

The women's movement has resulted in some improvement in the status of women and raised delicate questions about roles of both women and men. These are fundamental issues, involving the procreation and nurture of future generations as well as the present fulfillment of individuals.

All people should have the same rights, opportunities, and responsibilities. That seems beyond dispute to me, although many Americans apparently feel otherwise. To our disgrace, we have delayed ratification of a Constitutional amendment that simply confirms the legal equality of men and women.

Numerous other signs indicate that the mood of the country is pessimistic, cautious, and skeptical, so progress may continue to be slow. Unless there is a change in the historic direction of our society, however, the principle of the Equal Rights Amendment will surely be established eventually. Each of us should persist until that happens and legal equity between the sexes is fully achieved.

Some of the other issues raised by the women's movement are even more difficult to resolve because they concern unconscious attitudes and deeply engrained social traditions. Following her college graduation, my daughter chose to become a full-time mother rather than begin a career immediately. She doesn't regret her decision, but she notes with some envy that nearly all the women who were her friends in college are now practicing professionals. She wonders if she will ever catch



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up—and how many of them will interrupt their careers to raise a family.

Newspaper reports say leaders of the women's movement are disenchanted with the "super-woman" image. Women are said to be finding it difficult to be perfect wives and mothers while at the same time being fully adequate lawyers, executives, or school principals. Urie Bronfenbrenner says, "We have created a conflict between the two most human activities people engage in. One is working and the other is raising the new generation. We've pitted those two against one another when they should be complementary."¹ That does not mean women should abandon their careers; it means that expectations for both males and females should be redefined cooperatively by those involved—which is all of us.

Reconsideration of established habits and attitudes can be painful. When I showed an earlier version of this paper to two women staff members at ASCD, they told me

some things I had said and done that they considered sexist. They said no one should claim to be free from bias, because we are all creatures of our culture. Educational leaders have an obligation to re-examine their own behavior and to help their colleagues do the same. All the subtle cues used to let boys and girls know their place have to be recognized and eliminated.

An example of the way social conventions affect the destiny of individuals is "math avoidance." Mathematics and science are generally considered masculine subjects, which may be part of the reason girls tend not to like them or do as well in them as they do in English, for example. Fewer girls than boys elect advanced math classes, so girls lack preparation for technical occupations, and that limits their career options.

The problem is familiar to most of us. We may not have thought much about it twenty years ago, but during the last decade we couldn't avoid it. Just knowing, though, is not enough. In this issue Gloria Fauth and Judith Jacobs (page 485) offer practical suggestions, based on research, for what administrators and curriculum specialists can do.

The self-fulfilling prophecy works both ways, so an article by Carole Johnson and Gloria Greenbaum (page 492) is also pertinent.

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¹ "On Families and Schools: A Conversation with Urie Bronfenbrenner," *Educational Leadership* 36 (April 1979): 459.

Letters

Dear Editor:

This is a letter of criticism. Usually I wouldn't bother but I'm feeling a little feisty this morning and said to myself—why not?

In "Overview" for the December 1979 issue you reported that of 144 authors, one-third were women and minorities. Well, who cares? If all the authors were the same it shouldn't make any difference, as long as what they wrote was relevant, of high quality, and interestingly presented.

And look at who did write: those furthest from the classroom! Just who is this journal aimed at?

I wonder how many members are like me and put the journal on the bottom of the pile to be read "when we have time"? I have about ten or more I've not read yet or even looked at, but in the December issue I reviewed two articles: the condemnation of "free materials" and the indictment of "mixers" to get people to know each other.

After reading "free materials" I didn't need to have anyone tell me what was wrong and what was right about it. I can think as well as anyone when I care to and I'm sure most of your readers can, too. Now, where in your journal do you encourage or even allow responses from your general clientele? I'm sure you would have gotten some pithy comments on this article.

I can also see your audience writing in and giving Ellen Sarkis-

ian more suggestions for appropriate ice-breakers, and also some comments on how they feel when they are treated as small children who need to be led. If you encourage readers to speak up, you just might awaken some interest in your public and also discover more about the types of articles people read.

(Name Withheld by Request)

Ron Brandt replies:

Our December issue did not have a "Letters" column but we welcome responses from readers and frequently publish them. When an article is especially con-

troversial, we sometimes include a response along with it in the interest of fairness. Otherwise it takes several months for a reply to appear in print.

As I said in my column, our first consideration in choosing articles is their assumed value and appeal to readers, but we think diversity of authorship is desirable. University professors are more inclined to write for publication than others because they are expected to, and sometimes they have more information about a particular topic because it is their specialty. Nevertheless we welcome good articles—and letters—from administrators and teachers. We are even glad to get letters of criticism. *EL*

Overview (continued from p. 451)

They examine what research says about reading disability among boys, weighing the evidence for various explanations before concluding that the main cause is sex stereotyping.

The full story is complicated and not yet clear. Some neurologists say girls do, in fact, think differently from boys; that "some differences are biologically inherent and unlikely to be modified by cultural factors alone."² Still, expectations are very influential. When I taught in Nigeria in the 1960s, girls were considered naturally inferior in all school tasks. It was not uncommon for an elementary teacher to say, "Fatima

does quite well, for a girl." As expected, most girls seemed not to learn as well as boys.

Few people in the United States would profess such views, but we have our own traditions to overcome. If certain activities and pursuits seem more suited to some students than others, we can learn to adapt methods and materials to different styles and temperaments. We must not, however innocently, help circumscribe the aspirations and potential of half the human race. *EL*

²Richard M. Restak, "The Other Difference Between Boys and Girls," *Educational Leadership* 37 (December 1979): 232-35.

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