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ABSTRACT

The following are real events which happened recently in American universities. At an ivy league school two Chairmen questioned whether a nursing mother could function adequately as a professor . . . A woman was demoted to lecturer to free a tenure slot for a male . . . A woman faculty member's good teaching record was said to be a function of the "sexual power" she exercised over her male students. At a western institution a female undergraduate in mechanical engineering was told by her professor that he had never had, nor did he want, a woman in his class and he refused to recognize her presence . . . A woman Ph.D. candidate in a prestigious experimental psychology program was told hers would be the last degree granted to a woman because it was too hard to find jobs for women . . . In the south, a faculty woman who took her sex discrimination complaints to federal court was said by administration to be going through menopause early . . . Two faculty women wrote a letter of complaint to a Dean charging their Chairman with sexual harassment of students. The allegations were not investigated and the letter ended up in the women's personnel files as evidence of their "noncollegiality."

I

Since the 17th century, alumni have praised their universities in speech and song as "Alma Mater," a Roman title of respect evoking the feminine spirit of nurturance, guidance, and bounty. By addressing the university as "Alma Mater" sentimental graduates project qualities of the "Bounteous Mother" onto the institutions which gave them second birth into the world of knowledge and culture. What many people outside the walls of academe do not realize, is that far from being a nurturing mother the university is a shrine to the power of the fathers. Rather than Alma Mater, a more appropriate epithet for the University is *Alma Pater*.

The popular assumption is that affirmative action movements have enabled contemporary academic women to go as far as their talents and ambitions allow. Male colleagues comment enviously on what they perceive to be the advantages women currently enjoy in the academic job market. However, the professional lives of university women do not support this optimism. More charges of sex discrimination have been filed against institutions of higher education than against any other industry in the nation. Suits are increasing and some involve requests for substantial damages. The institutions involved are among some of the land's finest: Yale, Berkeley, the universities of Maryland, Pittsburgh, New York, Florida, Oklahoma, Harvard, Columbia, CUNY, NYU and Brown, among others. Bernice Sandler, Director of the Project on the Education and Status

of Women, estimates that in the next decade universities will have two important issues to address; the budget crunch and sex discrimination.

While no exception as a patriarchal organization, the university where we taught* is a particularly interesting example. It is a new university, begun in the early 70's as an innovative urban commuter campus dedicated to affirmative action, community service and teaching. Even today, it proudly proclaims that it had a head start in equalizing opportunities and in eliminating sex-based discriminations. One might expect that in such a university, women would earn a representative place. On the contrary, sex discrimination affects many women teaching there. This is despite the fact that since 1972 it has been illegal to discriminate against women or to avoid taking positive steps to correct their under-representation.

How do the dynamics of sex discrimination work? They arise from skewed sex distribution patterns and from sex stereotyping representative of the society at large. For instance at our institution when we trace the ratio of males to females from the inception of the College of Arts and Sciences to recent times, a picture of classic tokenism emerges. Despite a steady increase in positions, the overall proportion between females and males remains roughly the same, with females representing 20% of the faculty. This figure mirrors the national average, apparently reflecting an informal quota. The number of female faculty members is actually declining nationally, to the point that they can be considered an endangered species. (1)

It is a characteristic of "skewed populations" such as the 20/80 ratio between women and men found in universities, that the numerically dominant people control the group and its culture to the point of justifying their label as "dominants", while the few others are appropriately called "tokens." Women faculty we interviewed expressed reactions to their experience of tokenism at our university with feelings of invisibility, isolation, inner-conflict and victimization by stereotyping.

Universities protest that the reason there are so few women in academia is that universities operate on a merit system recruiting and promoting only the best candidates in the world of scholarship. The truth is that being the best qualified candidate is *one* way to reap academic prizes, but it is not, in fact, the usual way. A more realistic picture of university hiring describes the bonds of cronyism, the "old boy system" which severely limits the pool of "best available" candidates to one's colleagues and friends at other institutions.

