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MARRIED WOMEN IN ACADEMIA— A PERSONAL VIEW

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AT its Annual General Meeting held at Flinders University in August, 1973, the Federation of Australian University Staff Associations carried the following resolution "that the Federation investigate discriminatory practices in relation to women and single people in the Australian Academic Community and that it adopt as Federation Policy that all Australian Universities should seek to have implemented by their governing bodies a maternity leave scheme". In the following year it resolved to "instigate an enquiry into the status of women in academic positions in Universities . . .".¹ In July, 1973, the Australian Union of Students resolved that "specific research and action projects on sexual discrimination be a high priority of the A.U.S. in 1974".²

These resolutions reflect some of the questioning of the status of women taking place within Australian universities over the past two or three years. At Sydney, for example, a fairly large-scale survey of women academics in the city's three universities is well under way.³ At the A.N.U., a sub-committee was set up by the faculty board of the Research School of Pacific Studies in July, 1973, to investigate the problems encountered by women Ph.D. students with dependants and make recommendations designed to ameliorate the situation.⁴ Several universities have initiated women's studies courses, whilst others have attempted to integrate study of the role of women into existing course content.⁵ A number of student sub-theses

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¹ F.A.U.S.A., *Minutes of Annual General Meeting*, 1973, Sect. 28, 30. 1974, Sect. 19: the 1974 inquiry is to be "with particular reference to the qualifications of those women seeking academic employment; the level of position to which they are appointed; the extent to which the positions held carry tenure; the length of service in particular positions held; and the impact of promotion procedures on women in universities".

² "Woman's Day", a Flinders University publication, 16th July, 1973.

³ Madge Dawson, Diana Temple, Heather Radi, Bettina Cass, Anne Winkler, *Women Academics in Sydney*.

⁴ A.N.U. Institute of Advanced Studies, *Report to Chairman of Faculty on the Situation of Women Ph.D. Students with Dependents*, March, 1974. The survey and recommendations covered male students with dependants as well as female.

⁵ In the University of Tasmania a seminar course was run in the History Department in 1973. In the University of Adelaide, in the Politics Department 1974. In Sydney in the Philosophy Department 1973, and in the Department of Government 1974. In A.N.U. in the Department of Political Science, S.G.S., a set of lectures and seminars are included in the unit, *Political Sociology*. The Departments of

and postgraduate M.A.s are establishing the academic respectability of enquiry focusing on women.⁶ Most university publications now contain articles written from a variety of angles on the status of women.⁷

This unprecedented intellectual ferment is part of the wider questioning of the role of women in Australian society. It is part of the "second wave" of feminism stimulated and radicalised by the ideology of Women's Liberation.⁸ In time, albeit characteristically well behind other Anglo-American countries, we will have an array of statistical evidence to provide empirical verification for the contention that women occupy a subordinate status in our social, economic and political life. On the university front, there is no reason to suppose that the evidence will be other than that which has been well established elsewhere. That is, that women are massively outnumbered by men in academia: that a division of labour exists between the sexes; specifically that women are concentrated in certain faculties and are significantly absent from others; that, in terms of status, women are concentrated in the lower rungs of the professional hierarchies. Nor are the causes, when the statistics are placed in a social and human context, likely to be different in Australia from those in other countries, except perhaps in degree. They will surely turn out to be as manifold, as complex, and as intractable; defying both simple explanation and solution. Mention of only a few of the forces at work which sustain this situation will serve to underline the point: the relatively greater dropout rate of girls than boys from secondary schools, thus limiting at the source the numbers from which potential academic women can be drawn; inadequate career planning at the grass roots level by school counsellors, advisers of study, and women themselves; the concentration of female students in areas of university study where competition for academic jobs has been or is likely to be high; the practical

Adult Education, especially in Sydney, have run courses on the status of women for many years. At the time of writing a Committee of the Faculty of Arts at A.N.U. is investigating methods of expanding the study of sex roles. That the study of women's role has sprung up in a variety of departments reflects the increased sensitivity of academic women from all disciplines to the role of women, as well as the multidisciplinary dimension of the problems involved.

⁶ Research Notes, *Refractory Girl*, No. 1, 2, 1972/3.

⁷ See, for example, Lorraine Siggins, *Women Students and Career Attitudes*, ANU News, 8 (1), April, 1973; Gillian Leahy and Anne Reynolds, *Why Women? The Second Sex at Sydney University*, Orientation Handbook, 1970; Susan Eade, Daphne Gollan and Natalie Staples, *Women on Campus*, ANU News, Nov., 1972; W. Bacen *et al.*, *A Study of Social Attitudes of University Students*, Chapter 7, "The Women's Liberation Movement and the Universities", Elipse Books, 1972.

