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AUTHOR   Sherr, Mary-Lou Breitborde
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ABSTRACT
                Women's limited vision of their potential scope of
influence, of arenas appropriate for their work, and of their social
responsibility hampers their performance of professional work.
Feelings of social contribution and potential efficacy comprise a
basic need to feel uniquely important to humanity. This notion of
self-esteem is inherent in the particular social, historical, and
ideological conditions which have constricted women's realm of
perceived influence and responsibility. Although women are asked to
predicate their work on its benefits to others, their perceived realm
of influence and responsibility has been, in general, narrowly
circumscribed to husband and family. If women's self-esteem is based
on a limited vision of influence, career choices, and social
responsibility, then women will continue to choose occupations and
perform tasks that are not very professionalized. (Author/JAC)

<u>Self-Esteem and Professionalism</u>

Mary-Lou Breitborde Sherr

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In order to understand the full context of a woman's choice of, commitment
to, and performance within work roles, we must address her feelings about
what she can and should contribute to the lives of others and what are
appropriate arenas for this work. These notions of her potential and actual
contribution to world-life constitute her self-esteem. My use of self-esteem,
then, is as a broadly construed concept referring to our judgments of ourselves
as having social worth and referring also to the criteria according to which
we form these judgments. I intend, in this segment of the presentation, to
describe the ways in which Americans in general, and women, in particular,
define for themselves their self-esteem-through-social-worth, and the
implications of that definition for women's working lives. Once we understand
how women have traditionally defined worthy work for themselves, then we can
surmise whether, and in what way, they can conceive of themselves as "professionals"
and how this conception of themselves as professionals might affect their
professions. To that end, I will offer an analysis of the historical, ideological,
and social-psychological contexts of female self-esteem, and view these contexts
in light of the nature and characteristics of professionalism.

I am obliged to make clear to you the political frame of reference that
gives rise to these concerns of mine and that gives rise to the particular
ways in which I define terms like self-esteem and professional. First, my
use of self-esteem to refer to self-judgments about social contribution is
grounded in the belief that we ought to incorporate within our systems of
self-judgment a social consciousness and responsibility. Concepts of self-
esteem more typical in psychology refer to the extent to which we feel good
about ourselves. The idea of self-esteem-as-social-contribution speaks of

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the social group which legitimates our worth. Specifically, the difference is between a continuum of feeling good about oneself, or not, and a feeling of being important, essential, to humankind -- being here on earth with a job to do -- or not. Now, the social boundaries of self-esteem, that is, the size of this group to which we feel bound to contribute something, are elastic and vary with the individual and culture in which she/he lives. Yet my own bias is for a self-esteem based in the idea that we have contributed to the welfare and sustenance of large social groups, in fact, to humankind, rather than just to our families for example. I feel strongly that if we are to survive at least at all, and at best as a humane species, we all have the responsibility to conceive of broad-ranging criteria of self-judgment.

I must also make explicit my frame of reference with regard to the issue of professionalism. I have had a difficult time reconciling my egalitarian political beliefs with even using the word. In fact, Americans as a somewhat and sometimes democratic people have in general real difficulties with the term professional and with professional people (Barker, 1978), which is why the term is ambiguous and is used with so many different occupations. Fortunately, I came across Donald Myers (1973), who contrasted the words "professional," "professionalism," and "professionalization" in such a way that they could at once refer to a hierarchy of specific qualities and also theoretically be applied to any occupation. Myers says that "profesaional" is an ideal type, comprising a long list of qualifications which include, for example, knowledge based on scientific theory, service orientation, freedom from lay control, and authority over training and licensure. No occupation, then, is as yet professional, although all are in some state of "professionalization," that is, of becoming professional. "Professionalism" is an ideology found in some occupations, which in fact does not necessarily represent the actual extent of professionalization

of the occupation itself. The word "professional" has been abused in several

ways. In the "established" professions of medicine and law,

it has masked an absence of, or reduction in, some qualifications necessary for

the professional ideal. For example, their orientation to service rather than

to self-interest, can be questioned. In other occupations, such as , teaching,

"professionalism" has in contrast meant being dedicated to service, kind to

students, and concerned with the immediacy of the work, at the expense of the

conditions of the work and control over performance standards. I am comfortable

speaking and writing about women and professionalism only in terms of an ideal

as yet unattained, rather than in terms of the practices of the current elite

professionalizing occupations.

