# Sexism in Social Work

## The Experience of Atlantic Social Work Women*

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A rich and expanding array of feminist literature over the past decade has laid bare many important aspects of woman's exploitation and oppression. Stark recognition of our systematic and pervasive social and economic exclusion has prompted many of us to seek new and fundamentally different ways of both thinking about and acting upon that exclusion.[1] This paper represents an effort to do just that in the context of a helping profession—social work.

In this paper I shall discuss some structural dimensions of sexism in social work. I shall identify and analyze a number of widespread practices, beliefs, attitudes and policies which together result in systematic discrimination against women workers, faculty and students in the social services on the basis of their gender. In social work, scarcely less than on Wall Street, we (women and men) interact with, in-

terpret and evaluate each other in the context of these potent sexist structures.

To say that we interact in the social context of sexist structures is not to say that we are powerless to act upon them. To regard even blatantly sexist structures as somehow removed and fixed—as forces outside of ourselves that bear down upon us and mould us into distortions of ourselves—is to reify, and thereby to perpetuate them. The issue for us in social work, as it is for women and men everywhere, is not *whether* we can and will shape the social structures within which we interact, but *what* shape we will give them. And so in this paper I take as a central purpose an effort to approach my description and analysis of existing realities for social work women in a way that will generate some vision of alternatives, and of ways in which we might pursue them.

My analysis takes its departure from a number of "givens" which need to be made explicit at the outset. I am taking them as "given" because in my judgement they have already been sufficiently documented and clarified in the literature to obviate the need for repetition here. The first is that the particular form and

content of sexism, as it is experienced by women in social work or in any other specific social context, cannot be wholly understood from a vantage point inside that context. A theory capable of transcending the limitations of direct experience without distorting that experience—one that allows us to remain subjects in our own thinking and action—is essential.

The second "given" is that the dominant theoretical systems and conceptual categories, typically employed within and beyond social work to inform inquiry and to explain the human condition, have in the main been developed under male control and out of male experience. They have thus systematically incorporated a male perspective, and have systematically filtered out a female one.

A third "given" is closely related to the second. It concerns what constitutes an appropriate methodological starting point for a task such as the one I am undertaking. The derivation of hypotheses from theory incapable of accurately reflecting female reality would seem an unlikely first step toward productive inquiry and action. Instead, I consider it necessary to begin with that very female experience which has been so systematically excluded from traditional theory development; and out of this experience to first build and then test theory.

A fourth and final "given" involves an assumption about the nature of the basic struggle in which we are involved when we confront sexism. The exclusion of women from not only social and economic participation, but from the very process of developing and organizing the knowledge that might help us to reflect and act upon our exclusion, is rooted in a relationship of power when men dominate over women. The elimination of sexism, then, is assumed to be primarily a political challenge.

Moving from this point of departure and within an overall radical feminist framework, I will undertake three main tasks in the paper. The first task is descriptive. It involves recording and documenting sexism as it is manifested and experienced by women within social work, and indeed beyond it. To do this I will draw heavily upon three sources: upon my own direct experience as a long-time practitioner and educator in the field of social work; upon an empirical data base gathered through a large research project for which I have been responsible;[2] and upon a variety of sources where evidence of sexist realities in the general occupational structure have been recorded.

The second task is mainly analytic and interpretive. It involves searching out, integrating and, where necessary, developing conceptual categories and theoretical tools capable of accurately reflecting and illuminating the particular realities described. It involves, as well, a selective application of the theoretical framework developed.

The third and final task involves formulating some thoughts on strategy for promoting fundamental structural change in pursuit of the elimination of sexism. The thoughts on strategy are conceived in the context of social work and social work education. It is hoped, however, that the general principles of strategy enunciated will have relevance beyond the confines of one particular profession.

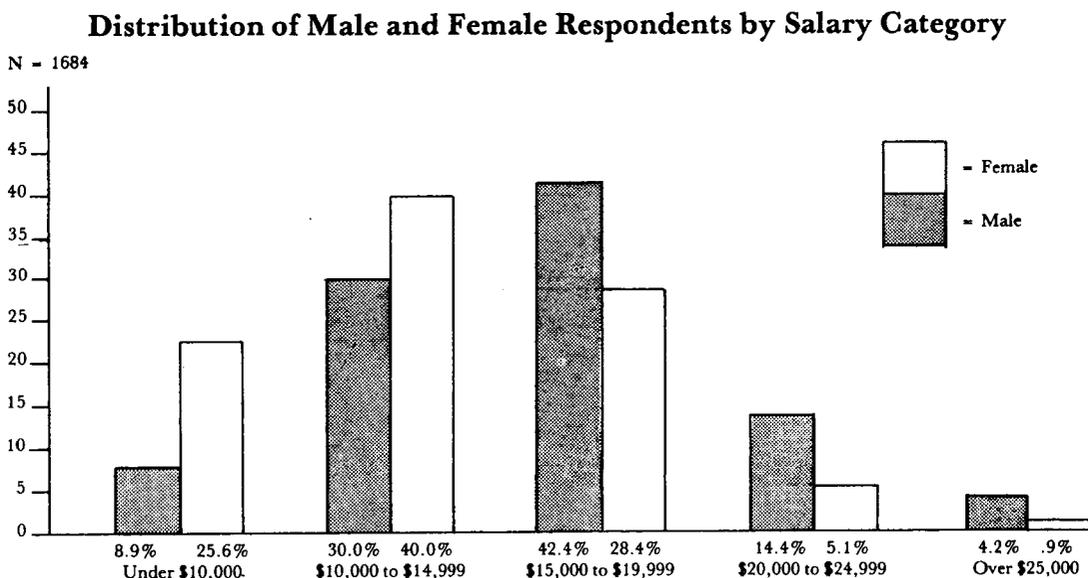## Manifestations of Sexism in Social Work and Beyond

