

Gender and the Canadian Introductory Sociology Textbook

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We shall be using "man," "he" and "his" a good deal of the time in this book. At times this is simply to conform to the conventions of English grammar which make "he or she" or "people" rather awkward and cumbersome. At other times we use "man" because women have not entered very much into sociological or social thought.

The above statement occurs in a footnote to a sentence in a Canadian textbook, *People, Power and Process: Sociology for Canadians*, written by Alexander Himelfarb and C. James Richardson, two sociologists at the University of New Brunswick. The book was published by McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited in 1979. The explanation for continuing to use sexist language footnotes an interesting sentence in which the authors comment, "From the Judeo-Christian perspective, "Man" is a fallen creature who, though redeemable to some extent, can never attain perfection." (p. 4) If the men who write and edit sociology textbooks in Canada are in any way representative of "Man" in the gender sense, the Judeo-Christian position appears to be vindicated.

Not only has "perfection", if defined as the elimination of more obvious types of sexism, not been achieved but despite the availability of materials which document the exclusion of women and their experience from full societal participation and others which might guide interested persons toward their "redemption," writers of textbooks perpetuate the sins of their fathers.

For the largest number of students in universities, the introductory course will be their only formal exposure to the concepts, theories, research findings and issues of the discipline. As a result of this exposure, of course, others will take a second or third course, a few will even major in sociology, and some number will even obtain graduate degrees and become practitioners themselves. In this context the introductory textbook is of considerable concern to feminists. As Perucci² has noted, it is the primary teaching device by which students first learn about sociology and such textbooks are presented by authors and publishers as representative of the entire field. Most importantly, the ideas contained in textbooks can shape a field of study through their impact

upon teachers who use them and students who may become professional sociologists.

The study of sex structure and sex relations as a sub-field in sociology has only emerged within the last fifteen years, concurrent to both sociology and feminism in Canada. It has also been proliferating at a rapid rate and undergoing considerable development. Furthermore, it is an area where all aspects of social experience converge—the biological, cultural, psychological and social structural. A sophisticated analysis of sex, gender and social structure provides a sound place to present the fundamentals of sociology to introductory students and at the same time to help them untangle the nexus of their own everyday ex-

periences in Canadian society. In a pluralistic society, gender differentiation is perhaps the simplest type (i.e., binary) even though the ramifications of its duality are as complex as any and undoubtedly interconnected with more multiplex categories of status and strata.

The specific questions addressed in this paper derived from the importance of textbooks as sources of legitimate knowledge and the emergence, somewhat parallel and outside the field of sociology itself, of feminist ideas and perspectives. One question is how much, what and in what way do students being introduced to sociology by textbooks published in Canada learn about sex structure, roles and identities? Another question is has there been



any notable improvement over time in the situation in which a male-centered orientation predominates?

Method: From an original list of thirteen textbooks published in Canada between 1973 and 1980, all but five were eliminated because they made no reference or gave only passing recognition to the topics of sex or gender.³ (This in itself is an interesting fact.) The index to each book was searched to find references in the text associated with sex and gender. All such pages were noted, read and summarized. Quantitative and qualitative analysis was made of the materials. Two textbooks published outside of Canada but widely used in this country served as a basis for comparison.⁴

Findings: Sexism in Canadian introductory sociology textbooks is expressed in several ways: 1) in the omission or narrow range of gender-related topics covered and the brevity or superficiality of the discussions; 2) in the concentration of gender materials in a few chapters, often considered "women's areas", or the under-representation of women as writers of the other chapters; and 3) the denial of women's participation in both Canadian life and the practice of sociology.

Over the seven years of textbook publication review, there has been little change in the general situation. I shall discuss each of the three shortcomings, using selected examples where they apply. No attempt has been made to evaluate the merits or demerits of individual textbooks since their publication is not synchronic and since, from a feminist perspective, none is entirely satisfactory.

The Scarcity of Gender-Related Topics and the Superficiality of Discussions.

