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Women and Education: A Survey of Recent Historical Research

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THE past two years have seen a flurry of publications on the position of women in our society. Several journals, among them *Contemporary Education*, *Improving College and University Teaching*, *University College Quarterly*, and the *American Journal of Sociology*, have devoted whole issues to women, and new journals such as *Women's Studies* and *Feminist Studies* have appeared.¹ The history of women's education has been the subject of several articles in these and other journals. While these articles have dealt mainly with issues of present concern, not those of the past, they nevertheless make a useful beginning for further research in the field.

The first problem facing any historian is to locate source materials. Two source guides to women's history were drawn up in 1972: *Archival and Manuscript Resources for the Study of Women's History: A Beginning* (describing the collections in many universities throughout the country) and *Women in American History, 1896-1920: Their Manu-*

*scripts in the Library of Congress.*² Information is still being sought on where further source material about women may be found. For historians of education the task is particularly tantalizing because much of the 19th century statistical data on schooling is not broken down by sex; and therefore more obscure, less quantitative sources, such as records of ethnic groups, private letters, diaries, reports of school board meetings, and teachers' records have to be relied on to provide the material needed. Many of these sources have still to be identified.

A strong impetus toward a historical assessment of women's roles in the universities has been provided by the continuing education movement of the 1960's and the Women's Liberation movement. From the Center for Continuing Education at the Uni-

¹ *Contemporary Education* 43 (4); *Improving College and University Teaching* 20 (1); *University College Quarterly* 18 (2); *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (4); *Women's Studies*, Volume 1, Winter 1972; *Feminist Studies*, Volume 1, Summer 1972.

² *Archival and Manuscript Resources for the Study of Women's History: A Beginning*, by Robert Asher, Mari Jo Buhle, Charlotte Davis, Ellen DuBois, Andrea Hinding, Mary Lynn McCree, Roberta Balstad Miller, Joan Hoff Wilson. Compiled by Andrea Hinding and Rosemary Richardson at the Social Welfare History Archives center, Clarke A. Chambers, director, University of Minnesota libraries, April 1972. *Women in American History, 1896-1920: Their Manuscripts in the Library of Congress*, by Roy R. Thomas, Assistant Professor of History, Bowie State College, Bowie, Maryland 20715.

versity of Michigan has come Dorothy G. McGuigan's history of 100 years of women at that institution.³ Her work underlines the problems faced by women in meeting university requirements and in finding career opportunities commensurate with their qualifications. The need to change inflexible university requirements, particularly those relating to the exchange of graduate credits, has been the subject of articles by Elizabeth L. Cless in *The American Scholar* and Jo Anne J. Trow in *Improving College and University Teaching*.⁴ During the past three years women faculty members, students, and staff members of many universities have initiated investigations into their status, and the reports of these studies contain valuable information on recent changes in the position of women.

Eleanor F. Dolan, in *Improving College and University Teaching*, and Joan N. Burstyn, in *University College Quarterly*, examine the changes in higher education for women within the broader context of women's aspirations and their job opportunities.⁵ Dolan takes an optimistic view of the gains toward equality made by women during the past century. Her greatest reservations are in relation to faculty in higher education, where women are sparsely represented. Dolan expects this situation to

³ Dorothy G. McGuigan. *A Dangerous Experiment*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970.

⁴ Elizabeth L. Cless. "A Modest Proposal for the Educating of Women." *American Scholar* 38 (4): 618-27; Autumn 1969; and Jo Anne J. Trow. "Higher Education for Women." *Improving College and University Teaching* 20 (1): 19-20; Winter 1972.

⁵ Eleanor F. Dolan. "A Century for Equality." *Improving College and University Teaching* 20 (1): 23-27; Winter 1972; and Joan N. Burstyn. "Striving for Equality: Higher Education for Women in the U.S. Since 1900." *University College Quarterly* 18 (2): 22-32; January 1973.

change rapidly as colleges and universities comply with federal equal employment regulations. Her article provides useful statistical data on change in women's education and jobs since 1870.

Burstyn is less sanguine about the strides toward equality made by women since 1900. While the *number* of women obtaining degrees at all levels has increased steadily during this century, the *percentage* of degrees awarded to women dropped precipitately after World War II, and is only now returning to pre-war level. The reasons for the drop have yet to be analyzed in detail, although the GI Bill and government funding of university research in science and engineering after World War II did a great deal to change the balance of men and women students.