The matter at hand is the relationship between women's self-esteem and

their choice of and performance within professionalizing occupations. Again,

the answer originates with how women have generally conceived of worthy work

for themselves and how this conception has compared with prevailing notions of

self-worth and professional work.

Ernest Becker (1971) sees self-esteem as a matter of life and death, of

sanity or insanity. He says,

> When the child poses the question, Who am I? What is the value of my
> life?, he is really asking something more pointed: that he be recognized
> as an object of primary value in the universe. Nothing less. And this
> more pointed question has ramifications immediately broad and embracing:
> He wants to know, "What is my contribution to world-life? Specifically,
> Where do I rank as a Hero?" This is the uniquely human need, what
> man [sic] everywhere is really all about -- each person's need to be
> an object of primary value, a heroic contributor to world-life --
> the heroic contributor to the destiny of [humankind]. (p.76)

Our "inner newsreel of faces" composed of people symbolically important

to us continually judges our actions, affirming to us "how great we are, how

important, how unique, how good" (Becker, 1971, p. 70). Becker said, people

never thrive so well as when they feel they are bringing purity and goodness

into the world (In Keen, 1974, p.72). Speaking of America, he felt her/sad

lack of heroism, the dearth of ways in which, at least in modern times, the

nation can express heroics.

Yet his concept of self-esteem as heroism was not limited to the grand

scale. Heroism can be defined on a personal scale to include anything an

individual might construe as a legacy:

> To be a hero means to leave behind something that heightens life
> and testifies to the worthwhileness of existence. Making a beautiful cabinet
> can be heroic. Or for the average man, I think being a provider is
> heroic enough... I suppose (I haven't thought about it) that the
> American heroism is that one has always made a good living, been a
> breadwinner and stayed off welfare roles. (Becker as quoted In Keen,1974, p.72)

How heroism is defined, then, is determined by the prevailing value systems

and opportunities presented to us within our particular life circumstances.

Our actions and our self-judgments are contexted within boundaries of perceived

influence that are visible and reasonable to us. A primitive tribesman views

his potential in terms of one hundred fellows living alongside the river.

A ghetto resident may make her choices with reference to twenty city blocks.

A Kennedy judges his worth and contexts his action with reference to a nation,

if not a world, of people.

In varying political surroundings, individuals have different conceptions

of possible influence, power, and responsibility. National governments allow or

disallow identification with social, religious, or political groups of varying

natures and sizes. Where such involvements are unrestricted by formal statute,

political ideology operates via mechanisms of communication to define and

constrain one's social reference. Works such as Claus Mueller's Politics and

Communication and Nell Keddie's "Classroom Knowledge" illustrate the ways in

which government, media, and schools, for example, restrict our notions of

what is heroic or important or effective activity. The communicative mechanisms

present particular subgroups of working-class, students, and women, and the

handicapped with limited choices, information and futures. At the same time, public messages are conveyed to these groups regarding their fitness for certain spheres of activity and influence.

Americans in general have a limited vision of their personal responsibility and efficacy within large social spheres. The prevailing ideology of individualism involves the belief that both progress and the welfare of society are best served by allowing each individual a wide arena of personal choice, privacy, and self-interest. This belief originated in the concerns of the early white settlers who were, after all running from governmental, social, and religious tyranny and "making it" in a fertile wilderness far from their native lands. The idea was reinforced by the myths of the "lone" pioneer and the "free" individual (see Boorstin, 1965). Early conditions in fact linked experiences and survival in interdependent community efforts. Later conditions of industrialization and urbanization, however, separated village from village, family from family, wives from husbands, and people from the products of their work. Individualism was stripped of its social context and became a matter of personal effort.