What are the existing realities of women and men in social work in Atlantic Canada and to what extent are the differences in their realities

peculiar to the profession? To begin addressing this question I undertook a secondary analysis of survey information obtained from nearly two thousand employees at all organizational levels in a wide range of public and private social service agencies and from faculty and graduating year students of the major technical, undergraduate and graduate programs of social work education available within the Region. In deciding where to look for differences, I was not guided by a particular theory, but by my own experience first as a social work student and then as a direct practitioner, later as a social work administrator, and most recently as a social work educator and researcher. From each of these separate vantage points, an aspect of female reality, which later emerged as a common denominator of all contexts, was visible. I and the other women with whom I worked seemed consistently to occupy a handicapped status vis-à-vis our male colleagues in terms of not only what direct opportunities, benefits and

rewards we could claim, but in terms of respect for our contribution as well. In each of these contexts there was very little sense among us as women that we did share a common discriminatory reality. In fact, until more recent years it was generally held, even when disadvantage was recognized, that such disadvantage was unique to us and of our own individual creation. Guided by these experiences, then, I sought in the Project data, as well as other sources, evidence to support or contradict the generality and pervasiveness of the discriminatory practices I had experienced.

Beginning with employee salaries, it can generally be said that the full-time female social service employees in our respondent group were earning considerably less than the males. A graphic representation of the distribution by salary category of the 1,684 respondents who gave salary information shows quite strikingly the over-representation of women in the lower salary categories, and

## FIGURE 1

### Distribution of Male and Female Respondents by Salary Category



N - 1684

| | 8.9% 25.6%<br>Under $10,000. | 30.0% 40.0%<br>$10,000 to $14,999 | 42.4% 28.4%<br>$15,000 to $19,999 | 14.4% 5.1%<br>$20,000 to $24,999 | 4.2% .9%<br>Over $25,000 |

their under-representation in the higher ones (Figure 1).

In itself, of course, this distribution is not necessarily evidence of discrimination by sex. To separate out the extent to which the differences might be attributable to important factors other than gender—factors such as education and experience—it became necessary to control for these other factors and then to compare male and female average salaries. When both the educational level and the total length of social service experience were held constant, the pattern remained unchanged. Whether mean or median salary was taken as the measure, the salary discrepancy was consistently in favour of men, and the discrepancies were often large (Table 1).

A further factor which might be expected to affect salary is the type of work being done. When this was added to the list of controls, however, the pattern of differences between male and female average salaries became even more striking. The overall result of comparing male and female average salaries when all three factors (education, experience and type of work done) were simultaneously held constant, was to reveal that of 53 possible cell comparisons, males were higher in 48, or 91% of them. This general pattern was consistent across provinces, jurisdictions and service sectors. Further, it was reminiscent of a similar pattern of salary differentials between women and men to be found not only in other professions, but throughout all sectors of the occupational structure, including working-class occupations.[3]

The structural location of women and men in social work, as well as the content of their respective jobs, were also factors on which comparisons were made. In my experience, the hierarchical nature of most social service organizations results in people in the upper organizational echelons—those performing administrative functions—having authority and control over organizational resources. These organizational resources include human resources and are not usually within the reach of direct practitioners or front line workers. In places where I have worked it was not just that administrators and quasi-administrators had more power and control; it was also that the particular functions they performed were somehow considered more valuable, no matter which sex was performing them. In analyzing the data, then, I tried to discover not only where women were located structurally within their organizations, but the extent to which differential price tags, attached to particular functions, were independent of the sex of the persons carrying out those functions.

Table 2 shows the relationship between average salary and the amount of time being spent on particular social service roles. The more time being spent on administration, supervision, policy analysis, staff-training, planning and research, the higher the salary. By contrast, the more time being spent on care-giving, counselling, case management and concrete service-giving, the lower the salary. The hierarchy of functions, as revealed in two separate surveys, is clear.[4]

Table 3 groups the respondents according to the more general job function on which they were spending the greatest proportion of their time. It shows male, female and overall average salaries for each category. A glance at the table will reveal that the hierarchy of functions which emerged in Table 2 remains evident. A further complexity, however, not previously apparent, is also evident. When average salary within each category of function was broken down by sex, the vertical progression from direct practice through administration remained quite clear on the male

