

Academic Queen Bees

by Maureen Baker



In 1944 Gunnar Myrdal made an analogy between the social situation of women and American Blacks (Myrdal, 1944: 1077). Few social scientists studied gender stratification again until the late 1960s when women took up this issue from a feminist perspective. Systematic investigations of the attitudes and performance of women working within a predominantly male occupational group have been neither common in sociology nor always considered to be relevant to the study of minority groups. The absence of such investigation implies both the male-oriented nature of sociological studies and the tendency of women until quite recently to identify with the dominant male stereotype of their occupational group instead of seeing them-

selves as a minority within the group. One example that can serve as a model is university professors.

Many studies have documented that women university professors are clustered in the lower ranks, are less likely than men to be promoted and granted tenure, receive lower salaries for the same amount of work, more often have part-time rather than full-time appointments and generally are granted less professional prestige than their male counterparts (Bernard, 1964; Rossi, 1970; LaSorte, 1971; Robson and Lapointe, 1971; to mention but a few). But the questions remain: do women university professors view this differential treatment as unjust and as a disability to

their professional development? Are they even aware that they are being treated any differently as women?

Answers to these questions were pursued in my research of 1973-74, when I looked at women academic staff and doctoral students as a "minority group" within predominantly male departments of a western Canadian university (Baker, 1975). In this paper, I would like to discuss the presence of minority group characteristics in this group of women, and their perception of differential treatment of the sexes in the university. I was specifically interested in what it means subjectively to be an academic woman, how women view their own status relative to men's, and what ramifications these attitudes have for changes in the status of academic women.

Case studies were obtained from interviewing thirty-nine women in four academic categories--full-time teaching staff, sessional (temporary) appointments, doctoral students and former doctoral students who had officially withdrawn from their programmes. These women were intensively questioned about their educational and occupational experiences and their attitudes towards various aspects of their career. I was interested in how women made this "atypical" career choice and whether or not they felt that their sex made a difference to the development of their career. The nature of this study precluded elabor-

ate statistical presentation of my findings but enabled me to obtain detailed information about the experiences of a representative sample of women in predominantly male departments of a Canadian university. These subjective accounts also provided useful insights into the university structure and how it deals with women.

Minority Group Characteristics of Academic Women

Definitions of "minority group" may vary but their essential feature is the group's unfavourable position in the reward system and a consciousness of being a disadvantaged group. Self-perception of being an object of discrimination is a crucial variable and an indicator of the likelihood of change in the status of the group.

Women are generally not included in a discussion of minority groups in sociology because they are said to lack a distinctive subculture, lack group identification, are dispersed throughout the population and have often accepted the propriety of differential treatment (Hacker, 1951; Streib, 1968; Abu-Laban and Abu-Laban, 1973). However, the number of status of women reports recently done in North American universities indicates a growing awareness of problems in the position of academic women. Women university professors are definitely in a numerical minority, often specialize in different disciplines

than men, often have different career patterns, receive fewer professional rewards and are therefore more likely than women in general to perceive discriminatory treatment.

Among the women in the present study, there was a tendency for the higher ranking women to reveal that they accepted some of the negative stereotypes of academic women. Some examples of such comments are: women's lower status in academia is their own fault because they fail to receive the necessary qualifications for promotion or because they have "divided interests;" women are their own worst enemies; they cannot expect to have their cake and eat it too (with respect to marriage and a career); men's voices carry more authority; and "I hate to say it, but some of the women in this department (graduate students) are here looking for a husband."

Another example of an older woman who accepted negative stereotypes against women was an assistant professor in a male-dominated school. She remarked: "Women are partly to blame (for their lower occupational status) as they sometimes use devious tactics. I wouldn't want to work under all women . . . I would prefer a man to some women. What they say and what they do are sometimes different things. Men call a spade a spade. Women are sometimes too emotional." This same woman later indicated: ". . . Women's organizations drive me up a tree. I'm not anti-social but

I think they're a waste of time." It was interesting to note that this woman seemed to be in a marginal position--she was in her mid-fifties and was still an assistant professor. As the only woman in her school, she was neither fully accepted by her male colleagues, nor could she fall back into the role of dependent wife and be accepted by women in more traditional roles.

