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Any Change in Sexist Texts? Feminist Press Staff Survey Education Publishers

The Feminist Press

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National Conference on In-Service Education

The Feminist Press has announced it will sponsor the nation's first Conference on In-Service Education to be conducted November 21-23 on the campus of SUNY/College at Old Westbury.

The focus of the conference will be sex-role stereotyping and the teaching of history and literature. Delegates from the school systems of nine major cities are expected to participate.

The cities include Seattle; Minneapolis; Dallas; Boulder, Colo.; Kalamazoo, Mich.; Baltimore; Teaneck, N.J.; and Hanover, N.H. New York will be represented by Manhasset and Glen Cove, as well as by BOCES in Westbury.

Funding for the conference has been provided by the Rockefeller Family Fund.

The idea for the conference has grown out of a several-years corres­pondence with individuals throughout the country who have requested materials useful in planning and teaching in-service courses. The growing number of school systems which have begun to teach such courses have shown considerable interest in sharing materials and methods. Seattle, for example, will offer teachers and counselors seven courses: a miniature women's studies program.

ANY CHANGE IN SEXIST TEXTS?
Feminist Press Staff Survey Education Publishers

Are American publishers planning to do anything about the sexist bias found in their textbooks?

In order to answer this question, two Feminist Press staff members—Merle Froschl and Phyllis Aroll—conducted interviews this spring with 37 representatives of 15 New York educational publishers encompassing (with their subsidiaries and divisions) more than 200 educational publishers.

The study followed a more comprehensive investigation by Feminist Press staff of the state of sexism in the high school English and social studies curriculum. This larger study, initiated in September 1973, was conducted with the help of a generous planning grant from the Rockefeller Family Fund.

One product of this Feminist Press curriculum evaluation was a detailed critique of the textbooks most widely used in high school

(continued on page 8)
Feminism at a Rural University (continued)

Stephanie is not only preparing herself for a career in forestry, but is investigating the U.S. Forest Service, to prepare it for an influx of women.

The problem of transience, of course, afflicts all universities, but it is compounded in Moscow by other factors, not the least of which is the phenomenal drop-out rate. Once a student drops out, there is nothing for her to do in Moscow. Unlike Berkeley or Hyde Park in Chicago, Moscow has no community of hangers-on. The university is primarily an undergraduate institution, so few students stay more than four years. There is an annual influx of disenchanted urbanites seeking culture-in-the-mountains—a new, less crowded Boulder, Colorado. The picture books of Idaho don't prepare them for the treeless wheat and lentil fields and the dry, dusty summers. Many of them move on. The faculty is also transient, since the younger ones are generally looking for better jobs elsewhere. Of the five people who taught women's studies courses in 1973-74, three have left to take new jobs (myself included).

Women's studies has not yet caught on at the University of Idaho, but I think its time is coming. In September 1973, in connection with a moderately successful Women's Week, I tried to launch a campaign for women's studies. The few people interested were the same ones who show up for everything, and women's studies was not their priority. I redirected my enthusiasm to the regular programming in the Women's Center. We ran at least two lecture-discussions a week, many of which drew wall-to-wall crowds. Other groups offer free kegs of beer to get such audiences! I also got the English Department to hire me to teach a full, three-credit "Women and Literature" course which was very successful. Unfortunately, it won't continue. I also team-taught a two-credit course cryptically titled "Women's and Men's Roles in Society." It was a dismal example of how not to team teach. Jolene Ramaker, a teaching assistant who has since moved away, taught a one-credit satellite course on sexism in education. Nancy Mendoza offered a short speech course called "The Rhetoric of the Feminist Movement" which she plans to repeat. My hope is that the pressure for women's studies at Idaho will come from the students whose appetites have been whetted by these few courses and the Women's Center programs.

Just as I pulled out of town, a new project got underway. Several of the Women's Center volunteers were working on a grant proposal for a study of the rural feminist tradition. Anyone curious about the project or willing to help define "rural feminism" should write to Corky Bush, c/o Women's Center, Administration Building, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho 83843.

Moscow feminists need to find a place within the larger feminist movement, and communication with sisters elsewhere is essential. What is needed, though, is realistic advice and support, not condescension. I am sure that the new coordinator, Celia Banks, will relish hearing from you as much as I have.

