

Teacher makes study

Women oppressed in schools

by Loma Jane Day

Loma Jane Day is a teacher at Kentville High School, who sent the GAZETTE an original article, the basic context of which is reprinted here. The copy was edited somewhat for easier reading. It is our hope that the deletions do not detract from the content.

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It appears that the High Priests of our educational system have replaced church authorities in the rigorous debasement of females. It is ironic to watch students coming from classes fluttering mimeographed papers on human rights, democracy or discrimination of the Negro, Eskimo and Indian. The women seem unaware that they are being sluiced through our Canadian school system only to join the ranks of the underprivileged.

Proportionally more females than males stay at school until the higher grades and as a rule make higher marks. The fact that women leave school in greater numbers before completing senior matriculation cannot be explained on grounds of lack of ability. Women, in turn, constitute only about one-third of university enrollment. They earn about 20 per cent of the master's degrees and about 8 per cent of the doctorates in spite of the admission by some universities that they expect women to have marks at least 10 per cent better than men in order to be considered for admittance. Their participation in the Canada Student Loans Plan is approximately 31 per cent.

On the employment scene, a recent survey of eight banks revealed that two-thirds of the employees were women; the same study revealed that 89.9 per cent of these women earned less than \$5,000 yearly, while 72.3 per cent of the men earned more than this amount. The \$5,000 mark seems to represent

an income ceiling for women in banking.

An excessive balance of power lies in the hands of men. In Canada in 1969, women in the House of Commons represented .4 per cent and in the Provincial Legislatures 2.2 per cent. This is a great deal lower than the figures for the USSR, Sweden, India, Ceylon and Israel.

Even in the "socially acceptable" feminine employment in Canada, most of the senior level positions are filled by men. Teaching is a good example. The figures in this area are astounding in view of the fact that many will argue that it is the UNPAID duty of the biological mother (regardless of how uninterested, mindless or impoverished she may be) to rear a child during its formative period, and in the same breath will argue that it is a male's PAID duty to guide the destiny of many children after their growth rate has slowed down. It can't be argued that "motherlove" necessitates this arrangement because many psychologists and biologists insist that it is cultural pressure, NOT an innate maternal love, that ties a mother to the impressionable young. "Could it be the relatively high income in comparison to the mother's virtual lack of any income that dutifully attracts men to the mother-hen role in education?"

One disturbing factor which contributes to our stifling of female ambition is the stereotyping of sex roles which are reinforced by models presented to children in their textbooks. For example, arithmetic books contain such comments as "A girl spent 1/4 hour sewing...A girl can type 45 words a minute." In English texts, there are statements such as "She looked up to him because he was going to be a lawyer...Mama scrubs the floors...Shapiro's boy will be a

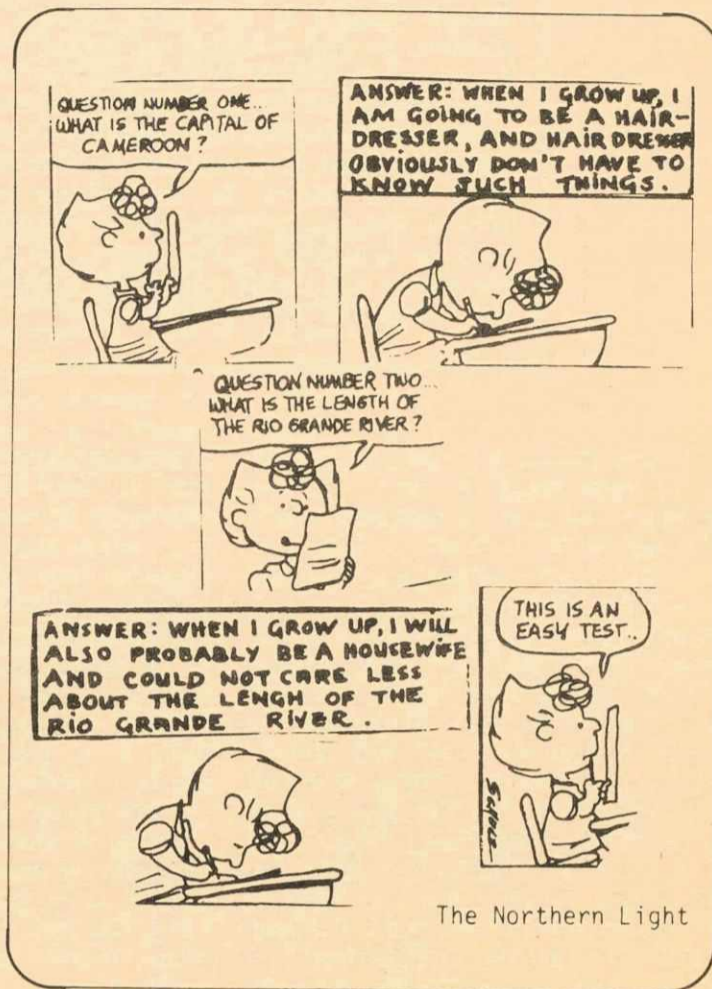
doctor." Women are often portrayed as passive, self-sacrificing and submissive, while men are styled in more adventurous, aggressive activities.

Countless times during my teaching career women have mentioned to me that counsellors, administrators and professors have sneered at them for voicing their career aspirations. They have bluntly told them such lies as "Girls don't make successful doctors...You'll get married anyway so some training in clerical, sales, nursing or teaching would be your best choice."

Women are encouraged to accept a secondary, supportive role in society (either to a husband or a boss) without question. Unrealistic views of marriage and society are presented to her. She comes out of high school or college completely unprepared to cope with the prejudice she is bound to encounter.

American statistics indicate that only about two-thirds of the females ever marry. Of this number countless will eventually find themselves widowed, divorced, separated, deserted or unsupported. The widow may discover that her dead husband disinherited her through his will and has left his estate to someone else. She probably has never been told that when her marriage ends by death she has no automatic legal right to share in the assets her husband may have accumulated. If she is deserted, she is entitled only to maintenance, which is virtually impossible to enforce.

The woman also has a better-than-average chance to run into life-long poverty. The income reported by all women in Canada for 1967 averaged \$2,303; for all men in the same year the average was \$5,331. The female is especially vulnerable if she becomes the



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head of a family, a sole-support mother, an elderly woman or a woman not attached to any family.

Schools are not encouraging women to become independent and self-supporting. They are encouraged to forego higher education, higher incomes, political power and prestigious positions; they are taught to

accept subservience, menial employment, unpaid drudgery as volunteers or housewives and a degraded image. Some will say she is compensated for all this because her life expectancy is approximately seven years longer than the male's. She has seven extra years to endure her oppression.

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