While ostensibly advertising widely to meet government regulations, most serious recruitment involves phoning colleagues for nominations and recommendations. Daniel Socolow reports in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that at least 76% of the institutions surveyed invoke old boy practices and only as few as 24% of administrative positions are filled by persons who make direct application for jobs without previous connections. An illustration of this from our own institution is a current Dean whose position was secured through the heavy lobbying of his good friend, a politically powerful faculty member. Acquiescence, if not support, was won by evoking the halo effect which accom-

*Since the writing of this paper the authors no longer teach at the university described.

panied his previous association with a high status university. Such considerations can outweigh indifferent teaching and undistinguished research. As a result, the new Dean was given tenure and a full professorship, neither of which he enjoyed at his previous job. Few women enjoy the advantages of the halo effect since the disparity between the proportion of women faculty and graduate students is greatest at the top universities, and studies show that the less prestigious an institution, the more women are found there. (2)

Comradeship and loyalty to a group are basic facts of social life. For men the importance of membership in a male collectivity is taught early in life. On the other hand, women, at least until now, have been less involved in group loyalty and comradeship. At our university, most faculty women are not active in promoting their interests as a group, and most do not openly identify with the sex discrimination which afflicts women. Thus the old boy system brings in and pushes up more and more men while there are few women's networks which attempt to do the same for women.

The claim that universities rely on a merit system is further weakened by examining promotion records. A number of studies on the status of women in different disciplines give consistent and powerful evidence to the fact that the higher one goes in the hierarchy of academic teaching and administration, the lower the number of women one finds. At our university in the College of Arts and Sciences, men outnumber women by almost nine to one in the higher ranks of Professor and Associate Professor. In contrast, women act as a surplus labor supply. More than 50% of the women faculty have been ghettoed to the lowest tenure earning rank, that of Assistant Professor. The National Education Association reports that nationally, 68% of all female members hold the rank of instructor or lecturer or have no designated rank. (3) The women in these underpaid, low status positions are offered minimal job security, fringe benefits, and chances for advancement.

Universities explain away these incriminating and consistently reported data by arguing that women with adequate academic credentials are not available. Research does not support this assumption. Harmon's study of over 20,000 Ph.D.'s, reports women Ph.D.'s superior to their male counterparts on all measures in all specializations; his earlier study found them brighter by any index used than men in the same specialization. (4) When considering the two most direct measures of academic productivity, the number of articles and books published, female Ph.D.'s compare favorably with their male colleagues. (5) Controlling factors relevant to rank, tenure, and salary, sex remains the critical variable between the status of women and men faculty. (6)

The handicaps women encounter in pursuing academic careers make their accomplishments all the more remarkable. Even before entering graduate school, social-psychological factors discourage them from entering a predominantly male field and they are urged to pursue more traditionally female professions. It is also more difficult for women to gain admittance to graduate programs. At every socioeconomic level, the chances of males getting into graduate programs are uniformly greater than the opportunities of females. In the bottom socioeconomic category males have a 250% advantage, while in the top category males have a 129% better chance of attending graduate or professional schools. (7)

Once admitted, a woman must contend with the cutting edge of misogyny in graduate education which is reflected in the complaint of Nathan Pusey, president of Harvard. Fearful that changes in the draft would result in fewer men applying to Harvard Graduate School, he lamented: "We shall be left with the lame, the halt and the women." Women's work and intellect are thus belittled. In classes it is more common for women to serve as audience rather than participant in the rhetorical and ritual oratory essential to the development of an academic personality. Women in graduate programs are used to male professors ignoring their presence in classes, addressing the students as "Gentlemen," and using women as the brunt of disparaging jokes and examples. Contrary to popular stereotypes, research from classroom situations show that male students by far out talk their sister students, while vying with one another to successfully dominate academic conversations and establish hierarchies among themselves. Women have little rehearsal or support for this kind of interaction and without it they are doomed to academic invisibility.