With the loss of community and a sense of mutual interdependence, individual achievement, thus self-worth, merely involved efforts to compete for the consumption of material goods. Becker's guess about American self-esteem in essence limited it to the pecuniary and the material. Our self-and social-worth is no longer defined by what we do, but by what we have. Self-worth has little basis in perceived social worth. A by-product is the loss of a social identity. The real shared experiences which would engender such an identity have been replaced by artificial social bonds constructed by corporate advertising. Maxine Greene (1965), John Dewey (1930), and Donald Oliver (1976) have described the confusion, malcontentment, and social problems which are the consequences of our lack of perceived social identity and social value.

Overspecialization of labor, the emphasis on competition and personal

gain and the loss of community have affected women as well as the men who

have in fact been the subjects of the aforementioned theories. Women's separate

and secondary status, however, has removed them from direct participation in

the main arenas of self-esteem. In addition, the idea of social responsibility

has had particular meaning for women, strangely separating their ascribed social

function from their sense of personal worth. I shall explain:

Affected by general notions of personal worth and social responsibility,

American women have personally- and socially-imposed definitions of worthiness

which derive from their particular social roles and expectations. What

constitutes heroism for women? In what ways and to what extent have women

lived out any notions of social responsibility and social participation?

How do these issues affect the ways in which women have conceived of their

work?

Becker was rather ambivalent on the issue of women and heroism, yet

his conditions for self-esteem in some ways apply more to women than to men.

Though he saw women as less compelled by competition, less obviously striving

for recognition, he assumed that the act of bearing children was far more

heroic than, for example, constructing a building or writing a book (In Keen, 1974,

p. 79). Perhaps he felt that the ability to create human life allowed women

to accept a uniqueness that was readily available to them. Men, of course,

have been traditionally eclipsed from the opportunity to share in nurturance,

and there are those who view men as perennially striving to compensate. I

would guess, though, that at least for some women, and certainly for this

woman, the social definitions of heroism which prevail in our culture, which

involve materialism and money, and which do not put a great value on childbearing,

render this version of female self-esteem and felt heroism questionable. Much

literature on women's feelings of worth and efficacy supports my reservations.

(See Colton, 1976; Friedan, 1970; Kundsin, 1974; Lowenstein, 1980; Malkiel, 1976)

Women have long been expected to contribute to the welfare of others,
even at the expense of personal gain. Their work has indeed traditionally
been judged by the health and manners of their children, the achievements of
their men, the general happiness of their families. Women of the upper-classes
have additionally volunteered their "good works" in various charitable organizations,
the Junior League, the hospital auxiliary, the benefit committee.

Yet, it can be argued that, although their impulses for contributing to
others is well-socialized, the horizons of social responsibility for women have
been limited. Furthermore, women have been removed from the arenas of real
power, thus have been compromised in developing feelings of efficacy and
influence. Women have hardly had reason to harbor visions of personal influence
on a large scale. More often in recent history their realm of ascribed and
felt social purpose has been the family. Their preeiminent responsibility to
home and family has precluded significant investment in work outside the home.

Cynthis Fuchs Epstein wrote that, despite real barriers to women's full
development, despite the fact that women have underperformed, underachieved,
and been underpaid, they have not been dissatisfied (1971, pp. 2-5). Part of
the reason for the limited social vision women have had for themselves is the
fact that they have been socialized to fulfill themselves in relation to their
families, rather than through a relationship between themselves and the larger
social world.

A buffer exists between women and the world in the form of the family as
a confining, seductively protective structure and as a group more important
than her self. There is evidence that women do not really see themselves as
separate and unique from their families. As both social scientists and the
public have defined a woman's place and social status in terms of her husband's
(Ginzburg, 1966; Mahoney & Richardson, 1979; Lowenstein, 1980) so do women

themselves perceive their social standing to be based in their husbands' achievements, rather than in their own education or occupation (Felson & Knoke, 1974).

Even though most of American economic history required a woman to work on the farm, in the store or tailor shop alongside her husband, for example, a woman's work was determined by and secondary to her man's. Overriding it was the ideal woman "free" to confine herself to her fit realm of hearth and home. During World War II when women were actually recruited into and trained for traditionally male jobs, they were expected to return to their stoves and babies when the men came home. (Simpson, 1974; Baxandall, Gordon, & Reverby, 1976).