Cheri Register

Any Change in Sexist Texts? (continued)

English and social studies classes. The study showed the quality of textbooks to be impaired consistently by repeated patterns of sex-role stereotyping.

Given this conclusion, what were the prospects for improving American textbooks during this decade? Specifically, how were publishers planning to ameliorate the biases in their texts? Were there any new plans to produce supplementary materials about women's achievements?

Education publishers were approached directly with these questions, in an attempt to assess the current climate of the industry in relation to the prospects for nonsexist education.

Prior to the study, it was anticipated that some publishers might be threatened by the feminist labels of the interviewers. However, all the publishing representatives were cordial, though not necessarily sympathetic to their point of view. Occasionally, Mrs. Froeschl and Arlow met with hostile remarks: "Feminists want to put books through a sterilization process and come out with something anti­septic." At other times they were challenged: "What do you want to do, get rid of Hemingway?" and, "Isn't this book-burning?"

Whatever its motivation, each group spent a great deal of time with the Feminist Press representatives who took part in large and small meetings, formal discussions with management, and moving personal talks with feminist editors. In a few cases, they later learned that their appearance may have helped stimulate feminists to organize committees or establish guidelines to begin eliminating sex bias from texts.

Generally, the editors and publishers exhibited some awareness of feminist issues and some sensitivity to sexism in texts. Early pressures on the marketplace—generated by test cases in Michigan and Texas and a new law in California—have apparently begun to make publishers listen to feminists and other in a position to select or reject textbooks. It may no longer be possible for publishers to deny that textbooks contain sex bias. On the other hand, they apparently do not consider it to be in their interest (financially) to take a strong initiative in the job of eliminating that bias from their books.

Although every company claimed that feminist issues were a top priority, the interviewers found many levels of consciousness, and these attitudes apparently dictated the house reaction to criticisms of its books.

Despite the sympathies of even the most enlightened editors interviewed, few plans were reported for new texts based on original research, and none for supplementary materials about women. (Explanations offered were economic: all publishers' backlists represent large investments; textbooks take at least ten years to produce, etc.)

Evidently, the publishing industry as a whole is not yet committed to fundamental change. At present, most publishers appear to be satisfied with little reforms: the shift in pronoun usage, for example, (continued on page 9)

Seattle Schools Clean House (continued)

the rapid elimination of sex bias. But in the Seattle schools, with or without administrative support, a momentum of change has been firmly initiated. Inevitably that movement will force the reluctant male-dominated systems to clean house.

The author is a member of CESS and a graduate student in curriculum at U. of Washington. This past year she initiated and co-taught the Seattle Public School staff development course, "Sexism in Society and Schools."
Any Change in Sexist Texts? (continued)
or the addition of a few women in illustrations. Three of the publishers interviewed (McGraw-Hill; Holt, Rinehart & Winston; and The Macmillan Company) were working on company guidelines regarding the treatment of women in texts; however, none had been completed at the time of this study. Not infrequently, plans were discussed for the deletion of blatant sexism in illustrations and language and for the addition of samples of women’s achievements. But such an approach appeared to be merely “cosmetic”: the books remain male-centered.

Now that texts have been excluded from Title IX guidelines, all indications are that publishers will not make changes that significantly alter the sex bias in their books. There is, therefore, still a greater need for supplementary and compensatory materials about women’s accomplishments in order to present the reading public with a realistic and comprehensive picture of human potential.

Merle Frosch and Phyllis Arlow have provided the following brief summaries of their interviews with educational publishing people.

What Publishing People Say

At the Association of American Publishers we interviewed Mary McNulty, staff director of the School Division. Two hundred seventy publishing companies (“90 percent of the [commercial] industry”) belong to this organization, which holds meetings and conferences and puts out a monthly bulletin.

The School Division Committee of Social Issues in Education, formed in the summer of 1973, is the AAP special interest committee intended to address such issues as sexism and racism in publishing. The School Division’s members (representing 11 different publishing houses) met at HEW in October 1973 with the Office of Civil Rights, the Office of Education, and the Office of General Council to ascertain whether the increased demands for women’s rights represent a significant problem to publishers. According to Ms. McNulty, the Committee is at present making investigations. It has not committed itself to affirmative action.