*TABLE 1*

## Comparison of Male and Female Mean and Median Salaries: Controlling for Education and Experience

| EDUCATIONAL LEVEL | N | EXPERIENCE QUARTILE | MEAN $ M | F | T | FEMALE MEDIAN SALARY RELATIVE TO MALE + | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 72 | 1st | 11,333 | 9,000 | 10,028 | - 2,203 | ** |
| High | 98 | 2nd | 12,810 | 10,955 | 11,851 | - 3,282 | *** |
| School | 104 | 3rd | 14,317 | 11,455 | 13,106 | - 3,025 | ** |
| | 173 | 4th | 16,264 | 13,746 | 15,347 | - 1,193 | ** |
| Social Work | 18 | 1st | 11,800 | 9,462 | 10,111 | - 2,800 | * |
| Technical/ | 34 | 2nd | 13,250 | 10,231 | 10,941 | - 3,625 | * |
| Certificate | 51 | 3rd | 14,857 | 12,348 | 13,725 | - 1,586 | ** |
| | 73 | 4th | 16,677 | 15,000 | 16,425 | - 2,500 | |
| | 130 | 1st | 13,656 | 12,227 | 12,931 | - 808 | * |
| Non Social Work | 182 | 2nd | 15,457 | 13,208 | 14,505 | - 2,125 | *** |
| | 68 | 3rd | 17,150 | 15,214 | 16,353 | - 2,654 | * |
| Undergraduate | 37 | 4th | 19,429 | 16,813 | 18,297 | - 3,433 | * |
| | 51 | 1st | 13,250 | 12,442 | 12,569 | + 31 | |
| Social Work | 81 | 2nd | 15,743 | 14,152 | 14,840 | - 901 | * |
| Undergraduate | 48 | 3rd | 17,241 | 16,105 | 16,792 | - 1,750 | * |
| | 31 | 4th | 18,636 | 18,000 | 18,452 | - 300 | |
| | 14 | 1st | 16,429 | 15,000 | 15,714 | - 1,000 | |
| Non Social Work | 24 | 2nd | 17,824 | 18,000 | 17,875 | + 625 | |
| Graduate | 6 | 3rd | 18,900 | 14,000 | 18,083 | - 4,500 | |
| | 5 | 4th | 25,625 | 20,000 | 24,500 | - 3,000 | |
| | 32 | 1st | 15,300 | 14,864 | 15,000 | - 400 | |
| Social Work | 51 | 2nd | 16,591 | 16,517 | 16,549 | + 417 | |
| Graduate | 72 | 3rd | 19,757 | 18,514 | 19,153 | - 1,590 | ** |
| | 84 | 4th | 23,291 | 21,069 | 22,524 | - 2,537 | * |

+ Asterisks refer to significance levels on the median test (chi square).

* indicates significance beyond the .05 level;

** indicates significance beyond the .01 level; and

*** indicates significance beyond the .001 level.

*TABLE 2*

**Relationship between Salary and Amount of Time Spent On
Particular Social Service Roles**

| ROLES | TOTAL POPULATION N = 1684 PEARSON'S CORRELATION | SIG. | RESPONDENTS TO SECOND SURVEY N = 609* PEARSON'S CORRELATION | SIG. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Administration | .4369 | .001 | .4590 | .001 |
| Supervision/Consultation | .4186 | .001 | .4403 | .001 |
| Policy Analysis | .4100 | .001 | .4030 | .001 |
| Staff Training/Development | .3429 | .001 | .3365 | .001 |
| Planning | .2706 | .001 | .2668 | `.001 |
| Research | .2342 | .001 | .1851 | .001 |
| Community Development | .1962 | .001 | .0693 | .077 |
| Brokerage | .0333 | .125 | -.0519 | .143 |
| Concrete Service Giving | -.0228 | .216 | -.1622 | .001 |
| Case Management | -.1057 | .001 | -.2386 | .001 |
| Counselling | -.2682 | .001 | -.3957 | .001 |
| Care Giving | -.4123 | .001 | -.3757 | .001 |

* A second survey, carried out up to a year after the first, included only persons employed by Provincial Departments of Social Services.

*TABLE 3*

**Comparison of Average Male and Female Salary of Respondents:
Controlling for Primary Type of Work Done**

| PRIMARY WORK ACTIVITY | OVERALL AVERAGE SALARY | SE | MALE AVERAGE SALARY | FEMALE AVERAGE SALARY |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Direct Practice/Community Development | 14,234 | .148 | 15,327 | 13,152 |
| Supervision/Staff Training | 17,597 | .377 | 18,704 | 16,203 |
| Administration/Planning/Research/Policy | 19,573 | .475 | 21,117 | 16,280 |
| Overall | 14,961 | .109 | 16,194 | 13,497 |

side. On the female side it was more complicated. Female supervisors were paid more than female direct practitioners, but in both cases less than their male counterparts in the same category. Female administrators, on the other hand, had an average salary only marginally higher than that of supervisors, and strikingly lower than their male counterparts. Further analysis of the difference showed that one particular group of women administrators, those operating day care centres, had anomalous salary levels. These day care administrators, including those responsible for large centres, were being paid much less than was normal for administrators. Thus, the average salary for the female administrator category was substantially pulled down by them.

This information about the hierarchy of functions and differential salaries by sex would tend to suggest that both the function being carried out and the sex of the person carrying it out were instrumental in determining salary level. The two, however, were at least partially independent of each other. Also, it appears that salary might have been influenced by a third factor as well. This was the overall numerical distribution of men and women in any particular category as a whole. Day care administrators represented the only instance in which an overall category normally involving higher salaries was overwhelmingly dominated by women. It appeared, in this case, that the ordinarily higher value ascribed to the administrative function might have been overriden by the ordinarily lower value ascribed to any category numerically dominated by women. Here again, however, these trends were consistent with patterns prevalent in the broader occupational structure. As documented recently by Pat and Hugh Armstrong, occupational categories numerically dominated by women, which they

termed "leading female occupations," tended consistently to pay much lower wages than male dominated ones.[5]

Given the differential power, prestige and monetary values attached to particular functions, it seemed important to compare women and men in terms of where they were located structurally within their organizations, and what they were doing. As shown in Table 4, about the same proportion of women as of men were spending their time mainly on direct practice activities (counselling, care-giving, concrete service-giving). The men, however, were strikingly over-represented among those concentrating their energies on supervisory, staff-training, administrative, planning, policy analysis and research functions.

