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WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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You have chosen as your theme for this convention, A Human Community: Confrontation--Contemplation--Commitment. As I thought about this 3-C description of the human community, I could not help pondering how differently my college community of a generation ago would have been described. We could have used the 3-C theme too, but where you have confrontation we would have had conversation. Where your mood is one of contemplation, ours was one of conviviality; and where you are characterized as the committed generation we were called gloriously contented. Furthermore, our elders worried not about our upsetting the status quo, but about our too-easy conformity. But the times were terribly different. Where we hoped to join a world that we saw as returning to peace, you hope to change a world that you perceive as on the brink of multiple disasters. Yes, the times they are a-changin, and it is not only those of us over thirty who have to run just to keep in place. Individuals can ordinarily adapt to rapid social change without great strain, but our human communities--the family, the church, and the college--are in deep trouble. Our social institutions find that periods of very rapid social change place all but intolerable demands upon their slow and ponderous ways of dealing with transition. Whereas tradition and authority have been the hallmarks of society's institutions for generations, they are now becoming the question marks in a new era. The message to

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college administrators is loud and clear, and the most insistent voices are those of the students. Our institutions must change if our communities are to survive.

Like it or not, your own institutions of traditional student government are moving as slowly and with as much agony as those of the rest of the organizational world. I doubt if student leaders have ever faced more difficult times. Along with college administrators, student governments are finding it difficult to lead when their impatient constituencies appear to be rushing pell-mell toward an escalation in the rate of social reform. Frequently, and perhaps even typically, traditional student governments have been placed in the difficult role of defending the status quo. Their emphasis has been upon responsible change, and often this means a concerted effort to try to slow down the action until the wisest path can be determined. This sounds reasonable, but in the practical world of campus politics, it often means that student governments are appointing study committees while those who have a position and a conviction of the rightness of their cause have grabbed the banner and are leading the troops--or at least, are in a better position to lead than are the duly elected representatives of the students. The simple fact is that it is easier to sell a program of action than it is to promote enthusiasm for the forthcoming report of the study committee.

Is it inevitable then that those seeking responsible change are destined to be upstaged by the more militant activists? Is representative student government too slow for the rapid pace of social change on the campus? Perhaps

the SDS cries for participatory democracy really are the new signs of the times.

Lest we jump too eagerly on that moving bandwagon that advocates revolution and a completely new start over evolution and change to meet new needs, let's look at the dilemma of student governments today.

It appears to me that the representative student governments emphasize two of the C's in your theme and the militant activists group^s have the primary advantages associated with the other two. Student governments are concerned with community and contemplation; the activists are promoting confrontation and commitment. It appears that student governments have the edge on rational, representative decisions; activists have the advantage of being able to move rapidly and to appear relevant for new needs. Assuming that it would be desirable to have student leadership that is rational and representative, and rapid, and relevant--how could this new 4-R combination be brought about? As an aside, let me make clear that these are assumed virtues. As we well know, student government decisions are not always rational nor are militant demands necessarily relevant. Furthermore, when only 25% of the students vote in an election, student government is not representative, and when the tactics of the militants raise an enormous backlash, activism is not rapid. Nevertheless, there probably is sufficient agreement on the general ideas represented by these labels to make them useful as tools for analysis. The question for you, then, as organizational student leaders is how can you add relevance and rapidity to your presumed virtues of rationality and representation?

