



# Are the Schools a

**I**N RECENT years, role and personality differentiation by sex has received much attention. Few indeed can say they have not heard of the "lib" movement and formed some opinion toward it and its leading voices and demands. As time passes, more thoughtful studies and discourse appear to help clarify the issue of prejudicial differentiations by sex.

The more objective and insightful writers distinguish common concern for both males and females. Recently, Block (1973) concluded a thoughtful article on the issue by saying,

I would suggest that the contemporary scrutiny of conventional definitions of masculinity and femininity is encouraging our society to reflect on the personal costs of adherence to the prevailing norms, the costs to men and women alike (p. 526).

Though elementary schools typically handle equal numbers of boys and girls and are supported by the general community, somehow their teaching staffs are 85 percent or more female. The question arises: Do schools so overwhelmingly staffed by women reflect female biases? If so, is the situation complementary to the concerns attached to the predominance of males in the greater society? As expected, responses vary and disagree some, but opinion and research tend to give affirmative answers to the questions. Studies report that the values and practices

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of elementary schools favor girls and discriminate against boys.

Writing with a style that often borders on outrage, Sexton (1965) claims that "schools are emasculating our boys":

Boys and schools seem locked in a deadly and ancient conflict that may eventually inflict mortal wounds on both. In vastly disproportionate numbers, boys are the maladjusted, the inattentive, the rebellious. . . . The problem is not just that teachers are too often women. It is that the school is too much a women's world, governed by women's rules and standards (p. 57).

Further, Sexton (1969) charges that home and school domination of males produces what she calls the "feminized male":

Denied the power to give orders on the job, women have developed compensatory muscle in the home and school. There at least a woman has some power over her children. A special target has been the males in her family—husband and sons, those who can do the things in the world she feels she can't. Sons are easy objects of her creative impulse and desire to shape human destinies and events. They are often victims, in school and home, of the female's repressed antagonism and legitimate resentment of male privilege (p. 24).



# “Feminized Society”?

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We see a different stylistic approach in the recent debate between Brophy and Good (1973) versus Smith (1973) on the question of whether the “feminized school” has detrimental effects on boys. Their debate centers more on the interpretation and implications of findings than on the substance of the research, for example, the McNeil (1964) study that found boys’ reading achievement was poorer than that of girls under instruction from female teachers, but boys equaled girls’ achievement with auto-instructional methods. The differing levels of generalization make Smith concerned with the need for “a balance in the number of male and female teachers” to end the “feminized school environments.” Brophy and Good argue that the improvement of early schooling for boys should be developed through the broader issue of “curriculum and instruction innovations” rather than just the recruitment of male teachers.

Schools have been viewed as “feminized societies” from the concerns of both reasons for and effects of the situation. Evaluating school psychology as a professional field of work, McCandless (1969), one of the country’s psychological leaders, identified the field’s major problem as being the role conflicts that frustrate many school psychologists. According to McCandless, school psychologists are social scientists who have been trained in a “masculine” discipline and

associate themselves with scientific societies. However, practicing school psychologists must function in schools which are “feminine” in social orientation and do not offer them opportunity to conduct research and development. The problem tends to divide academic and practicing school psychologists; the former are viewed as concentrating on “the growing edge of innovation, demonstration, service, manipulation, and research,” while the practitioners are perceived as “being clinicians and tire repairmen, diagnosticians, and healers” (p. 15).

## Character of Schools

The following definition of social systems by McCandless as “masculine” or “feminine” is especially noteworthy:

A masculine social organization is task oriented, pragmatic, ruggedly autonomous and independent, often impatient of human relations, full of initiative and innovation and, despite and often in contradiction to its pragmatism, sometimes inclined to stop impatiently to ask, “Where are we going and what does it mean?” A feminine social organization, however, stresses happiness, self-actualization, and “getting along all right.” It is sensitive to human relations and conservative: it jealously guards

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its status quo, safety, and security. It is nurturant, obedient, and responsible. When its values are threatened, it is exceptionally autocratic (p. 15).

Hofstadter (1966) has argued that the overwhelming feminine character of schools and their emphasis upon life-adjustment are clear signs of America's anti-intellectualism. He wrote: "The United States is the only country in the Westernized world that has put its elementary education almost exclusively in the hands of women and its secondary education largely so . . ." (p. 320).

Hofstadter made it clear that his point is not the superiority of male teachers or that they hold a monopoly in intellectualism. In fact, although he did not say so for males, he did say that women may be preferred for certain grade levels. However, as others have stated too, the fact that teaching is perceived by intellectuals (male and female) as a feminine profession in America, that it does not offer men "the stature of a fully legitimate male role," indicates the transient nature of teaching as a career and its less than adequate professional development.