In addition to actually spending a greater proportion of time on the more highly valued job content, and being paid more within each content category, provincially employed men were more likely to be classified in positions of authority (supervisory or administrative civil service classifications).Figure 2 shows the relatively higher proportion of male than of female provincial civil servants in the four Atlantic provinces who were in administrative civil classifications. The pattern is reflective of the distribution of males and females generally between functions which embody authority and control, and those which involve service. The virtual ghettoization of women in particular functions and even whole occupations is a strikingly persistent trend.[6]

Though we did not collect salary information on faculty, and students generally do not have salaries, our Educational Preparation Survey did suggest some ways in which formal social work education would seem to mirror quite closely the practice world. In our overall student population females outnumbered males three to one. A dispropor-
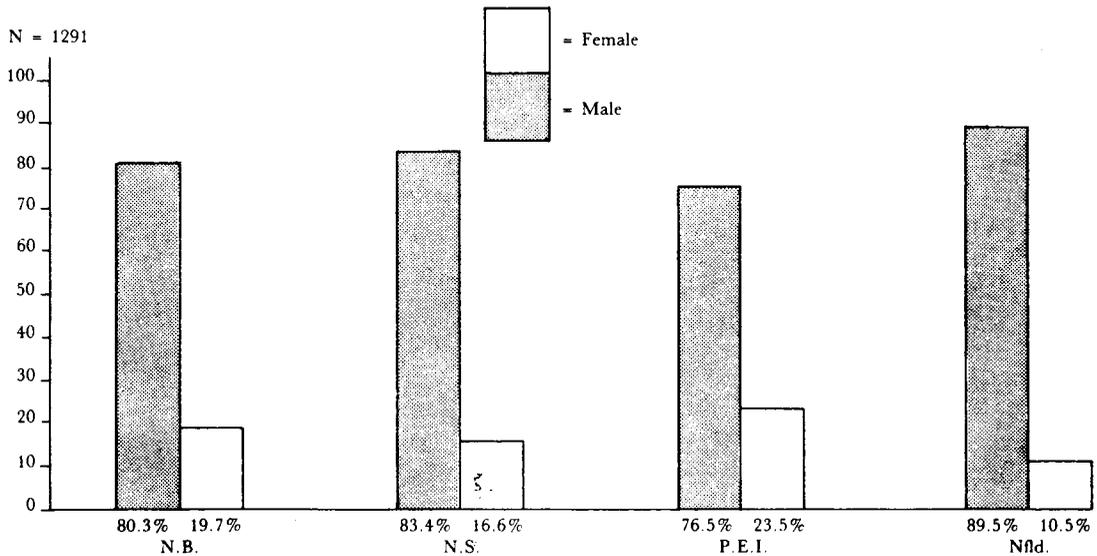
*TABLE 4*

**Distribution of Male and Female Respondents by Primary Type of Work Done**

N = 1704

| Primary Type of Work Done | % MALE | % FEMALE |
|---|---|---|
| Direct Practice/Community Development | 50.3 | 49.5 |
| Supervision/Staff Training | 67.3 | 32.6 |
| Administration/Planning/Policy/Research | 65.9 | 34.1 |
| Totals | 53.05 | 46.94 |
| | (904) | (800) |

*FIGURE 2*

**Percentage of Men and Women in Provincial Civil
Service Administrative Classifications**



tionately large percentage of these women, however, were concentrated in the lower level programs (Table 5). Over half the women students as compared with one-fifth of the males were studying at the technical level, where all full-time instructors were male. The picture was similar at the BSW level, where 31% of the female students as compared to 19% of the male students were located. Here, however, the full-time faculty were not as heavily weighted in favour of males. At the MSW level the picture was reversed with

## TABLE 5

### Distribution of Male and Female Students by Program Level

| PROGRAM | % MALE | % FEMALE | TOTALS |
|---|---|---|---|
| MSW | 59.5 | 17.7 | 28.3 |
| BSW, Certificate | 19.0 | 30.6 | 27.7 |
| Technical | 21.4 | 51.6 | 44.0 |
| Total Distribution | 25.3 | 74.7 | 100.0 |
| | (42) | (124) | (166) |

## TABLE 6

### Percentage of Male and Female Social Service Students Receiving Financial Assistance to Undertake Study from Specified Sources

| SOURCE OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE | % MALE | % FEMALE | % TOTALS |
|---|---|---|---|
| Student Loan | 23.8 | 45.5 | 40.0 |
| Direct Purchase | 16.7 | 27.6 | 24.8 |
| Personal Savings/Family Assistance | 23.8 | 18.7 | 20.0 |
| Government Bursary with Employment Commitment | 16.7 | 3.3 | 6.7 |
| Reimbursement | 9.5 | 2.4 | 4.1 |
| Government/Agency Sponsored Educational Leave | 7.1 | .8 | 2.4 |
| University or Foundation Scholarship | 2.4 | 1.6 | 1.8 |
| Total | 25.5 | 74.5 | 100.0 |
| | (42) | (123) | (165) |

respect to students. Only 18% of the female students, as compared to 60% of the males, were studying at this level.

As a further possible symbol of their lesser value, women students were receiving less financial support to undertake study at the technical, undergraduate and graduate levels. The male average was 42% higher at the technical level; 18% higher at the BSW level; and 29% higher at the MSW level. Only in the certificate category (university non-degree) was the female average higher (11%) but the N for this group was very small (N = 11). As indicated in Table 6, what support women received other than that available through the then Department of Manpower and Immigration to students in technical programs (Direct Purchase), came mainly from student loans. Compared to male students, financial support was received less frequently by women from government bursaries, reimbursement of tuition by agencies and sponsored educational leave.