Let us look first at the problem of speed in decision making on the rapidly changing campus. The activist groups have some enormous advantages over representational government in this department. In the first place, the group members are drawn together because they believe in a common goal. Those who accept the goal are admitted to the group; those who reject it drop out. The group exists, in other words, only to pursue a common purpose. Having the ends clearly established, time can be used for consideration of the means. Student governments, on the other hand, have no common ideology. Theoretically their goal is to represent the students, and that is an elusive and difficult task. In traditional student governments the commitment is to the group, whereas for the activists it is ^{to} an ideology. For example, traditional student government considers a wide range of subjects. Members will be in the minority on some issues and will vote with the majority on others. Whatever the position, however, the elected representative remains a member of the group. Only in extreme cases would she resign. In the spontaneous activist groups, however, when members find themselves in dissent (which they frequently do) they may drop out of the group or they may leave to form their own activist group. In any case, the commitment to action of ideological groups is likely to be much greater than for representative groups. Another factor, also beginning with C, and related to campus leadership, is the matter of communication. National as well as local press and television have, without doubt, given the activist groups both the advantages and disadvantages of modern mass media. Once again, the

advantages have to do with speed, the disadvantages with inaccuracy and mis-communication. Representative government, at one time, had as its primary strength, the effectiveness of its communications network. On many campuses, that advantage no longer exists, but students leaders act as though it did. On the face of it, it would appear that traditional student government is at some disadvantage in our rapidly changing times when it comes to speed of action and of communication. If rapidity is not the R for organized student government, let's see what can be done about relevance.

During periods of rapid change, speed is clearly related to relevance. Neither programs nor people, nor institutions can remain static and be relevant to changing times. Much to the distress of some who like the world the way it is if they can't have it the way it was, the status quo cannot be maintained--not for the world, the country, nor the campus. Changes in our environment simply will not go away. Let me try to illustrate the dynamics of change by contrasting what I shall call traditional campus government with the new trends.

Some stereotypes of women's governing organizations and the individuals they represent might look like this:

1. Student governments are typically concerned with legislation to institute change, but their student constituencies have discovered the more rapid, more dramatic mass protest movements for bringing about change.

2. Student governments have been concerned with a vast and complicated network of on-campus activities; individual students interests are moving off the campus or as they put it, into the world. Tutoring the disadvantaged, protesting our foreign policy, fighting for the dignity of the black man, these are the new student activities.

3. Women student governments have traditionally been concerned with social regulations; individual students are newly concerned with academic affairs--establishing new curricula, worrying about faculty tenure, protecting freedom of speech.

Although stereotypes have as their purpose making things more black and white than they really are, there is just enough truth in these contrasts to give pause for thought.

It is perhaps obvious that leadership cannot be exercised from behind. You cannot lead by constantly resisting the suggestions that others make. To lead, says Webster, is to show the way, and to show the way, you must know where you wish to go.

Well, where do responsible students wish to go? Research shows that most students today want a more active voice in the kind of education they are getting. This desire is expressed quietly by the silent majority on questionnaires and loudly by the activists in campus confrontations. Last year, roughly 27% of the colleges in this country had protests on their campuses which were concerned with the general issue of greater student

involvement in campus governance. This is a rather dramatic increase over a 19% figure for 1965. (11).

Since you represent women on the campus, and since it appears that there is both a need and a desire for good leadership in academic reform, I would like to spend the remainder of my time this morning talking about some of the things that are not being done to make higher education relevant for women. The future lives of women are very different from the future lives of men, and I see no reason to assume that the pathways to maximum personal fulfillment for men and women are necessarily identical. In many ways, women share the problems of other minority groups. They possess no voice where the academic decisions are made. Just as blacks are rejecting the white man's perceptions of special needs, so women should probably be less content to leave all of the academic planning to men. There should be some women academic deans on co-educational campuses. There should be some leadership from women students--not only in residence halls and sororities where women gather by themselves, but on the academic planning committees where the action is.

Assuming that in the best of all possible worlds, you had an opportunity to lead in a program of academic reform, where would you start? I think I'd like to start with an objective research look at college women--their attitudes and values, their opportunities, and their hopes and aspirations. Perhaps in this way we can arrive at some well-founded conclusions about some positive directions for academic reform. The research description which I shall

present is a synthesis of the findings of numerous research projects involving national samples of students. Taken together the projects have spanned the last five years and have analyzed the questionnaire responses of nearly one-half million young people--men and women.

