems to depend more on the field of study than upon the sex of the scholar. Scientists are highly productive in terms of articles published; those getting degrees in education are not. This fact leads rather naturally to the finding that men publish more than women. There is also evidence, it must be admitted, that men are more interested in research and publication, whereas women express more interest in teaching. It is a moot question whether writing books and articles is more "productive" than teaching students. And a yet to be explored research area is whether there is any difference between the teaching ability of men and women. We know that women teachers express greater interest in student evaluation than men. Whether that is due to weaker egos, greater need for improvement, or more confidence in the result, we don't know.

ADULT WOMEN

The segment of the population with the greatest potential for enormous expansion consists of mature women. The typical woman today has sent her youngest child off to school by the time she is 35, and she faces some 30 years of productive work life but reduced home

And this problem is exaggerated for women who generally move, not at their convenience, but when husbands have completed a given segment of education.

Related to the old fashioned notion that education is reserved for the young who can spend full-time at it are a host of practices and requirements that are grounded more in tradition than in logic. Why should scholarship and loan aid be so commonly restricted to the use of full-time students? Do residency requirements and regulations calling for continuous enrollment serve a sufficiently valuable purpose that we are justified in shutting out students whose life circumstances prohibit meeting them? Why must the size of an individual's academic load be determined by the institution rather than by the learner?

One of the great unsolved problems of education is the transfer of our excessive concern with procedures to more realistic concerns about purposes and outcomes. We have a way of defining education in terms of the pathways traversed rather than the ends reached. Most of the problems of women students--and many men as well--could be solved if we permitted them to reach defined goals via open-ended interconnected pathways that suit their life style rather than some preconceived notion of conformity to the procedures that will bestow the proper credentials on those who follow them faithfully.

In the final analysis, the barriers to individual development through education will come down when we decide as a society that educational opportunity depends not on class stereotypes based on the color or shape of one's skin,* but upon individual needs, desires, and potential for contribution.

* Sandler's (1972) phrase.