This feeling of alienation is compounded by evidence that professors are more likely to regard men students as "colleagues" than they do women students. (8) A study of microbiologists reveals that more than three times as many women doctorates as men report receiving discouraging advice during their graduate careers. (9) A further obstacle to educational and career development for women is the dearth of role models among teachers and faculty to whom they can go for support and collegiality. The importance of a critical mass for a woman's well being in the university is demonstrated in a recent survey of faculty women at our institution. The happiest woman faculty member, the one most enthusiastic about her professional life and her goals within the university, was the one woman interviewed who taught in an all woman department.

Additional hurdles to a woman's academic career occur when she is finally given the chance to teach her speciality. She does so under the burden of a "double day." Her life is such that when she leaves the university she generally assumes roles which are characteristic of women in the domestic sphere. She becomes a mother, cook, housewife, cleaner, social organizer, nurse, shopper, decorator and emotional supporter. In short, she must cope with being the primary domestic organizer and maintainer. We cannot remember knowing more than a few men with whom we have had academic relationships who have routinely taken charge of their own domestic affairs, who have cooked, cleaned and organized their private lives. We know of none who have done it for a woman. As Hochschild points out, "A wife who could type, assist with research and perform consumer maintenance tasks at home is an asset that no women enjoy". (10)

In their professional life, female faculty are bombarded with reminders that their presence is considered somewhat out of keeping with "real" university life. Women are absent from the curriculum, from reading lists, and course syllabi, and the predominant assumptions about reality are not human assumptions but male "presumptions." Nowhere is it more apparent that women are considered aliens to the university community than in the university's casual and official languages. An example of the thinking which leads to discriminatory behavior is evident in the jokes that are told using the image of the female as intellectual. One of us was never addressed by an administrator

as anything other than "female philosopher" and the title was always delivered with mirth. The point is that the reversal of the expected role model evokes a smile. The real distinction that is being made between "philosopher" and "female philosopher" is the difference, not between female and male, but between the standard and the deviation.

University jargon echoes the belief that so-called feminine characteristics weaken and generally endanger educational institutions, while masculine traits enoble them. For example, the university uses the adjectives "hard" and "soft" to distinguish "good" from "bad" in a variety of situations. "hard" courses, such as the sciences are thought to be intellectually respectable while courses relying less on "hard" data find themselves defending their importance and arguing against the charge they are "soft," i.e. non-intellectual. Women's studies courses fall into this category. "Soft" money refers to short term funds, something to be distrusted as unpredictable, while "hard" money can be counted on. "Hard" research brings tenure and promotion, while "soft" research is suspect and generates criticism and disapproval.

What this means for a woman faculty member is that she must sit in department and committee meetings and, in order to think from a university perspective, disparage qualities with which women are identified. One can only imagine that if the university used the adjectives "Black" and "White" in a similar fashion, there would be outcry of racism which would force the university to expunge these insidious distinctions overnight.

Besides collegial banter and institutional jargon, the official language of universities perpetuates sexist distinctions by using the so-called generic term "man" to describe institutional goals and course descriptions. That more precise language was needed was recognized as long ago as 1973 when the American Anthropological Association passed a resolution urging anthropologists "to become aware in their writing and teaching that their wide use of the term 'man' as generic for the species is conceptually confusing." The association recommended "that it be replaced by more comprehensive terms such as 'people' and human beings" which include both sexes."

Failure to adopt this kind of clarification in language results in ludicrous course descriptions in the current catalogue of our institution from which one might conclude that we are a single sexed species. For example, a course entitled *Marriage and the Family* is described as "an introduction to the intense study of the kinship relationship of man . . ."; and *Human Concerns* focuses on "man's vision of his future." Another course, *Origin and Dispersion of Man and Woman*, while suggesting more precision in its title, is described in more detail as "A study of the biological history of man . . ." A defender of the catalogue would protest, "But surely one knows what is meant in the generic masculine usage." To that, we would offer the course *The Organizer* which is described as:

A study of men who have inspired mass organizations and brought about major social and cultural transformations. The organizing styles of Christ, Gandhi, Hitler, Mao Tse-tung, and Martin Luther King will be examined . . .