It is not new, but all of the research verifies the fact that college women tend to come from homes of higher socio-economic levels than do college men. Both the mothers and fathers of women are somewhat better educated and the family income for women's homes is slightly higher. Men and women go to college in equal proportions only among the higher ability and socio-economic levels. Almost any kind of handicap operates selectively so that girls are less likely than boys to attend college. When ability is questionable, i. e. among students in the lowest 40% in ability, more men than women go to college. When funds are limited, far more male than female high-ability students from low income families start college. And in middle-class families more men than women enter college (9).

In our society, parents seem to feel that it is more important for a son to go to college than for a daughter (5), and this feeling is shared by students themselves. When asked how important a college education was for a man, 94% of the college women and 83% of the men said that it was very important. Nowhere near this degree of unanimity was obtained when students were asked to rate the importance of college for a woman; only one-half of the women and one-fourth of the men ranked college equally important for a woman. Perhaps the double standard exists more in the abstract than in the concrete,

however, since when the question was changed slightly to ask how important college was for themselves, 92% of the men and 90% of the women said it was very important (13).

We know, from many research studies, that encouragement from parents bears a high relationship to college attendance. And boys are more likely to get encouragement from their parents than are girls. Almost 70% of the high school senior men who enter college report "definite encouragement from parents," compared with about 60% of the women (12).

Ideally, we profess to believe that self-actualization is a primary goal of education. Realistically, society's endorsement of greater educational opportunity for men is tacit recognition of the vocational orientation of much of higher education.

The fact that girls tend to make better grades than boys in high school may help to lower some of the barriers to college for women. There is no question that college women have much better high school records than do college men. The fact can be stated in a number of ways-- 43% of the college women graduate in the top 10% of their high school class compared with only 30% of the men (5); or in terms of grades, 67% of the women had B averages or better compared with only 45% of the men (2); or if we look at it in terms of the obstacle posed by poor grades, we might use the statistic that the proportion of boys who make it to college despite high school grades of C or lower is double that for girls--40% to 20% (2). By the time they graduate from college, however, men and women make the top grades in about equal proportions. There is still a tendency, however, for women to make somewhat higher averages since the women make the B's while the men get the C's (4).

There is some research evidence for the notion that women make better grades because they learn to be feminine, which means that in our society they learn to be cooperative and to defer to the more authoritative males and adults. Girls, more than boys, are likely to conform to the adult culture. Fifty-five percent of the high school senior girls but only 35% of the boys care quite a lot what their teachers think of them (3); about the same proportion--half of the college women but only one-third of the men say that it is very important to satisfy their parent's wishes (5).

From high school into college, women, generally, seem to feel less alienated from the adult culture than do men. In one study at the Center for Higher Education of the University of California college students at twelve colleges showed a low rate of agreement with the statement that "it is hard for a person over thirty to really understand the young person today." On an average, less than a fourth of the women on the twelve campuses agreed and less than a third of the men, but on every campus, men were more likely to express the feelings of alienation implied in the statement than were women (8) and this finding appears consistent with other research data.

Now the research which pictures women as more closely and positively identified with teachers and parents leads some to believe that women are more content with the status quo and less likely to spark social reforms. On the contrary, college women tend to be more liberal than the men, and while men appear to be the leaders in the protest movements, women constitute the greater numbers. In the original Free Speech Movement at

