Notes toward an Analysis of Discrimination

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NOTES TOWARD AN ANALYSIS OF DISCRIMINATION
by Gloria DeSole and Dora Odarenko

Two years ago, in December 1972, the American Association of University Professors Committee W Report on the State of Women on the Faculty of Skidmore College concluded that the college appeared to be discriminating against women in its hiring practice. Studies of the faculty during the preceding five years showed that in a time of faculty expansion there had been an overall decrease in the teaching faculty by one woman and an increase by twenty-one men. In the words of the Report, it was "not a very equitable development in an already poor balance" of 86 men to 58 women on the faculty as a whole in the year 1968-69 and 107 men to 57 women on the faculty as a whole in 1972-73.1

The sexual composition of the faculty was only part of the story: "Even more telling" were figures for "the ranks to which appointments were made." Over the five-year period of the study, there were four men and no women appointed at the professor rank; two men and one woman at the associate rank (the woman was appointed in the nursing department to head a special project funded in part by a grant); twenty-nine men and eleven women in the assistant rank (five of these women were in the departments of nursing and physical education and one was in Asian studies); twenty-nine men and thirty-four women in the instructor rank where the turnover is the highest. Skidmore was not unique in hiring the majority of its women in the lowest position, but the consequences for Skidmore of such a procedure were serious, for since the majority of women were hired in the high turnover ranks and departments, a lower proportion of women were raised in rank: ten men promoted to full professor in the five-year period, but only one woman; twenty-eight men to associate but only eleven women; twenty men to assistant from instructor but only twelve women.

From such figures the Report noted the following: that Skidmore's "recruitment and hiring of faculty to fill vacancies and new positions has decreased the representation of women in the professorial ranks"; that "as the present female professors retire, the balance will become much less favorable";

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THE FUTURE OF WOMEN'S STUDIES
FOCUS ON THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
by Florence Howe

One of the most distinguished programs in women's studies was begun on the Buffalo campus of the State University of New York in 1970, another in 1969 at Cornell University, an institution affiliated with SUNY. At SUNY/College at Old Westbury, a Women's Studies Program was written into the innovative curriculum planned more than four years ago, and that institution has been host to The Feminist Press and the Clearinghouse on Women's Studies since that time. Newer programs have developed at Albany, Brockport and New Paltz, while SUNY/Binghamton's women's history program is the first in the nation to grant the doctorate. Similarly, SUNY/Buffalo was one of the first campuses to offer an M.A. degree in women's studies, and it is the only campus with a student-initiated Women's Studies College. Still, given the fact that SUNY contains some 73 institutions of higher learning, the state-wide record was, until recently, not impressive.

Last year, in part at the request of the Caucus on Women's Rights at SUNY, Chancellor Ernest Boyer established an Advisory Committee on Women's Studies to make recommendations concerning the development of women's studies within the state university. Ably chaired by Jerome H. Supple, Acting Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education, the Advisory Committee included faculty, students and administrators from Albany, Brockport and New Paltz, while SUNY/Binghamton's women's history program is the first in the nation to grant the doctorate. Similarly, SUNY/Buffalo was one of the first campuses to offer an M.A. degree in women's studies, and it is the only campus with a student-initiated Women's Studies College. Still, given the fact that SUNY contains some 73 institutions of higher learning, the state-wide record was, until recently, not impressive.

The Committee met several times last year to gather and share information about the development of women's studies on campuses around the state; and to plan a series of strategic panel sessions (before a meeting of all SUNY Presidents, for example) and state-wide conferences. The first of these conferences will be held on the Fredonia campus September 26 and 27; tentative topics for discussion include "Status Reports on Women's Studies—Nationally and At Selected Campuses"; the "Politics of Women's Studies"; and the "Nature of Women's Studies Programs."

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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 which could account for the situation described by the corporation executive and also uncover other problems and needs of women in business. 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' job effectiveness 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 female 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 two 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 Schein 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. 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

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ANALYSIS OF DISCRIMINATION (continued)

full time women. Although it might be argued that this year, with its six part time women equaling three full time teaching equivalents, the department has in fact met its quota of seven out of twenty-two, such arguments are unacceptable to affirmative action. Three of these women were here for one semester only; the other three are on one-year terminal contracts with their requests for renewal still unresolved. The opportunities available to any of these women for advising students, serving on committees or developing curriculum are minimal.