These are only a few examples of how some women have internalized the majority group's stereotypes about themselves. A minority of the sample denied that women had any career problems which men did not have. However most of the women interviewed (twenty-five out of thirty-nine) felt that women received fewer professional rewards and less recognition than their male counterparts. On the whole younger women were more likely to accept the rationale that women were in a lower position in academia because they are objects of discrimination. As the interviews were open-ended, numerous examples were given of salary differences between women and their male colleagues, promotional problems, hiring difficulties, and professional slights.(1) Statements were made that the opinions of women carry no weight in faculty meetings. One woman mentioned that she was frequently mistaken for a secretary and therefore rudely treated. A full professor in physical education said that she was refused a sabbatical a number of years ago, despite the fact

that every man who applied received one. Many others mentioned that the expertise and especially the commitment of women was questioned in situations where the same qualities were assumed to exist in men.

One woman in medical sciences explained that a man with a diploma from a technical college was earning more money than she was at the same job. She had a master's degree and had worked towards a doctorate and also claimed to have more experience. When she complained to her boss and threatened to leave, she was granted a "small raise" but said that her male colleague's salary would soon surpass hers again as he received regular increments.

In some cases women were paid lower salaries because they were not doing comparable work to their male colleagues --or so they were told. In one interview, a former doctoral student, who is now employed for a private consulting firm, asked her employer why her salary was lower than the professional men in the office. She was told that the men engaged in field work. When she asked to be sent out into the field with them, she was informed that she had been hired to write up reports because none of the men wanted to do this work. This same woman had quit university because she had witnessed many injustices experienced by her female thesis supervisor, who, she felt, had had to work harder than men to get the same rewards.

One sessional appointment in the faculty of science summed up the attitude of many of the lower ranking women when she said: "The university attempts to get the most out of women, and offers them the least amount of money they can get away with. Men still think we are working for "pin money" or to fill our hours."

Some women who had received less pay than men, and were aware of it, accepted this situation with resignation. For example, an associate professor in the faculty of education, who had come from an eastern Canadian university where she had been department head and dean, was hired as a sessional lecturer and paid a very low salary. When she was asked why she had accepted such a low salary, she smiled and shrugged and admitted that money had not been discussed before she signed the contract. When she later discovered the amount she was being paid, she was upset but did not insist on a raise for two years. Finally she threatened to quit and the university promoted her to associate professor and raised her salary considerably.

A full professor in the faculty of science mentioned that both she and her husband were hired at the same time. She was hired on a sessional appointment but her husband received a full-time position, despite the fact that she had a doctorate and he did not. Her salary was one-third that of her husband's.

Even though she was doing the equivalent of a full-time job and receiving only a fraction of full-time pay, she stated that her salary "seemed reasonable at the time," and would not refer to this as discrimination.

Table One indicates the relation between the rank of a woman and her perceptions of sex discrimination. The interviewees were asked if they felt that women university professors experienced any problems in their job which men would not experience. The question was phrased in an indirect manner, since asking about "sex discrimination" might bias the results.

From intensively interviewing thirty-nine women, I concluded that the majority viewed themselves as members of a disadvantaged group and were of the opinion that their gender did in some way interfere with their occupational status and development. Although not all women expressed these feelings explicitly, they indicated through a variety of personal anecdotes that they were aware that women were disadvantaged in a way in which men were not.

One recurring theme in the interviews was that certain university or departmental regulations worked to the dis-

TABLE ONE
Perception of Sex Discrimination by Rank

	<u>Low Rank</u>	<u>High Rank*</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Perception of Sex Discrimination Against Women</u>			
Yes	22	3	25
Uncertain	0	1	1
No	4	9	13
Total	26	13	39

* High rank includes women who are associate professors of above (usually tenured). All others are classified as low rank.

advantage of women university professors. Anti-nepotism rules and regulations against hiring the department's own graduates in full-time positions often affect women more than men-- especially married women who because of domicile laws and social custom are less mobile. Women's assumed lack of mobility seems to affect their bargaining power, as the ability to leave for a better job is frequently used as a lever for an increment or promotion in academia (Caplow and McGee, 1958: 33ff).