Full-time social work educators in the region numbered only 45. Males outnumbered females among these by about three to one. Almost one-fifth of these educators were technical level instructors, all men. At the university level, of the four full-time professors two were male and two female. The rest of those involved in university level education full-time were at the associate and assistant ranks. Over half the females as compared to one-fifth of the males were at the lower rank, while 43.8% of the men as compared to 30.8% of the women were at the higher one. Overall, there were more part-time and sessional than full-time faculty, and when these were added to the full-time faculty, they made up a population of just over one hundred. It was almost entirely women for whom this part-time or sessional work represented a primary or only job.

The tendency within Atlantic university level social work education for men to be at higher academic ranks than women is not unique to the region. A Task Force Report released by the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work in 1977 revealed that women in social work schools across Canada earned less, got fewer promotions and enjoyed less job security than their male counterparts.[7] Similarly, reports of women in the whole range of disciplines within Canadian universities have shown that such women occupy a disadvantaged status.[8]

Perhaps a more striking way in which social work education reflected the practice world was the distribution of graduating-year male and female students by curriculum content area. As shown in Table 7 women were, for the most part, studying primarily in curriculum areas more directly preparatory to the less valued practice roles. They were preparing themselves, that is, for direct work with clients. Men were found to be concentrating their efforts in quite different curriculum areas. That is, they were preparing for the more valued practice roles. In the case of planning, research, supervision, administration and staff-training, male student representation was substantially higher than that of females.

The differential content area focus of women and men was not merely a function of females being concentrated at the two lower program levels, though it was not entirely independent

## TABLE 7

### Percentage of Male and Female Students Who Were Preparing for Particular Practice Roles

| ROLES | % FEMALE | % MALE | % TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|
| Planning and Research | 28.2 | 40.5 | 31.3 |
| Supervision | 16.1 | 35.7 | 21.2 |
| Administration | 13.7 | 31.0 | 18.1 |
| Staff Training | 12.1 | 21.4 | 14.5 |
| Counselling | 90.3 | 71.4 | 85.5 |
| Care Giving | 42.7 | 28.6 | 39.2 |
| | (N = 42) | (N = 124) | |

of this concentration either. At the lower levels there was generally a lesser focus on the more valued roles. The differential pattern, however, was evident at the MSW level as well. Here women were much more frequently preparing for the counselling role.

The program level and content area focus of male and female faculty were somewhat more complicated. The faculty women, who were all of the university level, were teaching in a variety of areas. They were much more likely than men, however, to be preparing students for concrete service-giving. As already noted, the technical level instructors were all men. These men were all engaged full-time in teaching students, mainly women, how to do the less valued roles!

In summary of the facts, then, our survey data revealed a number of general patterns. There is an hierarchy of functions in social service organizations in the Atlantic Region. The more valued roles are predominantly occupied by men, even though this cannot be explained adequately on the basis of superior qualifications. Women employed not only in direct practice but at the higher organizational levels as well, are paid less than their male counterparts of equal education and experience. A whole category of personnel numerically dominated by women is paid very low salaries, even though this category involves functions ordinarily more highly valued. The practice world is mirrored quite closely by social work education, where student women learn in curriculum areas more directly preparatory to the less valued practice roles and with fewer economic supports. Social work practice and education share with the broader occupational and educational structure these same discriminatory characteristics. That these facts are part of the reality of Atlantic social work women is by now becoming all to familiar to a number of us who have been

observing the situation. The fact that sexism is so generalized not only within but also beyond social work, however, raises some troublesome questions. How is such a pervasive pattern of social organization, of which social work is merely reflective, to be explained? And given the inescapable contradictions inherent in the de-humanizing consequences of sexism, especially within a helping profession, why have social work women been so slow to recognize and act upon their realities?

## The Parameters of Sexism in Social Work

By now we are familiar with the idea that the sexual division of labour is such that the socially necessary work of providing for people's material needs (the productive sphere) is mainly the prerogative of men; and the equally socially necessary work of providing for the continuation of society through the bearing and rearing of children (the reproductive sphere) is the responsibility of women. Indeed, this consignment of women to reproduction has enabled both men and their productive labour to achieve dominance over women and their reproductive labour. Despite the fact that reproductive labour is socially necessary, it has no exchange value in a money economy, and those engaged in it are not seen as engaged in "real" work.

The separation of the productive and the reproductive spheres characteristic of advanced industrial capitalism is so complete that each sphere is dominated by a set of institutional characteristics antithetic to those of the other. Miles[9] has called these the separative masculine and integrative feminine principles respectively, as they have come to embody the prototypes of male and female character structure. These character prototypes provide a

double standard for judging male and female behaviour which has functioned not only to reinforce separation between the two spheres, and women's consignment to reproduction, but to perpetuate male domination in both spheres.

Theoretical explanations of the origins and continuation of the sexual division of labour generally fall into three categories: biological, cultural and economic. The strengths and shortcomings of each of these theoretical approaches have been widely addressed in recent years, and attempts have been made to rework these approaches in order that they explain more adequately the continuing sexual division of labour and women's subjugated status. While the substance of these theoretical discussions will not be repeated here, it is possible to draw out of them four basic conceptualizations which can be used as a framework for analyzing the sexist phenomena described earlier, and for identifying strategies to be used. The four concepts which make up the framework are: (1) a pervasive and enduring sexual division of labour which, by means of the double standard it has generated, has assigned greater value to men and to their "real" work; (2) a cultural mechanism which recreates and then justifies in the everyday lives of individual women this exploitative pattern of social organization; (3) an individual and collective female consciousness rooted in enforced consignment to and domination within the reproductive sphere; and (4) a dialectical struggle between the sexes, in which potent economic forces have thrown their weight on the side of the masculine separative principle (and the prototypical male character structure), but in which the stark violations of humanity inherent in the over-development of this principle have created a dynamic shift toward re-emergence of the integrative feminine principle. With these basic ingredi-

ents of the framework identified, then, we can reflect more specifically on the realities as well as on the change potential within social work.