Berkeley, women were over represented in the demonstrating students by 13%. Whereas women made up about 39% of the Berkeley student body, they constituted 52% of the FSM students (14). I don't think this disproportionate number of women demonstrators is accidental nor is it peculiar to Berkeley. When we asked students on twelve campuses what role they would most likely play if there were a student protest on their campus regarding the support of civil rights, the percentage of women stating that they would be actively involved exceeded the percentage for men on every campus (8). With one college exception, the same results emerged when the issue for protest was the support of greater student involvement in determining campus policy. I suspect that women student leaders will not be nearly as surprised as researchers to learn that when the issue was opposition to dormitory regulations, it was the men who were more willing to become actively involved. Generally speaking, however, students were not as willing to protest dormitory regulations as they were civil rights issues, the Vietnam war, or student involvement in campus policy. There are logical and consistent explanations for these findings, I think. In the first place, we have already mentioned the fact that women who enter college are more likely to come from the more liberal backgrounds associated with the higher socio-economic status. This, coupled with the fact that women, particularly, show a camaraderie with the adult culture makes it highly likely that the protests are a reflection of liberal views rather than adolescent rebellion. One must note the fact, too, that civil rights, Vietnam, free speech, etc. are values espoused by the faculty

culture. In this sense, the protests are in support of the adult culture with which college men and women identify and not in opposition to it. The tendency of women to show greater reluctance in demonstrating about dormitory regulations is, I think, a different issue, and it has to do with the double standard.

The double standard for men and women in our society is a fact of life which is accepted by most college women. Parents have different expectations and different concerns regarding sons and daughters, and the research contains some beautiful examples. According to students, parents keep a much more watchful eye on the social behaviors of girls. High school girls, as a group, reported less autonomy than boys in matters of dating, friendships, and curfews; boys had less autonomy than girls in the matters of homework and television viewing, and there was not much difference on home chores nor on high school courses selected⁽³⁾. One gathers that girls and their generally conscientious approach to grades do not pose quite the problem at homework and TV viewing time that the boys do, but that parents are more concerned about the activities of the girls when they are not under the parental eye. And so the feminine and masculine roles have rather deep roots in the parental culture.

Let's take a look now at the impact of some of the cultural role expectations on the ideas and values of the college woman.

It is in the realm of feminine and masculine roles that educational expectations of men and women show up most clearly. Whereas men think of vocational or professional preparation as the most important

reason for college, women show more diversity in purpose. Roughly one-fourth of the women say that the most important reason for a woman to go to college is to secure vocational training; another 25% state that they think women go to college with the aim of meeting the right person to marry, and the objective of developing the mind and intellectual abilities attracts another quarter of the women. These multiple purposes seem to reflect the uncertain futures of college women whose life goals are surrounded with an elaborate set of "ifs."

Sociologist Shirley Angrist suggests that woman lives by adjusting to and preparing for contingencies (1). Among the contingencies for college women are the following:

- 1) Although most women hope and expect to marry, remaining single is a possibility, and college women must face the contingency of preparing for a life career that is financially adequate and personally rewarding.
- 2) Even with marriage, most women expect to work at some time in their lives--perhaps for the economic necessity of helping a husband to complete his education, maybe to put children through college, possibly to have a vacation home, a new car, or some other luxury which one salary will not provide.
- 3) After marriage, temporary or permanent childlessness becomes a possibility. Work may be seen as a way of filling free time or adding purpose to life. In any case, children grow up and leave home, and

3) (continued)

women must be prepared to find satisfactions outside of motherhood.

These may be cultural pursuits, volunteer activities, or gainful employment.

4) Exmarriage like nonmarriage, is always a possibility. Divorce or widowhood may require the woman to be the breadwinner, not only for herself but perhaps for children as well.

Various contingencies gain ascendancy at different periods in life. As women progress through college, their interests appear to shift from careers to the more traditional interests of home and family. The largest proportion of freshmen women (42%) say that 15 years hence they would prefer to be a married career woman with children but for upperclass women, the preferred future is that of a housewife with children. Whereas only 35% of the freshmen women prefer the housewife role, 50% of the upperclassmen do (5, 6). These observations which are derived from questionnaires were also found in interviews of bright college women. The interviewers reported that while freshmen and sophomore women were giving serious thought to their educational and professional futures, by the time they were interviewed as seniors, they expressed less intensity of commitment to further education (7).