Fourteen sex or gender terms, or their equivalents, were searched for in the indexes of

the textbooks.⁵ Overall, there has been an increase in the number of terms associated with gender, especially with "women." The earliest publication (1973) indexed only two terms, "sex role" and "women's movement". The last one (1980) had 11 of the 14 terms in its index. The others listed three (1975), two (1976) and four (1979). Compared with the two American publications, only the 1980 Canadian publication makes as readily available to the reader a means for easily locating in the text references, examples, or discussions of sex related materials. Thus, one of the textbooks published in the United States indexed six terms (1977) and the other ten (1979). None of the five textbooks published in Canada treated gender or sexuality in a chapter of its own, whereas both of the American textbooks did with the one having two chapters (1977).

Accessibility is one thing, but the visibility of women or gender matters in the text is more important. This appears to be very much an individual matter with the authors or publishers. In none of the textbooks reviewed, including the American publications, did the number of pages on which there was at least a reference to gender or women exceed 10 percent of the total pages. Nor was there any secular (time-associated) trend, since the earliest text (1973) started out with 10 percent, the next (1975) dropped to 6.2 percent, the next (1976) even lower to 3.8 percent, the next (1979) rose again to 9.4 percent and the last (1980) dropped to 7.7 percent. The texts published in the United States each had one out of ten pages with gender notations (1977, 10.2 percent and 1979, 10.3 percent).

Of course the quantitative approach is a very crude indicator of exclusion or inclusion of women, which becomes quite apparent when one considers that on many pages the topic receives merely a passing mention. In the 1980

Canadian textbook for example, about one out of three pages on which a term appears contains little more than the word itself.

Turning to the discussions in the texts, some as short as a paragraph and others as long as six pages, they tend to revolve around the two concepts of "role" and "structure." In fact, half of the pages on which a gender topic appears dealt with some aspects of "sex structure" in all Canadian textbooks except the first (1973). This is striking when compared with the one-fifth (1977) and one-third (1979) in the American editions. This finding will be discussed further in the next two sections because it is related to the fact that materials are concentrated in certain chapters of textbooks and that feminist researchers and writers are on the periphery of the discipline.

Sex Concentration

It comes as no surprise that ghettoization occurs in textbooks just as it does in the societal structures. Women and gender related references and discussions are not distributed randomly throughout the pages of the texts, nor are authors assigned to chapters irrespective of their own sex.

Gender materials are most likely to be found in parts of the books dealing with socialization, family, social class or the work force. One of the reasons why the earliest textbook (1973) had so few pages devoted to "sex structure" is because it contains a section on "The Life Cycle and Personal Identity"; therefore, approximately one-third of the gender materials refer to some aspect of "identity," a psychological concept virtually ignored by other Canadian textbooks as well as the 1977 American publication, but less in the 1979 one. Obviously, women appear in textbooks where women's activities are being discussed, such as in biological reproduction, in caring for

children or others in family households or teaching in schools, or strikingly in recent years in working in certain sectors of the labour force. The women's movement also receives some share of the space allocated to the topic. In general, sexual compartmentalization in the social world is reinforced in the spatial dualism in textbook references to sex or gender.

Four chapters written by ten women contributing to three of the five textbooks (two were co-authored by men) dealt with topics often considered to represent "feminine" interests: socialization, family, and education; the other six women (four alone and two in collaboration with a man) wrote on politics, population, urbanization and social movements. None wrote on theory or methods. The first three chapter topics mentioned above cover the same areas where gender materials tend to be concentrated. Interestingly, chapters dealing with the theoretical issues (social class or stratification) of women's labour force participation were written by men. The ten women who contributed chapters to the three edited books constitute 29.4 percent of contributors to the five books. Half of them wrote chapters for one book (1980), the other half for the two earlier edited texts. No women were editors or co-editors. In total, nine men authored, edited, or co-edited the five textbooks. In contrast, of the two popular textbooks published in the United States but widely adopted in Canada, one was written by a man and one by a woman.