The idea that women's proper context for self- and socially-defined worth was the home devolved not only from notions of biological and social necessity but also from the exigencies of American economics. Of post-was America Rosalyn Baxandall says,

> On the one hand, the system could not provide full employment; on the other hand, continued industrial profits required, with the diminution of military spending, an expansion of the consumption of household durable goods. An emphasis on "homemaking" encouraged women to buy. (1976, pp. 282-283)

And so the business of homemaker came to full flower in the 1950's and 1960's, and the world view of women was thought to be limited to the myriad details of the home. Betty Friedan described the role of the media in promulgating the myth (1970):

> I sat one night at a meeting of magazine writers, mostly men. (One) man outlined the needs of the large women's magazine he edited: "Our readers are housewives, full-time. They're not interested in broad public issues of the day. They are not interested in national or international affairs. They are only interested in the family and the home. They aren't interested in politics, unless it's related to an immediate need in the home, like the price of coffee." The writers and editors spent an hour listening to Thurgood Marshall on the inside story of the desegregation battle... "Too bad I can't run that story," one editor said, "but you just can't link it to woman's world." (pp. 31-32)

In 1955, Adlai Stevenson told the graduates of Smith College that women's
participation in politics ought to be through their roles as wives and
mothers (Friedan, 1970, p. 53).

Women accepted the mystique not without difficulty. It was of course
at odds with the prevailing ideals of independence and achievement which
women could not totally ignore. It was unheeded by some women who, for reasons
of upbringing and exposure to alternatives, chose aberrant paths of broader
personal and social vision. Yet the public idea of women, which sees her gender
as inconsistent with any context for social worth other than the home, has
been most powerful. Women have generally had little conception of themselves
as participants, contributors or competitors within a larger human community.
Their isolation is evident in the comment of one member of a consciousness-
raising group of a few years ago:

> Men measure themselves against standards of excellence and an
> established level of performance; we measure ourselves against
> one another. (Cassell, 1977, p. 56)

Even in the case of women who have achieved higher educations and
"professional" training, their lack of long-range planning, their readiness
to interrupt careers in favor of their husband's career moves or of undertaking
sole responsibility for child-rearing, are evidences of differential assumptions
about the scope of worthy work and personal efficacy.

When women have worked outside the home and/or have had visions of
wider social responsibility and influence, formal statutes and informal
divisions of labor have routinely barred them from the exercise of power
necessary for self-perceived efficacy. In volunteer organizations, they have
worked at the direction of male policymakers. Herta Loeser wrote that women
volunteers have typically occupied low-strata positions without real power.
"Volunteering has been a convenient safety value for women's energies, giving
the illusion of participation without real power" (1974, p.57).

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In politics they have been significantly numerous, but at the lowest levels, in the precinct and on the telephones (Kirkpatrick, 1974). In the paid work force they have filled the ranks of occupations which curiously resemble the ideal roles of nurturant wife/mother or domestic worker.

While significant inroads have been made in the last ten years in nontraditional occupations such as law and medicine, the great bulk of working women are still employed in occupations historically reserved for women. From 1971 to 1976 there was only a 12% increase in law degrees awarded to women and a 7% increase in medical degrees. Law graduates of 1976 were only 19% women; women medical graduates numbered 16%. (Berger, 1980) The "top ten" list of occupations in which women have found themselves has changed little from 1870 to 1970. (Baxandall, et al.) With regard to the "professions," or perhaps more accurately, the "semi-professions," women have worked as nurses, teachers, and social workers, certainly reflective of traditional female roles. As Frances Willard has said, "The American woman has taken a _dip_ into every occupation (In Rothman, 1978, p.47).

Affecting women's level of personal ambition and vision of social efficacy is undoubtedly the nature of "women's occupations." First, they do not typically reward or expect long term commitment or a widely-construed perception of social role. On the contrary, they are structured to allow women to absent themselves periodically for their supercedent work as young mothers. No such parallels exist, unfortunately, in traditionally male occupations. Furthermore, "women's occupations" reinforce women's perceptions of themselves as primarily fit for personal service to others in matters of food, clothing, consumerism, handcrafts, organization of daily time and tasks, health, and sociability.