* * *


Mr. Bates, who is in a position to have an overview of educational publishing concerns about sexism, feels that publishers have become aware of feminist issues and are in the process of working out appropriate responses. He believes that the most effective pressures for change have come from citizens’ groups and feminist organizations such as the Women on Words and Images, whose work on elementary school readers he commends. Within publishing houses, feminist editors have also been instrumental in helping to change sexist materials. However, he stressed, the publishing industry has always played a responsive, rather than a leadership role.

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We talked with two editors in Holt Rinehart and Winston’s social studies division. Holt is a subsidiary of Columbia Broadcasting System, and affiliate with CBS Education International. Together they publish elementary, secondary, and college texts, as well as general fiction, nonfiction, reference, and juvenile literature.

The Publishing Steering Committee at Holt, Rinehart and Winston (organized in July 1973) consists of 15 people who meet with 10 elected members of a corporate advisory council. Our sources (both of them female) claimed that the committee has been effective in working within the company for the advancement of women. These editors say the committee helped to initiate some changes in personnel practices, including efforts toward job posting and equalization of salaries. (We were not able to test the validity of this claim by talking with editorial assistants, secretaries, or other employees in lower echelons of the corporation.) The steering committee, according to the editors we interviewed, has also been instrumental in developing company guidelines for the elimination of sexism in textbooks.

The awareness of women’s issues on the part of some Holt employees is reflected in the 1974 revision of Discovering American History. This secondary school text includes a section entitled “Facing the Future,” which presents a sensitive and realistic treatment of minorities and women.

* * *

At Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich we also spoke with two editors, one in English, and one in social studies text publishing. Harcourt, with its subsidiaries (Academic Press, Inc., Grune & Stratton, Inc., Guidance Associates of Pleasantville, N.Y., and the Psychological Corp.) publishes all types of books, including elementary, secondary, and college texts, standardized achievement and aptitude tests, and laboratory materials. They also produce programmed learning materials for high schools and colleges.

The Harcourt editors told us it is official policy at their firm to incorporate feminist issues within the company’s basal texts, “rather than” to produce separate supplementary materials on women. Several major revisions have been undertaken: sexist examples have been eliminated from a grammar text, they say, and the next edition of the popular history, The Rise of an American Nation, will include more information on women’s role in American history. In addition, they told us, new manuscripts are being edited to avoid the use of the generic "he," and a forthcoming paperback English series, Variations, will call attention to traditional roles of women and men. Still in the developmental stage is a new social studies series (for grades 9-12): more than half the authors of this series are women, and feminist consultants will be employed to evaluate the final manuscript, according to our sources.

It should be noted, however, that Harcourt has not developed formal written guidelines on sexism in textbooks.

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(continued on page 10)
At Noble & Noble Publishers we interviewed Warren Cox, the editor-in-chief, and two editors (in social studies and language arts). A subsidiary of Dell Publishing Co., Noble & Noble publishes elementary and secondary school textbooks and instructional materials.

The problems confronting this company indicate the impact which non-discriminatory legislation is now making upon publishers. Most of the firm's efforts have been focused on producing a new elementary social studies series, Man and His World. Because this series was recently rejected for adoption in California, the company is concerned about what it should do on feminist issues. (Noble editors now believe that the use of the word "man" in the title was the cause for the sexist label affixed to the series by the California adoption committee.)

The only Noble & Noble high school materials on the role of women are included in a social studies series, Springboards. These pamphlets for the slow reader (purchased from another publishing house) will probably be revised by Noble within a year. Their other secondary school materials have not been revised since they were developed, five or six years ago.

At McGraw-Hill Book Company, a mammoth educational book publisher, we talked with six editorial people, including a representative from the president's office. McGraw-Hill Book Company includes the Webster Division, the Gregg and Community College Division, the Professional and Reference Book Division, Schaum/Paperbacks Division, EDL General Books Division, Scholarly Books Division. It is encompassed by McGraw-Hill Book and Education Services Group, which also includes American Heritage Publishing Company, McGraw-Hill Continuing Education Center, and McGraw-Hill International Book Company. The parent company is McGraw-Hill, Inc., whose foreign offices are located in Australia, Brazil, Great Britain, Canada, France, Germany, India, Japan, Mexico, Panama, Malaysia, and South Africa. McGraw-Hill Book Company publishes programmed learning materials for use in elementary and high schools, technical schools, and colleges.