For a "distillate of American ideas of the teacher," Margaret Mead (1962) portrayed the teacher as a woman "urging, helping, poking, scolding, encouraging those whose steps though lagging slow to school went storming out to playing." Considering male teachers, she wrote: "The man who teaches in grade school has to deal with a self-classification of being a 'man teacher,' thus tacitly acknowledging that he is a male version of a role which is felt to be feminine" (pp. 5-6). Mead identifies "the type teacher of our city and town schools today [as] a girl who is . . . mobile upward, moving . . . to a better middle class position" (p. 29). Mead might have added that male teachers are probably more mobile-minded, most thinking of later administrative or academic careers.

In contrast to American schools, the findings of Preston (1962) that German boys generally outperform girls in reading achievement and have fewer remedial problems have led others to Preston's conclusion that "variability may be culturally or environmentally conditioned" (p. 353). For in Ger-

man elementary schools, male teachers predominate and school achievement appears to be more of a male than female value.

At this point of the discussion, therefore, it seems possible to say that American schools, especially for elementary pupils, operate with norms and biases that many characterize as feminine. However, this question arises: Is teaching behavior actually so simple to classify—by teacher sex or any other single factor?

Those who see a feminized society in schools may be making an oversimplified connection between the predominance of female teachers and the way schools operate. It seems accurate to say that teachers as a whole differ from people in other occupations. And teachers are mostly female, yet many women have not taken to teaching as a career and are busy with many other social roles. Teachers, especially the most experienced, do share certain values and role expectations common to schools as institutions, but all who have known teachers realize that they vary greatly in significant ways. If schools carry certain basic norms and operations that many characterize as feminine, then let us say that teaching attracts a certain type of person who is generally female and ask why.

## Attributes for Teaching

That certain type of person may well be a male with or without strong masculine characteristics. It seems more relevant to consider what common and variant attributes for teaching there are. After all, there are so-called "masculine" professions, such as medicine, in which women also succeed and might predominate in other societies (for example, medical practitioners are mostly female in Russia). Somehow America's image of "the teacher as a woman," as described by Mead, and its superficial approaches to the classroom tend to blind many to the complexities of teaching and learning and their potential expanded understanding and systematic development. Can one or two factors alone really summarize the educational system? Sweeping observations of

masculine and feminine societies, such as those by Sexton and McCandless, may be partially true but tend to stereotype and mislead, because they would have us focus blame on single factors, such as teacher sex, rather than composites or profiles of teacher type. The most significant factors to predict teaching-learning effectiveness will be less obvious and far more involved than people normally perceive educational settings. Hofstadter and Mead help us realize the seriousness of the problem by relating the reality of American perceptions of school teachers and practices. Block gives us guidelines to overcome static notions of what is female and masculine, which surely influence the type of person entering the teaching profession at present.

To illustrate the need for enlarging our view of teaching and learning, let us examine teachers' and pupils' attitudes as criteria or dependent variables and how they are determined by several predictors or independent variables. From my study of 212 classrooms on the relationship of teacher-pupil perceptions (Yee, 1971, pp. 269-82), I can expand upon data on teachers' attitudes toward teaching as a career and warmth, acceptance, understanding, and sympathy toward children and pupils' attitudes of their teachers' affective, cognitive, disciplinary, innovative, and motivational merit. In other words, the data tell us how teachers and pupils viewed each other in terms of some vital interpersonal dimensions. To save space here, the reader should refer to the original work for the technical details.

In general, various measures of teachers' attitudes do not differ at statistically significant levels when analyzed by teacher sex alone. However, analyzing the factor of pupils' socioeconomic status with teacher sex, the differences are highly significant ( $p < .001$ ). Teachers of advantaged children expressed the most positive attitudes, and attitudes of males were more favorable than those of female teachers. In the case of disadvantaged children's teachers, males and females expressed more negative attitudes than the teachers of advantaged pupils. The attitudes of male teachers in disadvantaged

settings were far more negative than those of their female colleagues.

Thus, the factor of pupils' social condition divides teachers into two distinct types, one that holds modern professional views and is friendly and warm toward youngsters, and the other that maintains archaic views of teaching and relates with children in a punitive and hostile manner. In addition, analyses with the same factor in combination with sex of teacher show the very interesting finding that there are two sharply contrasting groups of male teachers, one that is most up-to-date and sympathetic, and one group that is the most punitive and hostile toward children.