In light of the sexual divison of labour and its double standard, the differential pay, structural location and job content of women and men in social work make sense. The profession appears to have incorporated quite directly the male definition of what constitutes "real" work; and what is merely supportive of "real" work but not an integral part of it. Administration, supervision, staff training, policy analysis and research all involve, directly or indirectly, control not only over other forms of labour, but also over those performing it. They qualify therefore, as the "real" work that gets paid and valued more. As the more valuable form of work, they are the prerogative of the dominant and more valued sex. Direct practice, on the other hand, involving largely helping and caring interpersonal relationships with people who are in a dependent state, qualifies instead as the supportive work which is paid and valued less. Women are fully participant in this work, but it is carried out mainly under the control of men.

In social work as elsewhere, the double standard functions to maintain the separation between "real" and supportive work. Embodied in the separative masculine and integrative feminine principles, the double standard exerts pressure to keep social work women in their "place" and to draw men towards theirs. Women who abdicate their traditional professional roles to take up "real" work typically find that they must somehow overcome their "intruder" status. They must establish their legitimacy by demonstrating not only the attributes embodied in the integrative feminine principle (i.e., that they are not masculine) but also a job competency significantly beyond that ordinarily required of men, whose legitimacy is assumed.

The cultural mechanism through which the sexual division of labour finds concrete expression in our daily lives, and through which that expression is justified and thereby reinforced, will vary somewhat from one specific context to another. In its essence, however, it will involve those organizational forms which participate most significantly in discharging five functions: (1) communicating organizational norms and evaluative criteria; (2) defining the work and deploying people to it; (3) establishing control over the organization's resources; (4) allocating organizational rewards; and (5) justifying the practices of the organization. It would clearly be impossible in this paper to undertake a detailed analysis or even an inventory of these structures within social work. A few illustrative ones, however, will hopefully be helpful in clarifying what types of structures are typically participant in giving expression to the sexual division of labour in an organizational context.

From the vantage point of social work practice, one might point to such structures as the following: recruitment and promotion criteria and practices which reserve the higher paying and more prestigious jobs for those best schooled in the separative principle (often symbolized by an over-reliance on educational credentials assumed to be at least a necessary, and often a sufficient condition for performance of the "expert" role), or formal job definitions which characteristically separate the implementation of service plans with clients (direct practice) from their formulation and control (administration, supervision and so forth); or salary scales which characteristically provide very limited career ladders for direct practitioners, thereby limiting the rewards they can claim while in that role however well they perform it; or the application through service practices of diagnostic and outcome criteria which assume

traditional roles for women, and which pathologize, penalize and stigmatize women clients who refuse to conform to these traditional roles.

From the vantage point of social work education the structural communication of sexism is no less striking. Classic among curriculum structures is the separation of classroom work (which is typically oriented to the turning out of tangible products) from field work, particularly that of direct practice students (which is typically oriented to direct interpersonal engagement with clients in a service context). Even within classroom activity itself, there is a consistent tendency to package courses in such a way as to separate content pertinent to "real" work from that pertinent to people-facilitation through interpersonal engagement (direct methodology courses). Even more striking is the content of theory courses characteristically used in social work education. The theories given to students to guide their practice, and on which are based the diagnostic and outcome criteria they will later enforce in their jobs, have almost universally been borrowed from other disciplines such as psychiatry, psychology, sociology or economics, where they have been developed by men out of a male perspective derived from male experience. They are often highly discriminatory to women, assuming for them the traditional role to which men have consigned them, and providing the pathologizing concepts and conceptual categories which justify a deviant status for non-conforming women. These theories are potent instruments in the concealment and perpetuation of the domination of women by men within and beyond social work education and practice.

Organizational structures within social work education are generally complementary to curriculum structures. Some are also illustrative of the structural repositories of

sexism. Classic are the tenure and promotion structures through which are allocated the formal rewards of the system. Tenure criteria almost universally favour faculty whose research and publication record is impressive, even when their teaching record is not. Outstanding teachers, on the other hand, if they have had to apply their energies to facilitation of student learning without sufficient opportunity for concentration on research and publication (though they may have freed others to do so), stand typically at risk when it comes time to jump the tenure and promotion hoops. The burden of proof rests heavily upon those (and they are often women) whose primary contribution has been the people-facilitation which does not count as "real" work. And finally, the organizational arrangements by which faculty and students in most social work schools sort themselves into working groups (often in streams or other ways that reflect some version of the split between direct practice and "real" work) are direct expressions of the sexual division of labour. Indeed this streaming is frequently accompanied by competition between the streams for legitimacy, power and prestige. Many of these struggles are, in their essence, sexual struggles.

The existence of structural forms which justify and bring the sexual division of labour into our day-to-day interactions is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition, for its survival. An individual consciousness which has internalized the justificatory ideology, and a collective consciousness which reinforces it, are also necessary. In Margaret Adams' view the individual character structure as well as the collective consciousness of social work women has typically tended to embody an overemphasis on some dimensions of the integrative feminine principle to the exclusion of a functional balance with separative attributes: namely, an emphasis on other-directedness

which precludes sufficient attention to self; a submissiveness which stifles assertive action; an emphasis on the intuitive and emotional which inhibits analysis; and a personal engagement in other people's experiences which acts as a blinder to objective conditions. She refers to this internalization of cultural expectations as the "Compassion Trap."[10] She considers it to be one of the most powerful forces inhibiting the ability and willingness of social work women to act decisively upon the structures they experience:

> The main target of my concern is the pervasive belief amounting almost to an article of faith that woman's primary and most valuable social function is to provide the tender and compassionate components of life . . . . Woman's supposed social strengths have been gradually turned to her disadvantage, and now are used to blunt her protest and to bar her escape from the confused role that their exclusive exercise has forced upon her. Women in social work have been restrained from uncompromising or threatening action on their own behalf, for fear of negative repercussions on other individuals towards whom they stand in a protective role. Because of their ambiguous status . . . they find it very tempting to be designated the person or group relied upon to smooth away difficulties and reconcile warring elements; and to remain the willing repository for everybody else's unsolved problems.[11]

The female tendency to shrink from uncompromising action came out quite strikingly when Atlantic social work students were asked their views on what approaches to achieving change they would consider legitimate in extreme circumstances (i.e., when other means had already been tried and failed). Male and female responses showed predictable dif-

ferences. Table 8 gives the relative frequency with which male and female students indicated that they would consider each approach legitimate. Male students more frequently than females defined as legitimate every measure listed.

## The Power Structure: Some Thoughts on Strategy

By now it will be apparent that I view sexism as a highly complex phenomenon and that I have no simple recipe for change. So I will try only to outline very briefly some of what I think are important parts of the change process.

Like the problem itself, our solutions must touch the myriad dimensions in which sexism is manifest: our concrete realities; our cultural and internalized consciousness about them; and the societal and institutional power structures within which the dialectic between the sexes is played out. The solutions cannot imply a linear change process. Whatever action we may undertake will need to recognize the organic nature of the multi-dimensional

problem; and we will need to know that intervention in any one dimension will likely stimulate reaction beyond its immediate target.

Let me start with some comments about building our consciousness. Those of us who are living the contradictions of sexist realities bear, I think, a very special responsibility to understand them; to locate the common bondage we experience as women, whatever our differences might be in other respects. Beyond this, I believe, we need to grasp what is the similarity or difference between our bondage and that which is being experienced by people bearing other devalued labels; by Blacks and Indians, by the handicapped, and by many men. At a minimum, the bondage consists for all of us in our being forced to live realities that have been first created and then defined for us by others; defined in ways that exclude us from full participation, and from deriving equitable benefits from both the productive and reproductive spheres of society.

I believe that this consciousness-building process entails two quite distinct stages. In the

## TABLE 8

### Beliefs of Male and Female Students About What Selected Ways to Achieve Change Would be Legitimate in Extreme Circumstances

N = 166

| MEANS IN EXTREME | % MALE | % FEMALE | % TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|
| Using group social pressure to change attitudes | 85.7 | 75.8 | 78.3 |
| Taking the problem to the political arena | 73.8 | 54.8 | 59.6 |
| Taking the problem to the news media | 71.4 | 58.1 | 61.4 |
| Informing clients of conflicts internal to the agency | 47.6 | 41.9 | 43.4 |
| Defying, ignoring or circumventing agency policy | 42.9 | 14.5 | 21.7 |
| Work stoppage | 38.1 | 18.5 | 23.5 |

first stage, we women need to purge our consciousness of the images and labels that strip us of our equality, identity and dignity as human beings. This, I think, we need to do together, and without men. I say without men because I believe the habits of our heritage as men and women are so ingrained in our day-to-day interactive patterns that the reality of what would ensue in their presence would almost inevitably reinforce rather than purge the old images. It is when we have gained the strength to be consciously self-defining as women that we can look beyond our differences to what we have in common with men.

It is in the second stage of our consciousness building that we will, I think, meet our biggest challenges. Here we will need to comprehend and confront the most powerful forces of inaction; the fragmentation of consciousness resulting from society's complex and intricate labeling system. By means of this labeling system, we are persuaded to become instruments of each other's bondage and devaluation, even when we share a reality and a partial consciousness of it. This stage, then, will undoubtedly provide the acid test of our capacity to respect and tolerate our real differences while seeing beyond the images of difference that divide us. We will need to locate our common interests.

In more concrete terms, and often before we feel ready to do so, we are called upon to take action in relation to our unequal realities. Like consciousness, and in dialectical relationship to it, action moves in uneven stages as well. There are two basic kinds of action, both of which are essential. The first involves resistive action; a refusal to participate any longer in playing out the images that have been defined for us. The particular priority targets for resistive action in our environment may well vary from one social work school to another, or

from one agency to another. What is important is that the choice of targets be rooted in the experiences and consciousness of those who will undertake the resistance. We must together locate in our particular context the specific structures which are most significantly involved in communicating sexism. Out of the process of locating these structures, priority targets can be set. Whatever is chosen, two conditions need to be met. First, the scrutiny of structures and criteria must be vigilant and rigorous, and the exposure of sexist bias thorough and direct. Secondly, action needs group sanction to arise out of group consciousness and support. To whatever degree resistive action is successful in rooting out and confronting sexist structures and practices—whether these involve pay cheques, work assignments, the shape of our organizational, service and curriculum structures, the content of our diagnostic and methodological tools—to that same degree the individuals involved in the resistive action are likely to find themselves subject to an activated cultural press. This will be wielded by those whose power is most directly threatened, and will be directed toward invalidation and fragmentation of the collective consciousness achieved. Unless group consciousness and support afford an alternative to the asylum previously provided by submission to the demands of the label, individuals will be sorely tempted to retreat to the shelter of the stereotype, however, cramped the space inside it.