After meeting last spring with the Association of Feminist Consultants, McGraw-Hill formed a committee to establish nonsexist guidelines completed in May 1974, and illustrated with many examples from the company's own books). It is believed that their explicit character will help to reduce the chance of misinterpretation by individual editors. We were told guidelines will be used in preliminary planning with authors, illustrators, and copy editors.

Representatives we met said editors have been using nonsexist criteria for some time in planning new materials. The Secondary Language Arts Anthology Series (forthcoming from Webster Division of McGraw-Hill) includes women as both authors and subjects. In addition, original research to uncover the opinions and contributions of women in the past (e.g., excerpts from diaries, etc.) has gone into a forthcoming tenth-grade text, As it Happened—A History of the United States: The American Heritage School Dictionary, published by a division of McGraw-Hill, Inc., includes a definition of "Ms.," and other nonsexist terms.

Apparently, some commendable work is being done at McGraw-Hill. And yet—"because of the amount of time and expense involved in producing the basal texts"—no separate materials on women are being planned.

* * *


In 1973 a Sexism Committee was formed at Macmillan. Consisting of five editors and artists, it is now at work writing nonsexist guidelines. Macmillan also hired Anne Grant, coordinator of the NOW National Task Force on Education, to produce a slide show to illustrate sexism in the company's own textbooks (mainly elementary readers), and we gather her presentation was extremely well received. However, despite the new awareness it created, Macmillan still has problems. Some of the major concerns (at least of the male editor we interviewed) are the "literary effect" of nonsexist language and the "ethical implications" of what is feared to be "censorship".

* * *

Scholastic Magazines, Inc. arranged a meeting for us with editors, including Sturges Cary, editor-in-chief of the school division. Scholastic publishes instructional materials and individualized reading programs for elementary and high schools. Scholastic Book Services division publishes a variety of paperbacks for children (K-12). School Division imprints include Four Winds Press, Starline Editions, Citation Press. (Offices also in Canada, Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan.)

Scholastic used our visit as an opportunity to invite staff members from various divisions to an all-morning seminar on the issue of sexism. Editors from several departments described their efforts in dealing with feminist concerns. One issue of Scholastic Teacher dealt with sex stereotyping and women's liberation, and a filmstrip on women's history, Ms America, includes information on family, sex roles, and working women. Because of letters from feminist readers, Scholastic Book Club no longer advertises books "for boys only" or "for girls only."

Several editors at the meeting felt they had been working in isolation, without much support from management and that "policy decisions" had not reflected feminist concerns. School systems subscribe annually to Scholastic publications, and management fears that further presentation of feminist issues would jeopardize its relationship with teachers—who are believed to be offended by such "radical" thinking. Scholastic policy, reflecting a conservative viewpoint, is considered to be very much affected by even a small amount of negative criticism from readers.

Our group meeting at Scholastic spontaneously acquired a tone of consciousness-raising and many of the editors appeared to discuss their feelings openly. It was, they reported, the first time they had ever exchanged ideas on ways of eliminating sexism in Scholastic publications. One suggestion that was to be acted upon immediately was the formation of a committee to develop nonsexist guidelines. These guidelines were to be included in the company's basic manual of style.

* * *


According to these three women editors, during the past two years (continued on page 11)
Any Change in Sexist Texts (continued)

the climate at Random House set by management seems to have become more receptive to changing the sexist content of textbooks. This change in attitude can be traced directly to pressures from the marketplace. However, the editors we talked with felt that the changes which have taken place in Random House books are for the most part superficial.

Evan Morley is the editor we interviewed at American Book Company. (She is the in-house editor of a series of nonsexist science texts for the elementary grades.) This firm publishes elementary and high school texts, audiovisual and related materials comprising complete educational systems.