The Denial of Women in Society and in Sociology

The most obvious way in which the everyday experience of women is denied in textbooks is by means of linguistic practices. Until the publication of the 1980 Canadian textbook, none of them could be characterized

as non-sexist in language usage. The following excerpt from the 1973 text (p. 61) illustrates the point:

. . . The child learns that he is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Hudson, brother of Judy, and nephew of Uncle Graham. When he starts to school he acquires a new position and new roles. He becomes Miss Smith's pupil and a member of the junior kindergarten.

Observe that not only is the male rather than the female the center of attention, with mainly male relatives other than the obvious mother and sister of the nuclear household, but the teacher is stereotypically female and unmarried.

In the 1975 text (p.7) the sociological viewpoint in general is summarized as one which sees man and his behavior as explainable by the conditions which man himself creates and passes on to succeeding generations. The point is then recorded, in the following way:

. . . *man acts upon his environment, and is acted upon by his environment.* Man is both the producer and the product of his social relations and organization—his *society*—and his language and tools—his culture.

By 1976 the textbook writers and male editors appear to have become somewhat more conscious of feminist issues and except for stereotypes going uncaught in some of their examples, they utilize a writing style which avoids specific references to generic "man." For example, in discussing how groups which control language depreciate other, less powerful groups, the writer describes "a white middle-class teacher who makes invidious comments regarding the speech patterns of a

working class child, or a missionary teacher who prohibits her charges from speaking their native Indian language or expressing their Indian culture." (p. 85). The more subtle stereotyping of the oppressive teacher as female is likely to go undetected in the absence of the more obvious masculine pronouns.

As indicated in the introduction, the 1979 text writers, both males, are quite aware of the sexual limitations of conventional usage, yet they prefer not to fight it. Thus, even though the discussions themselves often show sympathy for feminist views and activities, women as readers are blatantly excluded from social experiences linguistically. In one case social mobility is discussed hypothetically in terms of only fathers and sons (pp. 172-173); in another (pp. 125-126) juvenile delinquency as involving only males (he/his/him).

The effort to expunge sexist language from the 1980 text has succeeded fairly well and in this respect the text is more like both the U.S. publications. One author, a woman manages to employ the neutral pronoun, without sounding awkward, as follows:

. . . For example, the very young child can follow a moving object in the environment. When it throws a rattle to the floor, it has no conception of the self as the thrower and the rattle as a separate object. (p. 137).

Only the last published Canadian textbook (1980) has pictures throughout the book, similar to the two American ones. The 1979 Canadian book has chapter page illustrations only and the others have no pictorial illustrations. Overall, photographs appear to represent women and men in non-stereotypical ways although specific selections do give pause to the thoughtful feminist.

More difficult to document is the denial of feminist women's research and theoretical contributions to sociology. Focusing only on the latest two publications (1979 and 1980), there appears to be some familiarity with feminist writers and those of other women who, while they may not consider themselves politically associated with feminism, do represent a woman's view of social experience. Such Canadian names as A.M. Ambert, P. Armstrong, M. Atwood, M. Boyd, L. Clark, and S. Clark appear in the A, B, C's of one bibliography, along with I. Adams, B. Blishen, and S.D. Clark to name some of the men in the same series. Again in this area the sexism is more subtle. The more recent works of some feminists, and therefore often their more sophisticated analyses, are not cited, and sources not yet in the public domain (that is, to be found in feminist publications rather than sociological journals or editions) do not appear. One of the most obvious omissions is the classic *Women at Work: Ontario*, published as early as 1974 by one of the Canadian feminist presses, which appears in neither the 1979 or 1980 textbook bibliographies.⁶ Non-Canadian works of feminist theoretical significance also escape notice, particularly if theirs is not the Marxist structural approach, as in the case with much of the new "mothering" feminist literature.⁷ In fact, the entire area of sexuality and its wider implications is ignored in Canadian textbooks, unless it touches on what is considered to be deviant or in some manner dealt with in the criminal justice system.

