

HERE AND NOW

Monthly Newsletter of the Greater Toledo Area Chapter of NOW

September 1974

Sex Stereotyping in Textbooks

Stereotypes, by their very nature, are damaging to anyone who is confined within them. Until the emergence of women's rights as a national issue, sex role stereotyping in textbooks and educational materials had been complacently accepted. Textbooks, as a prime tool of the educational system, portray what society asks for and expects from the children reading them. In elementary textbooks, boys are portrayed as active, brave, innovative, and omni-present. Girls (if present at all) are shown to be dependent, passive, incompetent, and fearful as they rehearse their role as future "mommies." This constant channeling into stereotyped roles is extremely detrimental to the development of both sexes.

In all textbooks the overwhelming disproportion in the amount of exposure allotted to each sex is quite obvious. A study of children's readers by a NOW task force called "Women on Words and Images" found the ratio of boy-centered to girl-centered stories to be 5 to 2; adult male main characters to adult female main characters 3 to 1; and male biographies to female biographies 6 to 1. Almost any American history book indicates that this country has grown and maintained itself with a 99% male population. Students will typically find one out of 500 pages devoted to women and their contributions in these history books. In a study by the New York Chapter of NOW, it was reported that in junior high school texts, female scientists and mathematicians are omitted, leaving the children to believe that women do not make any worthwhile contributions in these fields either.

Probably the most obvious and blatant examples of sex role stereotyping can be found in career education. Motherhood is stressed as the most desirable career for women. Girls are usually encouraged to pursue a career that requires a minimum of education or training and one that can be discontinued and resumed according to the demands of parenthood. The more typical female occupations mentioned are teaching, nursing, secretarial work or other service oriented jobs. The career options for boys are virtually unlimited. In a study of five popular primer social studies texts, one hundred plus occupations were listed for men with less than thirty listed for women.

Although sex role indoctrination begins soon after birth, it is reinforced throughout a child's school experience. The textbooks used in our educational system have traditionally presented children with a very obvious message---that girls and women are relegated to a secondary and inferior status in society. The damage perpetuated upon growing children through this sexist indoctrination is insurmountable. We must begin to look more critically at the information children are receiving about themselves at a time when they are extremely vulnerable.

C A L E N D A R

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| September 17: | General Meeting | 7:30 P.M. |
| | St. Paul's Lutheran Church | |
| September 19: | State Conference Committee | |
| | Karen Chapman | 8:00 P.M. |
| | 547 Winthrop Street | |
| September 30: | Newsletter Committee | |
| | Coral Schmidt | 7:30 P.M. |
| | 1831 West Bancroft | |
| October 2: | Board Meeting | |
| | Pat Garver | 8:00 P.M. |
| | 1606 Gilbert | |