

Sex-typing wastes talent, contends the author of this outspoken article. Worse (she maintains), "Whereas men are unsexed by failure, women seem to be unsexed by success." Her solution is two-sided.

women in the public school: a problem in discrimination and motivation

By Laura J. Heinrich



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The plight of women in the public school domain has been largely ignored to date by the Women's Liberation Movement. This lack of attention is understandable in that salary schedules on the surface do not discriminate and the women themselves have not complained in sufficient numbers. Those women seeking advancement and leadership positions in public schools accuse superintendents and school boards of discrimination only to receive in rebuttal a wide range of judgmental statements indicating their (the female applicants') inadequacy, lack of commitment, and/or incompetence.

The purpose of this article is not to place blame, for this can become a "chicken or the egg" debate, but to examine some behaviors, attitudes, and practices that constitute a tremendous waste of talent much needed in schools today.

In colonial and pioneer days, primary school teaching was a male occupation—"women did not have the stamina of mind to deal with the minds of small children." With the shortage of men during the Civil War and growing press of mass education, women were recruited and became predominant. Actually, women teachers have been in the majority since the 1870's and will continue to be so for many decades to come, with men constituting a slight majority only at the secondary level.¹ Between 1930 and 1960, the number of teachers at all levels increased by some 87%, with a larger increase in the percentage of men at secondary and college levels. During the 1950's and 1960's the traditional available labor pool of unmarried and childless women decreased by half. In the 1970's there will be more unmarried or childless married women seeking jobs at the same time middle-aged married women are returning to the labor force.² Recent studies indicate that mature women who begin teaching after age 35 become highly effective teachers and are committed to a career in education.³ These changes in the quality and quantity of the female labor force cannot help having an impact on the future of women in education.

Sex-typing links occupational roles with sex roles and makes female occupations of those which involve nurturing, helping, and empathizing (e.g., teaching, nursing, and social work.) Occupations which require coolness, detachment, objective orientation, and outspokenness are generally not considered appropriate for women. Although historically women have outnumbered men as teachers, only a relatively few have held the so-called responsible positions (e.g., administrators, professors superintendents). The large number

of women in teaching has been cited as a serious problem in the achievement of professionalization. That a woman's major interest in life is to marry and bear children and that this interest conflicts with devotion to a career is a misconception frequently stated by critics of women in education. That fewer women earn master's degrees and take longer to get them is perceived by some as a lack of commitment. These perceptions, coupled with the fact that women have in the past been willing to work for less money, cause the woman to be viewed as a professional risk.⁴ Results of surveys of the reasons for women entering teaching—e.g., short hours, long holidays, compatibility of teaching with marriage and ease of return—give some credibility to the aforementioned criticisms. The competency of women as teachers is not assumed to be a consideration.

Are men more capable administrators than women? Superintendents and boards of education seem to think so. While men constitute only 12% of the elementary teaching force, they account for 69% of the elementary principalships. Yet research findings show that the answer to the question is NO. Studies by Wiles and Grobman⁵ and Grobman and Hines⁶ showed that women ranked higher than men as democratic leaders, in working with teachers and outsiders, being concerned with objectives of teaching, encouraging pupil participation, evaluating learning, and gaining positive reactions from teachers and superiors.

One reason often mentioned for favoring men is the assumption that women teachers dislike working for women principals, and men teachers like it even less. In a survey by Barter⁷, however, a group of teachers rated female and male principals as equal in ability and personal qualities. The results indicated that while, in general, women teachers approved of women principals more than men teachers did, those male teachers who had taught in schools administered by women were more favorable to women principals than to men. Those who disapproved of female principals were men who had taught only under male principals.

In another study, data was gathered about problem-attack behavior and a comparison of results revealed that teachers described female administrators as noticing potential problem situations and as reviewing results of action significantly more often than did male administrators. One explanation is that generally speaking the female principals in this study had more years of elementary school teaching experience than the male principals prior to assuming an administrative position. Another possible explanation is that female principals may be more sensitive to "problems" of other women than male principals are.⁸

But in spite of the research studies which extol the administrative skills of women, the ratio of women to men in administration as well as other positions of decision-making responsibility is continuing to decrease. Women need to consider some reasons for this decrease besides the obvious one of discrimination on the basis of sex.

Typically, men expect financial rewards, job satisfaction, approval and encouragement, prestige, and power from their occupation. We don't think anything of men being wage earners, loving fathers, maintenancemen around the house—why such a big thing for women? No one says it is easy, and

something has to give, e.g., volunteer and social activities, and gardening, but when the children are grown it is easier to resume these activities than an interrupted career. Yet another reason given for the decreasing number of women in responsible positions implies that women do not expect or ask for the same things.

Recent studies on women's motivation have shown a generally inconsistent pattern of results. Attempts to relate such factors as individual value orientation, achievement relevance of goals, sex of Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) stimulus figures, nature of arousal conditions and sex-role orientation to achievement-motive scores and to performance have been so inconsistent that they have emphasized the complexity of the issue. Evidence from studies on women's motivation to avoid success and achievement-related anxieties provide a clearer understanding of the problem.