The English department, therefore, has currently, only four full time women, two tenured, and the two who are untenured, Dora J. Odarenko and Gloria DeSole. The second of the two senior women was tenured sixteen years ago. The more senior woman will be retiring within five or six years. Since Dora Odarenko was notified on November 14 that she had been removed from a tenure line and since Gloria DeSole was notified on December 12 that she will not be recommended for tenure, the soonest that tenure can be granted to a woman newly hired in English will be in five or six years, making a total gap of twenty-two years.

It is perfectly true that explanations for the 16-year gap are diverse. Nevertheless, all of them have been determined by masculine values in a male-oriented context. What is incontrovertible is that a pattern has been established that will continue the appalling imbalance of the department for some years to come. Furthermore, a department that conceives of itself as a white male preserve cannot, by its virtual homogeneity, fully realize the aims set forth in its catalog description, that of explicating literature "as an expression of human attitudes and values." Such a pattern defeats its own alleged philosophy, for men are simply not adequate to articulate all of the "responses to human experience," especially at a predominantly women's college.

Looked at from the standpoint of the two terminated women, Gloria DeSole and Dora Odarenko, the pattern that has been followed has been dangerous for three major reasons: 1) The definition of the department, certainly of its core, as almost exclusively male, has created an atmosphere that has neither sufficiently advised nor valued the two women. Given this definition, a discriminatory atmosphere is virtually inevitable, since a lack of diversity creates a sameness, a subjectivity, a kind of tyrannous naiveté that has resulted in a sexist point of view. Thus it is not so much a question of the bias of some people as a fundamental obstacle to the department's potential for growth.

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In the words of the recent decision (January 1975) against Smith College in which that institution was found guilty of discrimination against Skidmore College. Her suit has been taken up by the New York State Commission for Human Rights and "probable cause" of sexism has been found.

The effect on the entire college of such a pattern and of the termination of women like Dora Odarenko and Gloria DeSole cannot be dismissed. In 1971, they began to develop a program in women's studies that was new not merely within the department, but pioneering for the profession. Now listed as a concentration within the major, it has included several freshman seminars, two introductory level courses, a variety of January term offerings and a two-semester senior colloquium. In addition, these courses dovetail with new offerings in other departments and are part of the college's advertisements for its new forward-looking curriculum. Although the two women, together with their students, had to battle to get these courses accepted as a permanent part of the curriculum, some of the very men that opposed them are now themselves trying to teach these courses. Yet they are still unable to understand feminism as other than a stereotype, a nonprofessional intrusion; they see a feminist as a woman whose particular skills have only faddish value. They have no sense at all of what a feminist approach to literature might be. With rare exception, they look for evidence of such an approach in traditional forms and are unable to value its genuine appearance in the classroom and on campus. Just as these women were initially ridiculed for what was considered the hasty conception (albeit parthenogenetic) of their women's courses, they are now expected to deliver before term a criticism that will survive.

It is not surprising, therefore, that while at times the department equates too easily various kinds of feminism, at times it attempts to excise it variably. So, by repeatedly telling Gloria DeSole that she and the other sixth year people constituted "the backbone of the Department," they seemed to acknowledge the value of her contribution to the profession; in reality they did not comprehend it, or they refused to see work for women in the profession as valuable to that profession. On the other hand, warnings dropped to Dora Odarenko suggested that she should not involve herself unduly in teaching feminist courses, that her January terms, for example, should not deal solely with women. Neither Dora Odarenko nor Gloria DeSole has been thanked for courses that register nonmajors in droves; evaluation of these courses has been given lowest priority. The easy assumption that the two women who originated and developed these courses on the Skidmore campus can now be replaced by candidates who express some interest in the general subject of women and literature is shockingly naive. And if their colleagues allow the termination of the two women, they speak more than perhaps they know of their attitude toward their own students.

Editor's Note: Gloria DeSole has filed a suit charging sex discrimination against Skidmore College. Her suit has been taken up by the New York State Commission for Human Rights and "probable cause" of sexism has been found.

1 Note that these were figures for the teaching faculty as a whole. In fact, 38.7 percent of the total number of women faculty included in the figure for 1972-73 were members of the departments of business, nursing and physical education, areas traditionally considered the domain of women at Skidmore. When the BA or liberal arts programs were separated from the professional or BS programs, the proportion for the liberal arts departments was found to be even lower: 80 men to only 27 women in 1972-73 in BA programs and 27 men to 30 women in the BS programs. In other words, roughly 75 percent men to 25 percent women in the liberal arts.