Closeup: Women in Management Seminar

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WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT SEMINAR

A unique aspect of the Marymount College, Tarrytown, Women's Studies Program is a three day residential seminar entitled Self-Development for Women in Management. It was offered for the first time in January 1975, again the first week in April and is planned for other times throughout the coming year. The seminar grew out of an extensive research project conducted by six faculty members. In the fall of 1975, an executive of a large international corporation approached the college and told us of a problem (as he perceived it) that existed in his company. Equal opportunity regulations require the upgrading of women into high positions, but many women who were offered promotions had turned them down.

Financed by a small grant, we then developed an in-depth questionnaire designed to get at some of the reasons why such promotions were not granted. We interviewed women from major corporations at all job levels, in various areas: marketing, sales, advertising, technical and community relations among them. We found that at one time or another over 50 percent had turned down a promotion. On the other hand, over 75 percent of those interviewed felt that at one time or another they had been ready for a promotion but had not been offered one.

Our reading in the area and our survey of other research revealed that the corporate environment, particularly the expectations of some superiors and subordinates, militates against success for women. Expectations that women will not exert authority and handle responsibility decisively and rationally can become self-fulfilling prophecies and may place women in a most uncomfortable double bind.

After our reading and research, we set out to design a seminar based on our findings. We saw our goals as broad ones—to confront the participants with the social problem of the sex stereotyping of women both by themselves and others and to study how this might damage their chances in the corporate world. The goal of our three day seminar is to improve participants' self-confidence through increased awareness of self and the social environment. Our sessions include: developing self-awareness as women; improving interaction with others in the organization; developing managerial skills; translating awareness into action; integrating business and domestic life; and cybernetic simulation—participation in a simulated society where sex discrimination is a major factor.

Our first session in January was attended by 28 women from both small and large companies located in various parts of the country. Participants felt the program was of particular value in increasing their self-awareness as women and in helping them to understand how being different affects personal interaction in work situations. They felt that sharing common anxieties of women in business and discussion of myths about working women helped them feel less alone. As part of the last session, each participant formulated an action plan which consisted of steps she would take in the next two weeks and a series of steps toward fulfillment of a long range goal.

Although in our approach we seek to help women climb up the career ladder of the corporate structure, we also speak of the changes that they can effect in this environment. In the session on self-awareness we discussed a study by Virginia Ellen Schein1 in which she found that certain requisite managerial characteristics such as being understanding, helpful or intuitive are also stereotypically feminine traits. Schein suggests that focusing more attention on these so-called feminine characteristics which are related to managerial success will make business more receptive to women managers and will to some degree alter the emphasis in defining good management.

Self-Development for Women in Management does not meet the formal academic criteria for a women's studies course. It is not a re-examination of any area of knowledge, nor an investigation of the dominant point of view which has left women out or distorted their roles in disciplines such as history, psychology or literature.2 It is rather an action-oriented seminar, taught by a faculty experienced in women's studies and designed to bring about significant changes in women's behavior in a very crucial area of their lives: work and other aspects related to it. We hope to reach a large and important segment of the female population—women in business—a group who would not ordinarily be exposed to women's studies courses. The experience of working with such a public has made me feel that the definition of women's studies (and perhaps its future) should include workshops, seminars and outreach programs designed to be of service to women other than teachers and students. We at Marymount have found that the insights we have gained through participating in our own women's studies program for undergraduates can be profitably used in an enterprise which reaches out to women beyond the walls of the university.

Ellen Silber, Director


ANALYSIS OF DISCRIMINATION (continued)

that an "especially strong effort must be made to fill faculty openings with women, particularly at the professor and associate professor levels"; that "the biological sciences, English, psychology, government and the library" were "fields in which our faculty balance is more male than justified by the recent production of female PhD's." The Report concluded that Skidmore was providing the female 90 percent of its student body "with fewer professional examples or role models at a time when all our changing values of the role of modern woman need reinforcing."

Full figures for 1973-74 and for the present academic year are now being compiled; they suggest that the trends described by the Committee W Report have continued. The present situation in the English department can serve as a case in point. The department consists of twenty-two teaching faculty, eighteen full time and three and a half additional positions filled by seven part time faculty, six women and one man. (There is, in fact, an eighth part time faculty member, but she holds a full time appointment in the education department.) Of the eighteen full time positions, four, or slightly more than one-fifth of the department, are held by women. Since roughly one-third of all PhD's earned in English are granted to women, the department should have at least six (continued on page 10)