While male groups were quite disparate, female teachers of advantaged and disadvantaged pupils tended to be more alike in attitudes. The distance between the advantaged group on the female end of interaction curves and the females in the disadvantaged group would be less than one-third the distance between the two groups of males. Male and female teachers differed more by pupils' social condition than by teacher sex.

## Teacher-Pupil Attitudes

There were also interesting contrasts in terms of other factors, such as teachers' years of classroom service, grade levels, and pupils' ethnic background. Yet the most interesting outcome of all arose from analysis of pupils' perceptions. The amazing result was that although disadvantaged pupils faced the most negative male teachers, these children rated their male teachers more favorably than their female counterparts. The advantaged pupils also rated their male teachers higher than female teachers, which is easier to explain in terms of their teachers' more favorable attitudes. Such differences were insignificant at the beginning of the school year, but had become highly significant by the end of the first semester ( $p < .003$ ).

There is hardly enough space to discuss why such results might occur. One thing that seems clear is that while female teachers seem more alike in the attitudes studied, male

teachers really differ in terms of social situation. Differences between the recruitment and retention philosophy of advantaged and disadvantaged schools probably account for the results. Also, differing career goals and academic preparation would probably help explain such results too. From another study (Yee, 1971, pp. 331-40), the correlations of principals' and teachers' attitudes were very positive in both advantaged and disadvantaged settings. Thus, principals hired and kept teachers who tended to agree with their own attitudes. The reverse process is probably likely too.

Principal-teacher relationships were stronger than pupil-teacher attitude relationships, as one might guess from the disadvantaged pupils' perception of their male teachers. One reason that disadvantaged children perceived as they did might be connected with the fact that a male teacher was a unique affair and did have compensating aspects. Another reason is that a "tough" male could develop and maintain class discipline that the disadvantaged pupils

might have found lacking in other classes.

This brief review of teacher-pupil attitudes suggests that teacher sex is a relevant factor in classrooms, but we can see it is only one of many factors. A sound issue cannot be made upon it alone. Pupils' socioeconomic status seems very potent, but is it more cause or effect in teaching behavior? The simplified notion of the "feminized society" in schools seems relevant as an image from a distance, not in meaningful analyses. Focusing just on the recruitment of female or male teachers without concentration upon teacher types and the revolutionary change of schools as institutions would be supercilious in tone and misleading in purpose.

Studies of classroom teachers indicate that their main concerns seem directed more to the here-and-now and practical matters of classroom dynamics. Jackson (1968) characterized the orientation of teachers in part by saying they had a "tender-minded world view," which "idealized children and was tinged with a quasi-mystical faith in human perfectibility." Examining the lan-



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guage of teachers, Jackson wrote: "Lacking a technical vocabulary, swimming the intellectual surface of the problems they encounter, fenced in, as it were, by the walls of their concrete experience, these teachers hardly look like the type of people who should be allowed to supervise the intellectual development of young children" (p. 148).

Jackson said that teachers differ greatly from researchers and decision makers who are oriented to rationality, intellectual models, and educational management. But with the impersonal and institutionalized nature of ever-enlarging schools in general and the complex nature of classrooms, Jackson asserted: "Our present cadre of elementary school teachers, with all of their intellectual fuzziness and sticky sentimentality, may be doing a job better than could an army of human engineers" (p. 152). His description of teachers and their classroom tasks, therefore, leads him to an understanding of their difficult roles and pressures rather than simple condemnation of their problems. As education is organized and managed today, all phases of teaching are severely limited, including the recruitment and development of a professional corps of teachers.

For years, my view has been that the fundamental nature of education is the teaching-learning relationship. All other factors, such as buildings and facilities, texts, administration, and curriculum guides, seem secondary to social interaction in the classroom. Americans pursue so many approaches to improve their schools, which does attest to their desire to develop excellence; but all factors are not equivalent in value, as most tend to think, nor should they be handled simply. Without some system of priorities, educators seem to be perpetual rainbow-chasers. Some of the most obvious approaches to develop teaching as a solid profession, such as teacher education and interdisciplinary research, are neglected through excuses tangential to the direct needs of education (Yee, in press).

As a "man teacher" for seven years, I know what Margaret Mead's description means. Yet teaching is and could become far more than what the common image char-

acterizes it as being, and that was Mead's ultimate intent, too. I have known mediocre and superb male and female teachers and find it superficial to approach the problems and needs of schools from the matter of teacher sex alone. As a professional area of study, education has meandered this way and that, following now one slogan or concept hither and yon until another became attractive. I hope to see more advanced and purposeful approaches to educational problems and to see greater social interaction among teachers and educational scholars develop.

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