Clearly, this course can be read as (a) one which deals strictly with males who have exhibited unusual organizing skills in which case the absence of women on the list of those to be studied is entirely appropriate, or (b) a survey of historical figures who have brought about changes due to their organizing styles in which case the absence of women seems curious since a glance at the morning's paper would suggest women who might be included. At any event, this illustrates the futility of continuing to argue that the meaning of *man* is self-evident.

While we would not suggest that the intent of these courses is to exclude women, such words, while allegedly gender-generic, are, in fact, interpreted as being gender-specific. Studies of college students, the audience for whom these descriptions were written, indicate that the pronoun "man" is not generally interpreted generically, but is considered as "male." (11)

The decisive argument against using masculine terms is not that they are often inadequate and sometimes ridiculous, as the examples from our catalogue show, but that they perpetuate the cultural assumption that the female belongs to a subordinate and generally unimportant group. The insidious influence of this image of women is reflected in the fact that college students, both female *and* male, when presented with the same article rated it significantly lower when it was attributed to a female writer, than when they thought the author was a male. (12) This reaction is not limited to written works but extends to all forms of research and artistic products.

Perhaps the most devastating and overlooked factor working against women in the university is a disorder we call "*feminophobia*," a fear of being identified with women's concerns or with women as a group. Males are not the only victims of this neurosis, women too are afflicted. Even the most successful of academic women deny sympathy with or connection to feminism or the women's movement. These feminophobes maintain that their success was achieved on the basis of their own merits and the way is open for others to do the same, although many owe their positions, salaries and respect to changes brought about by feminists.

Feminophobia is a contemporary variation of the negative stereotyping of strong women as "shrew," "witch," "bitch," "dike," and "libber." For females, feminophobia is rooted in a fear of male disapproval and ultimate abandonment. As a result, female faculty tend to act in a deferential manner in the presence of their male colleagues and are extremely hesitant to offend members of the male society to which they have been granted admittance. The consequence for women is that they are caught in a double bind. On the one hand, to define herself as a woman in classic feminine terms is to discredit her image and intellect in a university setting. On the other, to define herself in classic masculine terms is to act uncharacteristically and to challenge the power of the dominant group.

As a way of reintegrating this conflicting self concept, academic women can take steps to establish a legitimate place for themselves in the university. (13) To do so, they must first give up some treasured myths by recognizing that the university does not represent a utopian model of the rest of society, but is in fact an exploitive, discriminatory institution. They must reject Alma Pater's propaganda that it is an island of progressive thought, governed by open-minded, unprejudiced humanists who enlighten and educate less capable people in society. Also, women must relinquish the naive political and social analysis which assumes that federal law will liberate academic women and sweep away institutional inequities. Laws and regulations do not guarantee change. They only change the rules of the game by creating new possibilities for winning.

There are no personal solutions for women. A sex discrimination suit at an Ivy League University suggested that the single most reliable predictor of success for a faculty or graduate woman is *luck* (e.g. being in a mildly progressive department, being the least threatening of two women coming up for tenure in the same year, having a powerful male mentor as a doctoral advisor or chairperson). Excellence in scholarship, teaching, and/or service had variable effects on the career success of women faculty. There is considerable evidence that certain women were denied tenure because they were *too good*.

The only realistic chance of personal success and political reform is for women to establish alliances with their female colleagues and to identify their mutual concerns as women. Women's networks afford some protection from reprisals and they increase access to university information which can be translated into power. Together women can create stronger images for one another and together they can insist on more women faculty, more women in higher ranks, recognition of women in the curriculum, more financial aid for women students, extensive day care facilities and other actions germane to the women's interests.