While much attention has been centered on issues of current concern, some historians have been examining the Victorian period to throw light on the origins of the 19th century women's movement. Historians of education who wish to understand the attitudes toward women held by 19th century schoolchildren and teachers will welcome several articles in the first issue of *Women's Studies* describing how women were portrayed in 19th century literature.⁶

Linda Kraft, in the *School Library Journal*, has reported some research on women in contemporary reference books.⁷ Kraft examined current encyclopedias, recommended by a committee of the American Library Association, and discovered that references to women's contribution to American

⁶ Donald D. Stone. "Victorian Feminism and the Nineteenth Century Novel"; Ann Douglas Wood. "The Literature of Impoverishment: The Women Local Colorists in America 1865-1914." *Women's Studies*, Volume 1, Winter 1972.

⁷ Linda Kraft. "Lost Herstory: The Treatment of Women in Children's Encyclopedias." *School Library Journal* 98: 218-27; January 15, 1973.

Future ASCD Annual Conferences

1974	March 9-13	Anaheim	<i>Anaheim Convention Center</i>
1975	March 15-19	New Orleans	<i>Rivergate</i>
1976	March 13-17	Miami Beach	<i>Convention Center</i>
1977	March 5-9	Detroit	<i>Cobo Hall</i>

history were scant and stereotypical. It would be intriguing to have analyses of the image of women portrayed in textbooks of the past 100 years; studies of successive editions would enable historians to pinpoint changes in attitude. How often did schools change their textbooks? An in-depth study of textbook changes in one school district might throw light on changing attitudes within the community served by that district's schools.

The origin of secondary education for women was the subject of a session at the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians in 1972.⁸ Keith Melder described female seminaries of the early 19th century as institutions training women to submissive behavior. The students' days were regulated minutely, and few decisions were left to the individual. The governing bodies of seminaries were men, very often local clergymen. While acknowledging that the best seminaries offered women an opportunity to study academic subjects to an advanced standard, Melder emphasized that seminaries played a large part in spreading the Victorian image of women as morally pure but socially submissive.

Catharine Beecher's contribution to women's education was discussed in another paper. Beecher, who believed men and women should have separate spheres of work, wished women to develop a hierarchy of professional achievement in nursing, domestic economy, and teaching. She saw such work as women's mission and sought to upgrade the education women received, especially their training as teachers. If women were to maintain control over their own sphere of work, they had to have the intellectual skills to design homes and formulate theories of education, as well as to keep house and teach school.

The teaching profession provides a fascinating field of study for those who wish to explore changing attitudes toward gender

⁸ The papers presented were: Keith Melder, "Mask of Oppression: The Female Seminary Movement in the United States"; and Joan N. Burstyn, "Catharine Beecher and the Education of American Women." (The latter paper will appear in the *New England Quarterly*.)

roles. Beecher's ideas have been abandoned by society, but there is evidence that differential pay scales for men and women make an occupation gravitate toward one sex or another according to the interplay of market constraints and the status of the occupation. Marianne A. Ferber and Jane W. Loeb have recently described current university attitudes in the *American Journal of Sociology*.⁹ We have still to wait for a historical analysis of faculty response toward the inflow of women teachers into elementary and secondary schools during the 19th century.

The research described here concentrates on the history of women in higher education. During the next few years we can expect much more light to be thrown on the role of women in elementary and secondary education: their part in teachers' unions, on local and state boards of education, as principals and superintendents, and their contribution to educational theory.

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⁹ Marianne A. Ferber and Jane W. Loeb, "Performance, Rewards, and Perception of Sex Discrimination Among Male and Female Faculty." *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (4): 995-1002; January 1973.

Manuscripts Needed for "Research in Review"

Manuscripts for the "Research in Review" column are being solicited by the coordinator. The column is devoted to providing a *summary* of research completed in an area of interest. The column is *not* designed to report on *one* particular research study (such manuscripts are best sent to the "Research Supplement").

Manuscripts should be 1,400 words in length (approximately five typewritten double-spaced pages), including references. Submit manuscripts in duplicate and with return envelope and postage. Decisions on materials will be made as promptly as possible.

Materials for "Research in Review" should be addressed to: Dr. Marcella L. Kysilka, Associate Professor, College of Education, Florida Technological University, P.O. Box 25000, Orlando, Florida 32816.

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