⁸ My own preference to date among the many writers on contemporary feminism is for (1) in U.K., J. Mitchell, *Women's Estate*, a Pelican original, 1971; (2) in U.S.A., Kirsten Amundsdén, *The Silenced Majority. Women in American Democracy*, Prentice-Hall, 1971; (3) in Australia, Ann Summers—see in particular her comment entitled "A Radical Political Currency", on my article "Reform and Revolution in Contemporary Feminism" which at pp. 321-3 briefly reviews the contributions of the best-known writers until 1972, *Politics*, Vol. VIII, November, 1973.

difficulties of combining an academic career with marriage and family—in particular the immobility of most married women, the absence of adequate child-care facilities, and the limited extent to which role-sharing is practicable given career structures; the rigidity of academic institutions themselves in relation both to their own long-term interests, to the essential needs of those women who attempt to combine an academic career with marriage, motherhood and family life.

These institutional problems operate within, and are compounded by, far more intractable socio-psychological constraints: socialisation processes which emphasise "the female role" along with "appropriate patterns of behaviour". And arising from these: women's own perceptions of themselves and their role in society, their limited career expectations, their feelings of ineffectiveness and/or confusion in a situation where modes of behaviour other than those generally regarded as "normal" or "feminine" leave them open to social disapproval, explicit or implicit. And the stresses which follow for those who attempt, without normative or institutional support, to confront the obstacles imposed by their sex. Let me illustrate some of these problems by a case history. It happens to be my own.⁹

* * *

I have been in and around academic life longer than most women, in fact for more than a quarter of a century, and in a variety of roles. As a student, excited by learning and by the discovery of my abilities, eager to teach and write, ambitious for recognition. As the wife of an academic, from junior lecturer's offside to the professor's "good lady", moving, for the most part willingly, hither and thither as necessary to move up the ladder. As a part-timer, bent conscientiously on "my dual role", hovering for many years around the shaded and isolated peripheries of the profession. Now, a fairly senior academic, I have, as the saying goes, "made it in a man's world", as competently as most, more competently than some.

The discovery that the career pattern of an academically inclined woman was liable to be markedly different than that of a man did not come during my undergraduate years. There was then no Greer, Millett or Friedan to alert us. In the pre-"consciousness-raising" atmosphere of the late forties we tended to take the formal equality of educational opportunity for the sexes as an indication of the real thing. Besides, with the world now safe for democracy, and with socialist egalitarian rhetoric all round us, we

⁹ What follows is based upon (i) my own personal experience, (ii) my own observation of and acquaintance with experience of other academic women who marry and bear children, (iii) my own research interests on related issues over the past thirteen years. It is written in the conviction that the time is ripe for older academic women to speak out in support of their younger colleagues who today confront similar problems and who are pressing for change.

ex-service students did not question our minority status as women within the university or, more particularly, within the Department of Political Economy and Political Science to which I belonged. We did not stop to reflect upon the concentration of younger female students in the more traditional subject areas, Humanities and the Arts. Then, as today, no formal restrictions were placed on what we wished to study. Moreover, teachers and departments seemed to be interested in good students regardless of sex. At least that was my experience.

I distinctly remember feeling supremely confident and universally admired when my name appeared in the First Class Honours list of eight at Glasgow in 1950 (an unusually big crop, attributed to the ex-service intake of which I was one, as was my husband). When I was short listed for a Ph.D. scholarship at an Oxford college there was no doubt in my mind that I was bent on an academic career. I enjoyed fronting up before all those distinguished dons who appeared en masse, or so it seemed, to vet the potential intake. I do not recall seeing a woman's face among them, and it did not occur to me then to ponder the matter. My application was not successful. No doubt there were a number of reasons why I was not selected, but it was the one which my well-loved professor volunteered which stays in my mind. As closely as I can remember them, his exact words were: "I think they decided you were the kind of woman who would not be very happy away from your husband." It was true enough. I would not have been particularly happy without him. Nor he without me. Nor can I be certain that I would have taken the scholarship had it been offered. It is quite likely though. We were enthusiasts for the academic life. We were self-confident, ambitious and, above all, unencumbered with children. And Oxford was, after all, Oxford. One thing, however, was certain. To the extent that the selection committee had taken my married state into account—and there was no reason to doubt the information on that score—it had taken a decision for me. It had made a judgment on my personal life—or was it on my place in life? More important, would the committee have raised a similar question, however well meaning, in the case of any married male applicant?¹⁰