The idea of an occupation's being "fit" for women has varied with demographic and economic conditions. Office work was at first a man's job

(remember Bob Cratchit?), employers having little confidence that women could be responsible, stable office workers.

> An engraving of 1875 shows a shocked male government official opening the door to an office that has been "taken over by the ladies." The women are preening themselves before a mirror, fixing each other's hair, reading Harper's Bazaar, spilling ink on the floor...In 1900 the Ladies Home Journal warned women that they could not stand the physical strain of working in a fast-paced business office, that business girls...were apt to suffer a nervous collapse. (Davis, 1978, p. 234)

Twenty years later, the Journal was arguing that the "natural temperament" of women made them fit for the office. Certain "female" characteristics, among them sympathy, adaptability, courtesy, manual dexterity, and tolerance of routine, convinced the editors that women were indeed the "natural candidates for the job" (Davis, 1978, p. 235).

Like office work, teaching was originally a job for a man, who would be physically capable of controlling the big farm boys who reluctantly found themselves in school. With the expansion of public schooling, the absence of men during the Civil War, the creation of the graded school with a principal as leader, the lucky realization that women teachers could be paid lower salaries, school boards became convinced that women could do the job as well, more cheaply and more docilely than men. From the point of view of the women who have chosen teaching, there is ample evidence that these have been women of higher social-status background than their male counterparts, but for whom career ambitions were narrowly channeled by society, parents, and marital circumstances. Women have been attracted to teaching because it nicely integrates family and work roles, and because job security is established early (Lortie, 1978; Charters, 1970; Rice, 1973; Yoger, 1979; Tyack, 1974).

Teaching, nursing and social work, the choices of women with visions and aspirations beyond home and family and with the means to a higher education, have been called "semi-professional" (Etzioni, 1969). While requiring specialized

training and knowledge and service orientation, these occupations do not

satisfy enough of the usual criteria assigned to professional occupations.

A survey of occupational sociologists yields three general conclusions about

the nature of professional work: (1) Professional work is based on knowledge

derived from a body of scientific theory and requiring special and lengthy

training and licensure.   (2) Professional workers are autonomous decision-

makers, collectively determining standards of performance, training and

licensure, able to influence legislation pertaining to their field of work,

and relatively free from lay control.   (3) Professional work is oriented to

the delivery of service to clients in need of them and involves norms of

pracitce that are stronger than any legal control or regulation.

Viewed against these criteria, teaching, nursing, and social work, while

aspiring to professional status can be seen as lacking in all but the third.

That this is the case is understandable. Due to notions of women's inferior

intellectual abilities and to their additional, if not superceding,

responsibilities to home and family, women have taken jobs not requiring long

periods of theoretical study and internship before licensure and practice.

Nor have they been encouraged to interpret their work as teachers, nurses, or

social workers, for example, along truly professional lines. In fact, there.

are sound arguments to support the idea that it is in the interests of the

bureaucratic organizations and paternalistic authority systems which context

these occupations to keep their workers relatively unstudied and uninformed

(Tyack, 1974, p. 61).

The second broad characteristic of professions, autonomy, is related to

a sense of personal and collective influence, as well as to power that is

actually exercised power. In the case of the three occupations under

discussion, the arena of felt power is limited to small-scale, immediate

relations between teacher and student, nurse and patient, and social worker

and client. This one-to-one authority is a kind of intrinsic power which keeps women satisfied in their work but hides from them the fact of their powerlessness in extrinsic matters of policy and work conditions. In reality this intrinsic authority is mythical, in that organizational requirements, evaluation procedures, and governmental standards, for example, directly affect the worker-client relationship (Myer, 1973, p.17).

Of relevance is the bureaucratic setting of these semi-professions, which reduced the amount of discretion these women have about the hours they work, whether and when they can leave the building and how the work itself is structured. Increasingly, of course, all professions are being bureacratized. Martin Oppenheimer writes that all professions are affected by bureaucracy to a greater or lesser extent. The semi-professions would like to lift themselves out of bureaucracies; the "established" professions are fighting against absorption into large organizations.