Each academic woman must take charge of her personal career and future. She must manage and not allow herself to be managed. She must question and challenge transgressions since her silence can make her more vulnerable to unfair treatment than if she prudently spoke her mind. Otherwise, she may be viewed as someone who is too naive or fearful to *ever* fight back. Here she treads a thin edge, for to speak too aggressively will result in her views being discredited and dismissed as those of a "libber."

If resorting to justice in the courts becomes necessary, women should try to form class action suits. They are more threatening to institutions than either an individual suit or a series of individual suits. The legal costs and expenses along with the impact on fundraising can be a massive diversion of university resources. Class action suits also redefine the political context and make it more difficult for universities to isolate a particular case, reducing its importance, to a confrontation between the institution and one woman. Through these means, universities will be forced not simply to tolerate the presence of women, but to acknowledge in all their decisions and policies, the integrity of women academics as persons.

While our recommendations have addressed the survival of women in the university, it is at least as important for academic women to realize that there are other areas besides Alma Mater where women can survive and prosper better both financially and emotionally. We remind academic women who are just now entering Alma Mater as students or faculty members, not to believe that the university's "ivory tower" is a protective asylum, except in the most ominous sense of that word. Rather, they should heed Adrienne Rich's warning that "... [professors] are jealous of any infringement of their rights and highly combative if anyone dares dispute them." Merely being an *academic woman* is to challenge those assumed rights. Therefore, women joining the university should be prepared to fight, for as Virginia Wolfe has said, they are going to war.

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NOTES

- (1) Women in colleges and universities have been in the decline; in 1920 they constituted 26% of the faculty, in 1930 and 1940, 27% and in 1976 only 22% (Janet Giele, *Women and the Future* [New York: Free Press, 1978]).
- (2) The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, *Opportunity for Women in Higher Education* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1973).
- (3) Irene Murphy, "The Nature and Extent of Sex Discrimination in Institutions of Higher Learning," APSA Workshop, September 4, 1976.
- (4) As quoted in Gertrude Ezorsky, "The Fight Over University Women," *The New York Review*, May 16, 1974.
- (5) R.J. Simon, S.M. Clark, and K. Galway, "The Woman Ph.D.: A Recent Profile," *Social Problems*, 15 (1967).
- (6) Helen Astin and Alan Bayer, "Sex Discrimination in Academe," *Educational Record*, 53 (1973).
- (7) William Sewell, "Inequality of Opportunities for Higher Education," *American Sociological Review*, 36 (October).
- (8) Carin Weiss, "The Development of Professional Role Commitment Among Graduate Students," Master's Thesis, University of Washington, 1972; Lucy Sells, "Sex Discipline Differences in Doctoral Attrition," University of California, Department of Sociology, unpublished paper, 1973.
- (9) Eval Kashkef, Mary Louise Robbins, Loretta Leive and Alice Huang, "Status of Women Microbiologists," *Science*, 8 February, 1974.
- (10) Arlie Hochschild, "Inside the Clockwork of Male Careers," in *Women and the Power to Change*, ed. F. Howe (New York: McGraw Hill, 1975).
- (11) V. Kidd, "A Study of the Images Produced Through the Use of the Male Pronoun as the Generic," *Moments in Contemporary Rhetoric and Communication*, 1 (1971); J. Schneider and S. Hacker, "Sex Role Imagery and the Use of the Generic Man in Introductory Tests: A Case in the Sociology of Sociology," *American Sociologist*, 8 (1972), 12-80.

(12) Philip Goldberg, "Are Women Prejudiced Against Women?" *Transaction*, 1978; Sandra L. and Darley J. Bem, "Training the Woman to Know Her Place: The Power of a Non-Conscious Ideology," *Women's Role in Contemporary Society* (New York: Avon Books, 1972).

(13) The authors' debt to Pat Russion, a co-plaintiff in the Louise Lamphere Case against Brown University, is gratefully acknowledged.