In the event, my husband's career took precedence. In my experience most academically inclined women who are married place their own ambitions second to their husband's. And this is so even where they are married to academics. Most of the early decisions

¹⁰ It may be, as a colleague has suggested, that what was really meant was that I would be a poor investment. My point would then be (i) that they were wrong, (ii) that the decision was not a purely academic one, and (iii) that it was a short-sighted view of their investment return.

are made, one suspects, as mine were, with relatively little interpersonal conflict and without too much thought of the consequences. It is not simply that the practical difficulties of pursuing independent careers become readily apparent and, for most, overwhelming obstacles. A decision to opt out in this situation is rational enough and many sensible women may, and do, so decide. What is far less rational is the assumption on the part of both sexes, even before children are involved, that it is in some sense "right and proper" that the husband's career take precedence; that to think otherwise is for women "unfeminine", for men "unmasculine".

It is precisely these assumptions which are under question by today's feminists. Of course, there were rebels and feminists in the early fifties, but for feminism, both as an ideology and a movement, that was a period of relative quiescence. Those who spoke out or behaved contrary to society's expectations were seen as isolated cranks, sexually dissatisfied or neurotic—sometimes all three. A formidable trio for all but the most courageous to confront. For most it was too much. Besides, social disapproval apart, it was far from easy to reconcile one's rational ability to question these assumptions with warm sentiments for, and emotional commitment to, one's partner. Confusion, resentment, guilt and above all inaction, were the result for me, as for many.

Relatively few of us, therefore, struck out on our own in the fifties. At the crucial juncture in academia, at the onset of one's career, when one must be prepared to take anything that comes up, we were immobilised—less by restricted opportunities than by conflicting loyalties and perceptions of ourselves, which only partially accorded with the reality of our ambitions and hardly at all with our potential. And options once closed for a woman cannot easily be reopened. For most, that discovery comes too late. Today's young married academics are far less disposed to close their options. And they are right, for the alternative is a lonely limbo on the peripheries of academia which can depress the ego, sap the confidence and inhibit personal and intellectual growth.

Again, my own case illustrates this. It is best seen alongside that of my partner who topped the First Class Honours school a year after me, was immediately offered an assistant lectureship, moved on within two years to a full lectureship, five years later to a senior lectureship and two years after that to a chair. The entire process took nine years. It was a remarkable achievement which he richly deserved. During the same period I took whatever was available consistent with his career requirements—examining scripts, researching, tutoring, lecturing—all on a part-time basis. The pattern is familiar enough. To eke out family income I also took a Diploma

in Education, taught for the Workers' Educational Association, tried my hand at freelance journalism and taught on an irregular part-time basis in primary, secondary and technical schools. To complete the record, between 1953 and 1957 I bore three children with whom I spent most of their waking hours. I was 37 when, almost fortuitously, I landed my first part-time university tutoring job, 38 when I published my first article, 41 when we decided that I would start applying for academic jobs further afield than home and, if offered, take one. I was 42 when I was appointed to a lectureship at A.N.U., 47 when I was awarded a doctorate and 48 when I became a senior lecturer. The process so far has taken twenty years.

Let me emphasise that I make no claims to having equal ability to my partner. Few men even reach the top in nine years. My point is simply this: that I too, demonstrably, had the proven potential for an academic career; that for me, unlike my husband, there was no way, for some fourteen years, of reconciling my ambitions with the constraints of marriage, family and financial circumstance. I was immobilised psychologically as well as physically. Not until we took action, precipitated by my partner's ill-health, which required him to follow me, was it possible for me to take opportunities further afield.

It would, of course, be dishonest to ignore the advantages of part-time employment. The dual role as a part-time academic, wife and mother has much to commend it as a way of life if not as a means of speedy professional advancement. It is flexible. Much of the work can be done at home within physical reach of the family. It is easier to maintain a degree of healthy detachment about universities as institutions. If one also has a co-operative role-sharing husband who happens to be an academic, as I had, it is a life which has a quality of "balance" hard to improve upon. Nevertheless, universities tend to assume that the part-timer who is a married woman is "filling in" (should be "filling in"?). Rarely is it recognised either formally or informally that her perceptions of the job might be quite different. Many are, of course, filling in from choice. Many more are not. They are doing two things. Objectively, like their male counterparts, where they exist, they are trying to find a way into the profession—eventually; the only way, unless they are prepared to live apart from their husbands and/or their families. Subjectively, they are trying to reconcile society's and often their own perceptions and normative assumptions concerning their "proper role" as women with their "masculine" ambitions. In essence, they are trying to secure for their right to work the stamp of social approval so unreservedly given to their right to bear and rear children.