Conclusions: Although there has been some tendency for more recently published Canadian introductory sociology textbooks to reflect feminist influences, for the most part sexism has not been eliminated from their presentations of the social world or sociology as a discipline. Smith's analysis of ideological structures and how women are excluded, made

six years ago, applies today: "It seems that women as a social category lack proper title to membership in the circle of those who count for one another in the making of ideological forms."⁸ In gender related materials included and in the choice of who will represent the field, sociology textbooks perpetuate the exclusion and segregation of women and denial of the feminine, even when they have somewhat eliminated stereotyping. They continue to skirt the complexity of sex structures and their association with ideology and they are far from current in sources or their conceptualization of sexuality and gender. As Stephenson says about the sexism she found in natural science books for the layperson, this gives the "stamp of scientific objectivity . . . to what is, in fact, discriminatory and often conceptually distorted work."⁹

The results of the comparison between Canadian textbooks and those published in the United States cannot help but disturb instructors who want, on the one hand, Canadian content which has increased over the years and on the other hand, up to date and accurate knowledge creations (theory and issues) which if the topic of gender and women are any indication, have not kept pace with what is available.

Unexamined in this paper, but no less important, are the ways textbooks present or do not present the practical concerns of feminism. My impression is that with few exceptions textbooks fail to introduce or examine adequately the current feminist issues such as abortion, wife-abuse, sexual harassment, inadequate child care provisions and rape laws or other legitimating mechanisms of victimization. Perhaps the most important feminist issue not dealt with is that of the effect of the masculist culture on the quality of life in Canada.

NOTES

1. Revised version of a paper presented June 2, 1979 at the annual meetings of the Canadian Association of Sociology and Anthropology, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.
2. Robert Perrucci, "Sociology and the Introductory textbook," *The American Sociologist* 15 (1), February 1980, pp. 39-49.
3. The five books selected were: Stewart Crysdale and Christopher Beattie, *Sociology Canada: An Introductory Text* (Toronto: Butterworth and Co. Ltd., 1973; Dennis Forcece and Stephen Richer, eds., *Issues in Canadian Society: An Introduction to Sociology* (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall of Canada, Ltd., 1975); G.N. Ramu and Stuart D. Johnson, eds., *Introduction to Canadian Society: Sociological Analysis* (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1976); and Robert Hagedorn, ed., *Sociology* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, Limited, 1980). Crysdale and Beattie has been revised in 1977. The decision to use the first edition was based on the need for a chronological analysis.
4. See Ian Robertson, *Sociology* (New York: Worth Publishers, Inc., 1977), and Metta Spencer, *Foundations of Modern Sociology*. Second Edition (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1979). Those were the current editions in use at the time the paper on which this article was based was written. Both have been revised since the presentation of the paper at the Canadian Association of Sociology and Anthropology meetings held at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, June, 1979, but the decision to retain the earlier editions stemmed from a perceived element of "unfair advantage" on the part of American publishers whose large market allows almost instant revision of successful publications and results in the potential for greater currency in topics.
5. The index terms were the following: female, feminine, gender, male, man, masculine, men, sex, sex role (gender role), sexism (sex structure, sex inequality, sex segregation), sexuality (sexual behavior), sex stereotype, women, women's movement (liberation). Terms like "gender identity" were included under gender, and many other combinations were also included under the first word.
6. J. Action, B. Shepard, and P. Goldsmith, eds., *Women at Work: Ontario, 1850-1930* (Toronto: The Canadian Women's Educational Press).
7. A blatant example appears in the discussion of socialization in the 1980 textbook (pp. 138-139) where the author expounds the phallogocentric theory of Freud and ignores the recent and abundant literature on matricentric psychoanalytic theories; for example Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).
8. Dorothy E. Smith, "An analysis of ideological structures and how women are excluded: considerations for academic women," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 12 (4), November 1975, p. 364.
9. Marylee Stephenson, "Butterflies aren't free: sexism in natural science books for the layperson," *Atlantis* 4 (2), Spring, 1979, p. 102.