Along the same lines and somewhat surprising in the light of their supposed immersion in academic pursuits is the fact that the percentage of women who describe their college purposes as primarily academic--i. e. interest in ideas, the pursuit of knowledge, and the cultivation of the intellect--drops

from 21% as freshmen to 12% as upperclassmen. Interest in vocational training drops from 25% for the freshmen to 20% for the upperclassmen. The slack seems to be taken up by the increase in the number expressing interest in the well-rounded woman described by the collegiate subculture which values social life, rewarding friendships, living group functions, etc. Whereas only 44% of the freshmen felt that these so-called collegiate activities were the most important college goals, 57% of the upper classmen find their satisfaction with college best expressed in these college experiences. Now I do not think that this means that women become anti-intellectual and disinterested in scholarship as they progress through our colleges. As a matter of fact, there is research evidence to indicate that women grow in terms of flexibility, openness to new ideas, and interest in reflective thought--traits which are usually associated with intellectual interests (13).

What it probably does mean is that as the choices of marriage or career loom closer, women opt for marriage as the immediate concern and their attention moves in this direction. Throughout their lives, girls in our culture are taught to prepare for the role of wife and mother, and the research shows how well the lessons are learned. Deeply imbedded in the folklore is the dictum that women--whether in marriage or career--should remain femininely submissive and non-aggressive. College women of today appear to accept this role. About half of the men but only a third of the women say that they enjoy competitive situations. The objectives which women consider important are distinctly non-competitive when compared with men's objectives. In the ACE survey at least 10% more women than men considered the following objectives to be

essential or very important: To help others in difficulty, to join the Peace Corps or Vista, and to create works of art. Men were far more likely than women to endorse objectives such as: Obtain recognition from peers, be administratively responsible, be well off financially, become a community leader, and succeed in business (2). Although there appears to be no discrimination in the election of women to leadership positions--exactly 22% of the men and 22% of the college women had served as president of a student organization in high school (10), women are considerably less likely than men to feel that leadership is one of the very important things in their lives (25% to 40%) (3). For women it is somewhat more important to be popular (68% to 58% for men).

The research data also indicate that women as a group have less confidence in themselves than men. Despite the fact that women make much better grades in high school than men, they are less likely to feel that they definitely have the ability to do college work (26% to 35%) (12). And college women tend to express less self-confidence than men on a variety of traits presented by the ACE questionnaire. One would expect fewer women than men to feel special competence in the masculine areas of mathematical, mechanical, and athletic abilities. But it is also a fact that fewer women than men rated themselves above average on the following: leadership, popularity in general, popularity with the opposite sex, and intellectual self-confidence as well as social self-confidence. The only traits on which more women than men rated themselves above average were artistic ability, cheerfulness, understanding of others, and sensitivity to criticism (2).

Not so incidentally, these attitudes of submissiveness, deference, and lack of self-confidence, thought to be characteristic of women, are self concepts that have been shared by minority groups in our culture. It remains to be seen how soon the values encompassed in the phrase, "black is beautiful" can change the social lessons of centuries. As our culture moves toward affirmation of the dignity of all human beings, it is entirely possible that future generations of college women will describe themselves differently. There appears to be no rational reason, for example, why women should consider themselves less able to do college work than men--despite all evidence to the contrary. It is simply unreasonable to suppose that academic ability and the use of the mind are in conflict with woman's role as wife and mother.

Despite all of the emancipation of recent years and despite the extensive publicity given to Betty Friedan's best seller, there does seem to be a "feminine mystique" to which a large number of college women subscribe. While the mystique need not involve lowered status as human beings in a predominately white man's society, it is surely true that college women are preparing for very different futures than those faced by college men. The college woman of today has ample justification for feeling that she is juggling three possible identities throughout her college career. She has one eye out for a husband, another out for practical job training that will enable her to type or to teach wherever her husband may be located, and we also expect her to fulfill her potential as an intellectual being. Not only do all these choices face her in college, but she knows quite well that they will face her

the rest of her life. To my mind, this means that we should give serious attention to possible distinctions between education for men and education for women. The immediate as well as life-long goals of men and women do differ and thus the concept of relevance in education needs careful consideration. You who are women giving serious thought to your own futures and, having demonstrated your capacity to lead, will have your own ideas about the type of education you want. Let me suggest only some general directions indicated by the research.

