

ANOTHER VOICE: FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL LIFE AND SOCIAL SCIENCE
Edited by Marcia Millam and Rosabeth Moss Kanter. New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1975. Pp. 382.

Another Voice is an important collection of articles on a wide range of topics relevant to social scientists: political behaviour, the study of organizations, medical sociology, sociology of education, of deviance, of arts, of occupations, of emotions, urban sociology, race and ethnic studies. The various articles have a common theme: that much of the work done by social scientists, especially sociologists, has a particular bias. This bias reflects itself not only in downplaying the role of women in society, but also by distorting it. This distortion is seen in the assumptions underlying much of the research, the methodological tools used and the topics covered.

One key assumption behind much social science research is that men and women live in the same social world. Several of these articles argue that women's perception of the world is very different from that of men and therefore an analysis from a male viewpoint can be, and often is, misinterpreting the social reality of the female participants. For example, social scientists tend to focus on the rational element in our behaviour and, in effect, to

assume rationality in human action. Since women are assigned to an emotional, supportive role in our society, this focus leads to an inappropriate (rational) model being applied to female behaviour. As a result much of this behaviour is defined as secondary or irrelevant for study. As McCormack states in Chapter 1, "Because male behaviour is taken as the norm, women constitute the deviants" (p. 12)

The methodological approach most heavily criticized is quantitative analysis, "hard methods." The argument is that this approach encourages the study of easily quantifiable variables and that, in fact, social reality is often artificially forced into prearranged categories. This is not a new criticism of quantitative methods in social science research. The novel element is the concern that certain variables, certain forms of behaviour peculiar to females, are systematically ignored by this approach which leads not only to an incorrect view of the role of women, but also to a critical omission in the study of male behaviour.

This criticism also extends to the topics chosen by social scientists. In the past, researchers have focused not only on the easily measurable, but also on the public, the dramatic and the visible (usually male) elements of social life.

These and other criticisms raised in this book are important for all social

scientists to consider. It is crucial that we occasionally (if not continually) examine the effect of our assumptions and our research tools on the kind of "facts" that we observe. Articles such as those in Another Voice force us to face these questions.

It is not possible in a review article of this length to comment in detail about particular articles in the book. While all had their strengths and weaknesses, I found Lightfoot's article on the "Sociology of Education" and Myer's brief one on "Black Women and Self-Esteem" to be particularly well written. McCormack's article was, in my mind, the weakest, and therefore a poor choice as a lead article. But, in general, the arguments put forward were well presented and well documented. They raised issues critical to a vital social science. The tragedy is that many social scientists are unlikely to read this book since it can perhaps be too easily dismissed as being relevant only to "Feminists" or teachers of "women's studies." A related criticism is that, as it stands, this collection of articles suffers from overkill. After reading the first few articles one is well aware of the general areas of criticism. The remaining authors sound variations on the same theme, applying it to their particular areas of specialization. These articles would have much more impact if they were presented in the general literature rather than being grouped together as a separate "feminist perspective." The danger is

that it can and will be dismissed or overlooked because of just the kinds of biases that are discussed within its covers.

One of the major points of the book is that social scientists cannot do an effective job of studying "social reality" if the tools they use and the assumptions they make predispose them to ignore, downplay or misperceive the "reality" of half the participants that they study. Women are involved in every aspect of social life; one cannot even understand what men do and why they do it unless it is recognized that these men live with, work with, fight with, play with women as well as other men. The book Another Voice argues this very persuasively, but this argument will be in vain unless social scientists generally become aware of these issues.

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