I can offer direct testimony to the physical and psychological consequences of this semi-schizophrenic role-playing. I could not have survived the physical and mental exhaustion of this dual role but for an excellent constitution, extreme determination and a forbearing and co-operative partner. I have little recollection from the years as a part-timer that those with whom I worked took me seriously as a potential academic, which is not to say that I was not aware of being admired because I managed "to do both". I do, on the other hand, have distinct memories of hurtful, thoughtless or unperceptive comment or behaviour, albeit in most cases unintentional.

Life as a full-time academic—especially as a teacher—alternates between two extremes. At times it is demanding to the point of exhaustion. And one can never quite shake oneself free of it. At other times it offers more scope probably than most jobs for working at one's own pace in an atmosphere of pleasant social and intellectual exchange and camaraderie. The married woman's experience of academia, if she has children, is almost exclusively restricted to the former. Few families ever manage completely to solve the child-care problem. It is not simply that facilities are inadequate. It is that where there are children there are always crises, no matter how well organised one is. And, however equal the partnership, responsibility falls, and is expected to fall, most heavily on the woman. The flexibility of academic life simplifies some of the problems, especially if both partners are in the profession, but they are not eliminated.

There are two consequences of this situation. The academic woman is, more often than not, excluded from the informal trappings of her profession and she becomes socially isolated. Consider the first. Informal contacts, being around at the opportune moment, participating in university committees do not make an academic career but they may, and often do, make it easier. They certainly make it less earnest. There is a tension, a hurriedness about those of us who take our families and our jobs equally seriously, which sets us apart—leaving aside the question of numbers. A quick survey taken in a staff common room or committee room would soon confirm this. We are simply not to be seen there in numbers and/or for any length of time.

Asked if they would rather have a career or miss out on the informal advantages of academia, most women would probably opt for the first. They would not however opt for the social isolation which the practical burdens of their dual role imposes upon them. Psychiatrists have testified often enough in recent years to the psychological consequences of the social isolation of the suburban housewife. It is time to have a look at the phenomenon as it affects

professional women and especially academic women in a predominantly male professional establishment. Time is always at a premium and, specifically, thinking time. The diffidence which many women feel in socio-academic conversation is as much a consequence of their awareness of these constraints as it is of their minority status. Many women feel that they are no match for their male colleagues. They often come to prefer working alone. There is the added complication that in Australia a solid core of academic men of the older generation are visibly maladroit in the presence of their female colleagues. They have more difficulty than younger men in adopting roles and modes of behaviour which run counter to cultural norms and expectation. Observing this, one may often judge it easier and kinder, one's own feelings notwithstanding, to save them from such embarrassment.

Sometimes it is possible to make rapport with colleagues' wives but the opportunities are not, in my experience, great—quite apart from the time factor. It may happen if male colleagues themselves take social initiatives. Some do, but many leave it to their wives. And most wives are not academics. It is more natural for them to wish to mix socially with non-academic women.

Effectively, therefore, the academic woman when she finally "makes it" can all too easily be cut off from the male professional culture. She is also cut off from the female culture which experiences academia more vicariously. She can always mix with other academic women. But they are few in number, too busy, and thinly scattered especially in the grades above lecturers. The more senior one becomes, therefore, the more one is likely to be socially isolated. Only the most robust personality can overcome these constraints, and then only at times.

* * *

The postulates of the new feminism deserve serious attention, as they illuminate the dilemmas of academic women who are wives and mothers. No less than non-academics, they are constrained by the accident of sex and by assumptions, their own as well as those of male colleagues, concerning their "natural" and/or "proper" female role. The academic community is predominantly male in structure and ethos. Women who have sought to make a reality of their formal equality are still essentially in conflict with existing role expectations and norms. They operate in an institutional and social framework which has not deemed it of importance to question the assumptions which sustain their subordinate status and which is therefore rigid and minimally responsive to change. It has come to regard as normal a situation in which their female colleagues constitute a deviant sub-culture isolated from the predominantly male culture of academia.