One interesting fact which came out of the present study is that academic women are far less likely to be married than academic men. Only fifty-six percent of my sample was married at the time I interviewed. Bernard (1964: 206) found that about fifty percent of academic women are married compared to about ninety percent of academic men.

About fifty-eight percent of the married women in the sample, and those who have been married, were married to university professors (all of whom had a rank equal to or higher than their own). Because so many academic women are married to academic men, nepotism rules become a very real problem for them. Although the university under investigation no longer had such rules "on the books," they still were informally enforced in some departments. One associate professor in the study told me that her marriage broke up because

nepotism rules in the American university where her husband was employed prohibited her from being hired. She left her husband so that she could have a full-time position in Canada; several years later he joined her at the same university.

None of the married women indicated that their husbands took sessional appointments so that their wives could have full-time appointments. In fact the usual pattern in this study was that the husband would start looking for employment at the university of his choice; after he received an offer, the wife would start to apply at the same institution or others in the same city. But she did not always find a job. And when she did, it was almost always a part-time position or at a lower rank than her husband even when she had the same qualifications.

It was also a pattern among the married women in my sample to be married to a man whose career was already established. They could then easily justify the fact that they had deferred to his career moves, as "he had greater earning power." In some cases the husband obviously did have greater earning potential but, in others, this assumption was implicitly made when the husband and wife started out with the same qualifications. In cases where the wife automatically gave priority to her husband's career, he is now well ahead of her in terms of rank and salary. When the women were asked

why they had given priority to their husband's career, most could not give any reasons and some had apparently not even thought about it before.

Despite the fact that a few women had made the tacit assumption that their husband's occupational life was more important than their own, the majority felt that their careers were extremely important to them. Several mentioned that other people underestimated the importance of their work, and did not take them as seriously as male professors. There was a strong indication from the interviews that women professors, especially the younger women, are conscious of their disadvantaged position and feel the need for co-operation among their female colleagues.

A month prior to the beginning of my study, a group called the Academic Women's Association was formed on campus. It was organized by women who realized that they knew too few women to even nominate some to university-wide committees. The major aim of the group was to increase women's awareness of the activities and interests of their female colleagues, and to thereby raise women's consciousness of the problems. It seems that this "consciousness raising" goal was realized, as several women mentioned what they had learned from this organization. One full professor in the faculty of physical education said: "If I hadn't gone to the women's meetings, I wouldn't have known about

other women's problems, as I personally have never felt discriminated against."

Another woman who was the only female professor in her department expressed the need for group support from other women: ". . . My colleagues now treat me as an equal I can talk confidentially with my colleagues and am not ostracized but there can be no group stance as I am the only woman." She indicated that there are some issues of particular concern to women: "I can't bargain on my own. If there was a group of women, we could make ourselves heard."

One question which attempted to measure the willingness of women to ameliorate their situation was to ask if they thought that Canadian universities should have an affirmative action programme, or a policy of giving hiring preference to an equally qualified woman. About half of the sample was in favour of such a policy and about one half was against it. It was interesting to note that the lower ranking women were more likely to see this as a way of amending years of discrimination against women, and the higher ranking women saw it as "reverse discrimination" and therefore contrary to the idea of hiring on the basis of merit. Table Two portrays the attitudes toward affirmative action according to the rank of the woman.

TABLE TWO
Attitudes Towards "Affirmative Action" by Rank

<u>Attitude Toward Affirmative Action</u>	Rank		<u>Total</u>
	<u>Low*</u>	<u>High**</u>	
In favour	50%	17%	16
Uncertain	19%	25%	8
Against	31%	58%	15
Total Number	26	12	38***

*Low rank includes Ph.D. drop-outs, doctoral students, lecturers, assistant professors and professional officers.