There is, in fact, evidence that bureaucracy and professionalism are not necessarily incompatible. Both rely on universalistic objective standards. Both assign authority on the basis of technical knowledge. Both employ expertise in specialized areas. Both, at least theoretically, are impelled by client-interest, rather than self-interest (Blau & Scott, 1962). The major difference lies in the locus of authority or power. In the case of bureaucracy, power is in the hands of a person or group other than the service-deliverers. For professionals, power exists within the colleaguial collective. A case in point: I belong to a health maintenance organization where many doctors work under standardized and specified conditions. Yet my guess is that they have had a strong voice, if not the only voice, in making these decisions. Teachers, on the other hand, must negotiate work conditions from a position that is adversary and secondary to the actual decision-makers.

The third general qualification for profession work is service orientation.
This characteristic is clearly obvious in traditional women's occupations and
in the sociopsychological origins of women's self-esteem as described previously.
Women might indeed score much higher on service orientation than would men in
professional or semi-professional work. Jeane Kirkpatrick (1977), presently
our U.N. ambassador, found women legislators in the U.S. Congress to be much
more concerned with their public service duties than were their male counter-
parts, who frequently saw the job as a steppingstone to higher office or
extra-official rewards. Nine years later, Joan Hulse Thompson (1980) character-
ized the roles Congresswomen perceived for themselves as primarily "tribunal,"
that is, concerned with representing the people's wants and needs, or
"inventive," that is concerned with innovating policy related to public service.
In contrast, significant numbers of male legislators saw their role primarily
as interpreters and masters of parliamentary and political procedures. A few
Congressmen took the roles of "power broker" and "opportunist," categories
that were absent among the women. Steven Neuse (1978) found women state
employees more "professional" than males, in that they had attained higher
education levels, belonged to more professional organizations, went to more
professional meetings, were more concerned with the quality of their work and
with public service and citizen-participation in decision-making.

Yet, as Kirkpatrick said, it is a sad irony that the very qualities and
roles which woudl make women better legislators, for instance, discourage them
from becoming legislators at all (Kirkpatrick, 1974, p. 214). Too often women's
idea of carrying out an orientation to serve others is confined to narrow
contexts -- family, one-to-one relationships of teacher-students, secretary-
boss, nurse-patient -- without a wider eye to conditions surrounding the work
which they could be affecting. Furthermore there is the issue of how much, or
how little, personal identity and vision grounds the service relationship;

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in other words, how often is the role a matter of what women should do rather than what I can and what I choose to do. The "I" has too often been an "I" of public imagery. As Friedan said, the problem of limited personal vision for women has actually been the lack of any private vision (1970, p. 64).

An additional theme which pervades discussions of professionalism is the requirement of long term commitment, the idea of career rather than job. Members of a professional occupation should be strongly affiliated with the profession and view it as a terminal occupation. An "in-and-out" arrangement (See Lortie, 1975) where women take up and leave jobs relative to conditions in other areas of their lives is hardly condusive to professional cohesiveness, colleaguial strength, or the kind of commitment required of professional development. Carole Holahan and Lucia Gilbert recently studied the degree of role conflict perceived by working women who viewed their work as careers or as jobs. Interestingly, career women reported fewer conflicts between their roles as worker and mother, worker and spouse or worker and "self," as well as greater satisfaction with their work and their lives in general. It must be added that the career women in this study had more "professional" jobs than the noncareer women. They were systems analysts, editors, and technologists, as opposed to office workers. It must also be added that a significant factor influencing life and role satisfaction was spouse support. These findings of course call into question the idea that work commitment is necessarily problematic for women with spouses and children.

Related to work commitment is the issue of choice. A recent dissertation (Akhtar, 1975) reported that women who freely choose teaching from among a lengthy list of alternative careers have higher commitments to their work than do those whose job choice was constrained.

Is professionalism as it has been described here incompatible with women's self-esteem? If women's self-esteem is based on a limited vision

of their potential scope of influence, of arenas appropriate for their work
and of their social responsibility, then women will continue to choose
occupations and perform work that are not very professionalized. In this
case, not only we, but the "established" professions will suffer, for they
will lose the significant impact that women would have on their function and
their image.

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