The time is ripe to question these assumptions. The F.A.U.S.A. resolution is a step in the right direction and there are plenty of guidelines to direct investigation in individual universities. In the Australian context let us postulate the following:

(1) That the facts are unlikely to be markedly different from those established elsewhere: briefly, that women constitute a significantly smaller proportion of academics than men; that they are concentrated heavily in certain fields; that they occupy the lower rungs of the professional ladder.¹¹

(2) That it is desirable to have a more equal balance of the sexes in academia and that universities may be expected to take an enlightened approach towards securing this balance. Also, that they cannot afford to secure such limited returns for their investment of resources in the higher education of women as they do at present.

(3) That the family as a social institution is unlikely to change significantly in the foreseeable future; and that married women will consequently continue to be less mobile than their partners.

(4) That the practical difficulties of combining family responsibilities with an academic career will continue to militate against increasing the numbers of women in academia, particularly on the

¹¹ See, for example, the following references taken from *Women Studies Abstracts*, New York. (Source: Sara Stauffer Whaley (ed.).)

A report to the President from the Committee on the Status of Professional Women at Yale, Yale University, 1971, ERIC, 44 pp.

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A compilation of data on faculty women and women enrolled at Michigan State University, 1970, ERIC, 56 pp.

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Final report on the status of academic women, Wisconsin Univ., Madison, 1971, ERIC, 490 pp.

A preliminary report on the status of women at Princeton University, National Organization for Women, 1971, ERIC, 24 pp.

Report of subcommittee on equal opportunities for faculty and student women, University of Minnesota, 1971, ERIC, 18 pp.

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Van Fleet, David D., Salaries of males and females: a sample of conditions at the University of Akron, 1970, ERIC, 17 pp.

Weitzman, Lenore, and others, Women on the Yale faculty, 1971, ERIC, 33 pp.

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Ferguson, Mary Anne, Affirmative action: HEW, women, and the law, *Bulletin. Association of the Departments of Foreign Languages*, 3:43-6, March, 1972.

Lauter, Nancy A., and Daniel Dietrich, Woman's place in academe—an ERIC report, *English Education*, 3:1, 69-73, Spring, 1972.

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Final report of the commission on the status and needs of women at Carnegie-Mellon University, 1971, ERIC, 151 pp.

Miner, Anne S., Academic employment of women at Stanford, 1971, ERIC, 43 pp.

Schoen, Kathryn T., and others, Report of the ad hoc committee to review the status of women at the Ohio State University, Phases I and II, 1971, ERIC, 360 pp.

The status of women at the Ohio State University, *Protean: Administration Systems, Management in Libraries*, 1:40-53, December, 1971.

higher rungs of the ladder, even where partners try as far as possible to share roles.

Given these assumptions, investigations and recommendations need to be guided by the following kinds of questions. How can universities, as educational institutions, increase the sources from which potential academic women can be recruited in the first instance? Are those counselling, advisory or other services which constitute the potential student's first point of contact with the university adequate for this purpose? How can the recruitment of women during the child-bearing and child-rearing years be facilitated? Are conditions of entry sufficiently flexible? What adjustments need to be made to the present course requirements to make it easier for married women with children to take undergraduate or postgraduate degrees? What can universities do to meet the child-care problem for married students?

As employing agencies, what can universities do to assist the married woman academic to continue in the profession and/or return to the profession? What adaptations to present part-time employment arrangements would make it easier for women to continue their academic careers during the child-bearing years?¹² Given the immobility of married women with families, what can universities do to counteract the fallout rate of women academics and potential academics? What can universities do to facilitate re-entry into the university workforce when families have grown up?

In Australian universities today there are plenty of women, most of them on the lower rungs of the professional ladder, who have much to contribute to investigations along the lines I have indicated. But they must do so alongside men. It will not do to introduce the occasional woman who happens to have the appropriate seniority into an otherwise all-male committee. For that would be no more than tokenism. Nor will it do to set up all-female committees and leave them to it. For that would be, to coin a colleague's phrase, "limited co-existence, not equality". Moreover, it is apparent that the nature of the problem precludes its solution other than peripherally, unless more men can be convinced—and not simply at an intellectual level—of the justice of the cause. More than this: that they too may have much to gain at a personal, as well as at an academic, level by change. The way to do that is to make the university and its committees not a social microcosm of the society in which we live, but of the society we wish to create.

¹² The French Public Service in 1970 introduced a scheme of regular part-time employment with continuity of salary, social security rights and retirement rights. It is open to all employees, male and female, with children under the age of twelve, those who are incapacitated by illness, employees on temporary invalidity pensions or those who have had an accident. The maximum duration is nine years. *Actualités—Service Bulletin*, hebdomadaire public par le Secrétariat Général du Comité. Interministériel pour l'information No. 55, January, 1970.

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