It is easy to confuse two levels of vested interest that might be threatened by the change efforts of women in social work. At one level any significant challenge to the existing male-dominated definitions of humanity and of "real" work, might be threatening to most men. At least, such redefinitions would eliminate the competitive advantage they enjoy

on the basis of superior schooling in the now prevailing norms. But beyond this level of immediate vested interest there would be those men who, despite their competitive advantage (and perhaps because of it), will have experienced an oppression different from, but in some ways analogous to our own. There is within the grasp of these men a consciousness of common interest with us—a desire to escape from social definitions that inhibit, distort and contain individual potential. In a political struggle these men and we could pursue common goals.

There are men whose consciousness does not pose fundamental contradictions between their own individual needs and the external structures. Such men would likely be more threatened by the change efforts of women. From them can be expected the most powerful reaction. But their power is not in themselves. It lies in their greater containment by and appeal to the culturally prescribed role stereotypes that define greater worth and a privileged status for men; and in their ability to reawaken in us the vestiges of our own internalized prisons constructed of these same definitions. More fundamentally, their power lies in an appeal to higher and higher levels of institutional and societal power for their own legitimation and for our de-legitimation. At the pinnacle of this power are those men whose fundamental economic interests, supported by the means to market them, are tied up in maintaining the sexual division of labour and thereby their own control over the productive surplus. When we vigorously resist the sexist behaviours of men in our midst we are recognizing them as the institutional instruments of these powerful vested interests. In the final analysis, however, even their power depends on our willingness to continue playing the roles they have assigned to us, and on our failure to demand a definition not only of

"real" work but of humanity itself within which we and they stand as equals.

Resistive action by women, then, is necessary. It is by itself, however, not sufficient. Creative integrative action is required as well to provide the alternatives; to replace sexist structures with egalitarian and growth-enhancing ones. It is in the concept of creative integrative action that we encounter most fully the complexity of the sexist phenomenon. Our schools and agencies host but a small fraction of the concrete realities wherein sexism affects each one of us. Creative action, then, requires not only that we act upon the many faces of sexism wherever we may find them, but that we build bridges to those who, through social manipulations comparable to sexism, are forced like us to live realities of economic and social exclusion.

The significant challenge to each of us as individuals, I think, is to position ourselves with respect to both resistive and creative integrative action; to determine in what arenas we can best pursue our individual and collective change goals; and then to find the courage to take the risks inherent in positive action.

onerous by the fact that I am visually handicapped. Their sensitivity and their willingness to accept graciously and supportively the extra load that necessarily fell to them was very much appreciated.

2. The Project is *The Atlantic Social Services Project*, funded by Health and Welfare, Canada. It is being carried out at the Maritime School of Social Work. It is now in its fourth and final year of operation.

   The particular data used in this study were collected between November 1977 and September 1978 as part of the Project's Phase I and II operations. These involved surveying social service employees, faculty and students to obtain descriptive, perception and attitudinal data, as well as a picture of the social service work being done.

   There were two employee surveys, involving the total identifiable population of social service employees at all organizational levels in a wide range of federal, provincial, municipal and private social service organizations. There were also surveys of the total population of graduating year students from the eleven major programs of social service education at the technical, undergraduate and graduate levels available within the region; and of the total population of full and part time instructors/faculty from the same educational institutions. The employee population included direct practitioners, administrators, supervisors, policy analysts, researchers and staff training personnel from social agencies targeting twenty-two specific problem areas or fields of service.

   The Project has been carried out in three phases. It has as its overall purpose an analysis of significant relationships between major elements of the social services system in the Atlantic Region. These relationships fall generally within and/or between four components of the overall system: (1) the policy-making component (being studied primarily through a scrutiny of trends in public expenditure on the social services); (2) the service delivery component (involving surveys and group interviews with social service employees, and a Functional Job Analysis, to discover the precise nature of the social service work being done); (3) the educational preparation component (involving surveys and group interviews, as well as a scrutiny of curriculum documents, to determine what is being taught and learned in educational programs at all levels); and (4) the service consumption component (involving obtaining client perceptions of the goals and effectiveness of the direct social service practice with which they are engaged). The impact of the relationships between these components, and between elements within them, on various constituencies (i.e., employees at all levels, faculty, students and clients) is also being explored. A detailed Project Proposal as well as the five Interim Reports on various aspects of the Project are available on request from the author at the Maritime School of Social Work, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

3. Women have always been paid less than men. This is true within each occupational category, and for each age and educational group, as documented in a variety of sources. See for example *Women in the Labour Force: Facts and Figures* (Women's Bureau, 1976) part 2, table 5, pp. 27-28. It had been similarly evident in an earlier publication of the Women's Bureau (1973: 26-29, tables 13 and 14). See also *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women*, (1970) Chapter 2, Part C especially pp. 53-55, 57-60, 78-80, tables 4 and 5.

4. The first survey included employees of federal, provincial, municipal and private social service agencies. The second survey, carried out up to a year after the first, included only persons employed by provincial Departments of Social Services.

5. Pat and Hugh Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978), pp. 30-50.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-50.

7. See Gillian Walker, *The Status of Women in Social Work Education,* a brief prepared for the CASSW Task Force on the Status of Women in Social Work Education, Ottawa: CASSW, 1977.

8. The recent study of the status of women at Dalhousie University is but a tardy addition to the list of such studies which have shown discrimination against women in Canadian universities across the nation. See Virginia Miller, *Report of the President's Committee on the Status of Women at Dalhousie University,* Halifax, Nova Scotia. *University News* (Special Edition), January, 1979, p. 1.

9. Angela Miles, *The Politics of Feminist Radicalism: A Study in Integrative Feminism*, Doctoral Dissertation submitted to the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and the Department of Political Science, University of Toronto, 1979.

10. Margaret Adams, "The Compassion Trap", in *"Women in Sexist Society,* edited by Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1971), pp. 401-416.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 402, 405.