In any achievement-oriented situation, performance is evaluated against some standard of excellence; thus the situation offers both a chance for success and a threat of failure, though the results may not immediately be ascertainable. Women may in fact be more anxious than men in achievement-oriented situations because they face negative consequences not only in failing but also in succeeding. There are aggressive, masculine overtones that are implicit in successful competition. This is not to say that women are aggressive and masculine when they are successful but that they are perceived by significant others to be aggressive and masculine.

If not rejected, they are praised for having masculine minds. A woman actively engaged in professional pursuits often finds herself trying in various ways to prove her femininity. As a whole, society has been unable to reconcile personal ambition, accomplishment, and success with femininity. The more successful or independent a woman becomes the more she is viewed as having lost her femininity, being a failure as a wife and mother, as a hostile and destructive force within the society. Whereas men are unsexed by failure, women seem to be unsexed by success.

Many American women facing the conflict between maintaining their feminine image and developing their abilities compromise by abdicating from competition in the outside world. Women have been choosing—consciously or unconsciously—not to develop their potentiality or individuality rather than pay the price of social rejection.

Whenever a woman places herself in a leadership role, either alone or as a team member, she must be aware of the feelings her position of leadership, prestige, and power are generating in both men and women. Men are frequently angry and women are frequently resentful and vindictive. A partial solution is to be aware of these feelings, though this awareness often results in withdrawal behavior, deference in front of the group to the male leaders, assuming an "assistant" role rather than a "leader" role.⁹

More problems emerge when one looks at the intentional or unintentional chauvinistic behaviors of male supervisors. They question the seriousness of a woman's efforts, expect competency but not originality, and pass judgment if she works and has children. Many male faculty members find it

difficult to develop strong platonic friendships with their female colleagues, considering them as belonging to an entirely different, inferior status system.¹⁰ It is widely recognized that opportunities for advancement in education are heavily weighted in favor of men, who now hold an increasingly disproportionate number of principalships, superintendencies, and other high-ranking posts. Educational administration will not attract the best women or inspire their best efforts until opportunity is truly equal.

Many women have become effective and significant leaders in education and more women must take their rightful places as decision makers in educational institutions. Our society can no longer afford to waste the ideas, skills, and commitment of the female members of the profession. However, women now more than ever must make conscious decisions about what their goals are and how best to accomplish those goals. Women with discontinuous or intermittent career patterns only support the proposition that women are at worst a peripheral and at best a secondary component in the teaching labor force and in public endeavor in general.

The woman educator of the '70's has not been a victim of a delimited area of vocational choice. Moreover, her possession of a teaching certificate is not an insurance policy but rather a matter of career choice. She will realize herself as a professional with special abilities through *choosing* to teach.¹¹

The strongest argument of all for competency must be the performance of women themselves in professional pursuits. Women as well as men must accept the fact that women have not only the right but the responsibility and the need to lead multidimensional lives, and both must further un-

derstand that a chosen activity outside the home may express womanhood just as well as duties within it.

FOOTNOTES

1. Samuel Brodbelt, "Teacher Professionalization: Its Determination and Achievement," *School and Society*, vol. 97 (March 1969), p. 151.
2. Alice Rossi, "Discrimination and Demography Restrict Women," *College and University Business*, vol. 48 (February 1970), pp. 75-76.
3. Barbara Doty, "Predictions of Teaching Effectiveness of Women Who Begin Teaching After Age Thirty-Five," *Journal of Teacher Education*, vol. 21 (Winter 1970), p. 524.
4. Brodbelt, *loc. cit.*
5. Kimball Wiles and Hulda Grobman, "Principals As Leaders," *Nation's Schools*, vol. 56 (October 1955), p. 75.
6. Hulda Grobman and Vynce Hines, "What Makes A Good Principal?" *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin*, vol. 40 (November 1956), pp. 5-16.
7. Alice S. Barter, "The Status of Women In School Administration," *Educational Horizons*, vol. 37 (Spring 1959), pp. 72-75.
8. John Hoyle, "Who Shall Be Principal—A Man or A Woman?" *The National Elementary Principal*, vol. 48 (January 1969), p. 24.
9. Beatrice Dineman, "Sex Discrimination in Academia," *Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 42 (April 1971), p. 263.
10. Jessie Bernard, *Academic Women* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1964), p. 111.
11. Ted W. Brooker, "The Woman Educator: Designer of the '70's," unpublished speech presented at a symposium at Texas Woman's University, Denton, Texas, 1971.

Involvement

As many teachers are prone to do to heighten student interest, I began hamming it up to get my seventh grade social studies class in the proper mood to hear a story about a Viking raid. As I read, the room became very still. " 'Quiet, all!' commanded the Viking captain sternly in a low voice. Fifty men held their breath, not daring to whisper. For a few moments in the stillness of the dawn, there was no sound except the dripping of water from the oars. 'Row, all!' the leader signaled. . . " And from the back of the room came a small clear voice singing, "Row, row, row your boat. . . "

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