Ms. Morley was pessimistic about the changes taking place in educational publishing. She feels that the attempts publishers are making—pronoun changes and head counts of males per female in illustrations—reflect a superficial approach and a lack of commitment. In her opinion, publishers have not initiated the original research that is needed to improve the textbooks, nor have they tackled controversial political issues such as crime, birth control, and abortion. She believes that educational publishing companies are dealing with feminist issues within a traditional, rigid, narrow frame of reference, which precludes progressive thinking and creative, significant change.

It should be emphasized that the comments of the individuals interviewed obviously represent a public stance taken by officials in the presence of acknowledged feminists. To learn the full story of sexism in educational publishing, one would need to interview privately everyone in the company—including secretaries, bookkeepers, and mailclerks—in order to examine the possible connections between discriminatory attitudes in the office and bias in the books. The need for a more extensive investigation of this sort is now apparent. No doubt it could most effectively be undertaken by concerned individuals within the industry, and if any publishing people who happen to read this report are interested, The Feminist Press would certainly encourage them to pursue the project within their respective companies.

SLIDE PROTEST

Never thought of myself as a feminist

til I was 7

I went to the Typical Red School House

and during recess I hung by my knees

from the 6th graders slide

in protest that us younger kids

couldn't use it

No one seemed to care

about the fact that I wanted

to take the heights and coming down

off the huge curved slide—

the crowd yelled,

"Your underpants are showing!"

My upside down mouth yelled

"You're lucky I've got some on."

but I promptly tried to hold my skirt up

around my butt—

lost balance and fell

Lallo

Denver, Colorado

Administering a Women's Studies Program (continued)

changes in attitudes and behavior occur in many students and faculty as a result of participation in these courses. This affects a radicalization of individuals, a strengthening of the women's movement through broadening the population base of supporters, a greater willingness to accept the political nature of feminism, and often profound changes in life styles and goals. Women's studies are concerned with a directional social change; they have a point of view, and thus are political. This last point and its ramifications probably cause more problems for women's studies within the academic community than any other aspect of their existence. When courses and programs are suggested or proposed in hitherto naive institutions, it is not uncommon for administrators and male faculty to become suddenly sensitized to the possibility of bias and discrimination in such courses. In one instance, when a male student complained of a grade in a Women's Studies course, claiming that it was discriminatory, the academic vice president of the university made a public statement that he was "glad to see" a complaint of this nature, since it showed that this type of program was not exempt from the kinds of charges that had been brought by women against other practices of the university.

Discussing the role of the administrator in women's studies is necessarily restrictive; it implies that a major decision has already been made, namely, that a program or department has been established which houses a collection of courses that are identified as Women's Studies. The establishment of a separate program, as contrasted to the offering of courses about women in existing traditional departments such as sociology or history, is and probably will continue to be an important administrative and fateful issue, one that will not be resolved soon, and perhaps never. The reason for this, as I see it, is that women's studies, more than any other part of the curriculum at the present time, are emerging in idiosyncratic ways on campuses; the forms that their establishment take are a function of the beliefs, energies, and personalities of the women promoting them, and of the character of the institution and the supporting community. Consequently, among the variety of existing women's studies programs, one finds strong proponents both for separate departments and for the development of new courses within existing departments. I am persuaded of the sanguinity of arguments on both sides. Although I have cast my lot as administrator of an autonomous program, I am not unhappy when someone in another department wants to develop a course about women. Under certain conditions, our Women's Studies Program will even cross-list such courses. Later, I will discuss the implications of cross-listing.

For those who are still considering the pros and cons of a separate program, I will briefly summarize the arguments. A separate program serves as a focus for attention to existing knowledge and concern about women, their unique experience and roles in society; it gathers students and faculty who are interested in the various aspects of such an identification, and thus generates research and a continuing structure for scholarly enterprise in the area; it signifies an institutional commitment to recognition of women faculty, students, and the identity of women in general, as well as a compensation for past neglect and discrimination; it provides an administrative entity which can promote all of the above, can act as the manifest identity of the women's movement on campus, can interact with the institution and the community as an educational agent, and can, by its very existence, promote awareness and implement institutional and social change.

Arguments against the establishment of separate programs are mostly based upon a fear of segregation, isolation, and the creation of second-class faculties and educational experiences for students.