Foremost perhaps among the differences in educational needs of men and women is the matter of flexibility in education for women. New flexibilities are needed for men too, but the case is especially powerful for women in higher education.

For entirely too long, we have been trapped in the delusion that education and learning are synonymous with grades and credit. We know beyond a shadow of a doubt that people learn at different rates, and that entering students of some colleges "know more" than the graduates of others. Yet we persist in acting as though 120 credit hours accumulated in 50-minute units meeting three times a week for four years bestowes upon its bearer all the magic associated with a college degree. Our traditional content-oriented classes only succeed in perpetuating the myth that knowledge can be packaged and distributed to the dutiful and deserving to place upon the shelf in case of future need.

Today as never before, the world needs the social sensitivities of women. It is wasteful in the extreme to society and to the self-actualization of individuals for colleges to graduate women who are content to receive their bachelors degrees and move through a day of typical daytime television, coffee klatches, and no more lofty thoughts than the latest neighborhood gossip.

Education must offer the kind of flexibilities that demand much more active participation on the part of the student. Someone has said that you can no more say that something has been taught when nothing has been learned, than you can say something has been sold when nothing has been bought.

One way of breaking the lock-step of education is through programs of independent study.

I am of the conviction that independent study is really what education is all about, but I think that it is especially important for a woman. Research evidence already suggests that women who engage in full time homemaking after high school graduation do not show the same kind of intellectual growth and development as women who enter college. As a matter of fact, as a group, housewives show a rather remarkable regression on research measures designed to measure intellectual interests. Thus four years after high school graduation, they are less interested in ideas and the use of their minds than they were when they graduated from high school (13). If a woman is going to be intellectually alive at all through the years of raising a family, the motivation pretty well has to come from within herself. We cannot

honestly say that we've provided a woman with a good education until we have taught her how to learn and how to derive the satisfactions that can be found in intellectually stimulating activity. The type of magazine one reads and the television programs one watches, for example, become habits, and they are habits that can make a large difference.

According to the research, one of the traits possessed by college women is that they feel they are conscientious and hard working. I see no reason to doubt the premise that most can manage the discipline of independent study and that this type of learning activity should be introduced as early as possible in women's college careers.

The flexibility of independent study has another advantage for women and that is that it helps to bridge the gap between making a firm choice between the overly practical homemaking courses and the all-too-frequently purely graduate-college oriented academic courses. Why, for example, shouldn't a woman become actively involved in writing an academically respectable sociology paper on the problems of the growing gap between male executives who travel in an increasingly sophisticated world and their wives who stay home and raise children, as did their mothers and grandmothers before them? Is this necessarily a topic reserved for a course in marriage and the family? Or why can't one delve into the problems of the social pressures practiced by groups of young children in an independent psychology paper just as well as in a course labeled child development?

I do not want to leave the impression, while arguing for flexibility, that I would rigidly eliminate the options of courses in marriage and the family or child development. Some college women are ready to make the choice between marriage and graduate school but many more are not. There are all kinds of reasons -- educational as well as pragmatic -- why a woman should be encouraged to develop an academic program suited to her needs and interests.

Many of the needed academic reforms apply to men as well as to women, but I am suggesting that there is a special case to be made for specific improvements to meet the needs of women, that IAWS is the group to lead in these reforms, and that your leadership must be strong and, if necessary, impolite. In these times, human communities are not held together by unthinking loyalty and blind refusal to question. Drastic changes are needed in higher education and it is highly probable that they will be brought about by contemplation, commitment, and yes, at times, confrontation.

KPC:dr

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