**High rank includes associate and full professors.

***One woman did not answer this question.

Generally speaking, the results of this study indicate that the majority of the women in the sample felt that their sex was a disability in terms of hiring practices, salary increments, promotion and professional status. However, most of them expressed the opinion that the status of women was improving as awareness is growing of sexual stereotyping, and as more educated women enter the labour force. Most of the women were optimistic about the future of academic women, despite the fact that they them-

selves were considered to be "deviant" by family and former friends because they had chosen the career of university professor. Several women indicated that they were in a marginal position in both their professional and family life. They were not accepted as equals by colleagues or students, and certainly would not fit in with non-employed, dependent women. They therefore felt the strong need for supportive friends among their female colleagues--as rare as they were.

Conclusions

The above data indicates that these academic women are experiencing a growing minority group consciousness--similar to an ethnic group becoming aware of its powerlessness and feeling the need for action. Most of the women were aware of the discriminatory situations which continually confront women and were angered or upset by them. However, not all women in the study felt that they were objects of discrimination or were sympathetic to other women who felt that they were. Thirteen women felt that there was no sex discrimination in the university, nine of whom were full or associate professors. These women suggested that any problems women had were "brought upon themselves"--that most women were underqualified or had competing family interests or were simply paranoid.

This finding that higher ranking women are less likely to perceive discrimination is consistent with the findings of Staines, Tavis, and Jayaratne (1973), and has been labelled the "Queen Bee Syndrome." These tenured women would rather believe that their own success can be attributed to their superior intelligence and perseverance, and that other women have not "made it" because they are not as good. Most of the "Queen Bees" in the present study were married and had children, and had successfully combined their careers and family life. They saw no reason, other

than lack of ability, why all women should not be as successful as they were. These "Queen Bees" implied or stated that they benefitted from being the only woman in the department, and wanted to retain their personal position of "power."

As well as the older species of Queen Bee, there appears to be a "new breed" of Queen Bees arising out of the Women's Movement. Women who have been hired through affirmative action policies or attempts to redress the balance of the sexes in universities sometimes use this climate to launch their academic careers and later "put down" the women's movement as something they have "outgrown." These women do as great a disservice to feminism and the status of women in general as the older higher rank women who denied that bright, ambitious women experience any problems. Both groups of women have in fact been coopted by the system, and turn the tables against those who feel that women still have a long way to go to gain true equality within the university and society in general.

One immense hurdle that academic women and men have to overcome in order to improve the status of university women is to abolish the ideology of the university as a "universalistic" institution in which the "best" person is hired on the basis of their superior qualifications and the notion of the university as a community of colleagues who are above politics. Victims of

this view, whether men or women, are oblivious to discrimination and do not support policies to alter discriminatory practices.

Although most women in my study were aware that discrimination against academic women exists and felt that something ought to be done about it, they did not agree on what should be done. The majority expressed the need for reformist modifications to the system, such as increasing the number of women students and professors and placing more women on committees. Many felt that the situation was hopelessly complicated, that they were too powerless to accomplish anything themselves, that their jobs were precarious as they did not have tenure and that they were afraid of "rocking the boat." Changing patterns of socialization was seen as one solution which would benefit later generations, but not themselves. Few women suggested attempting to change the structure of the university--or political solutions--and very few mentioned that they were actively involved in fighting sex discrimination.

The fact that younger women are more aware of the problems of academic women may indicate that the women's movement and the social trend toward equality has had some impact on the university, or it may mean that these women have not yet been coopted by the system. Only more research and the passing of time will tell. Until equality is achieved, it is important that our young out-

spoken women of today not become "Queen Bees" tomorrow as they grow more comfortable in their academic niches.

NOTES

1. I made no attempts to verify these complaints unless another member of the same department mentioned the same issue. I was more concerned with how the women themselves explained and interpreted these problems, and how it affected their attitudes towards the status of women and necessary changes.

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