

# Wiesstein paper examines female oppression

Naomi Wiesstein is a psychology teacher at Loyola University of Chicago. She also is the author of an interesting six-page paper entitled "Psychology Constructs the Female," which is being used this semester in one of the psychology classes at UNL.

Her paper is subtitled "The Fantasy Life of the Male Psychologist" (with some attention to the fantasies of his friends, the male biologist and male anthropologist). It's quite an undertaking, and while the paper may fail to live up to its hefty title, it succeeds in revealing the underlying biases upon which modern psychologists have obediently based their practices.

The fact that these practices are merely reflections of the attitudes of the whole of society makes the ideas presented too vast in scope to handle fully in so brief a paper.

Wiesstein sees the problem of female oppression as the result of two things—the concepts society imposes upon women and the conclusions that have been unjustly drawn from the biological differences between the sexes.

Theories which attempt to stereotype women because of their physical construction, particularly their ability to bear children, are shown to be scientifically unfounded.

One of these theories states that, because the sex hormones differ and because these hormones enter the brain, there is an inescapable behavioral difference between men and women.

A man who calls himself "Tiger" published a work which took this theory a step further, stating that it is the level of the male hormone testosterone which "determines innate differences in aggressiveness, competitiveness, dominance, ability to hunt, ability to hold public office and so forth".

This theory, however, is not supported by evidence in nature. For example, while the lion has a level of testosterone significantly

higher than that of the female, it is the lioness who does the hunting. An corollary which Tiger draws—that the lack of testosterone in females is responsible for producing the familial instincts—is again disproved by evidence in other animals, this time among the primates, where one finds a species of monkey in which infant care is left entirely to the male.

To make the statement, then, that physical and biological differences between the male and female of a species are the factors which determine behavior is erroneous.

Wiesstein's second major point, that woman is what society has conceived her to be, is interesting in its validity, but disheartening in its implications.

## amy struthers broad side

It has been found that up until high school, girls and boys score approximately the same on intelligence tests; if anything, the girls' scores are higher. But beginning in high school, the girls' scores begin to fall below those of their male peers. The difference increases dramatically as time goes on, through college, graduate school, and into the business world.

Why the sudden change at age 16? Could it be that it is at this stage of the game when women finally start getting the message from society that they are supposed to be dumb? And why does it take so long for women to begin performing in accordance with this message?

Perhaps the answer can be found in another aspect of this theory of cultural determination of behavior. In our society, a woman's worth is in direct proportion to her appearance, her ability to attract men.

An ugly woman is subject to a kind of ridicule seldom, if ever, experienced even by the homeliest of men. (In the same vein, a common remark about the feminist movement is that it's "a bunch of spinsters, women who couldn't get a man or were dumped by one they'd had." The credibility of the movement is called into question and laughed about on the basis of what the stereotype "libber" is supposed to look like—in other words, ugly. It surprises many people to find feminists who are happily married and who have no feelings of inferiority about their looks.)

Perhaps then the intelligence rating begin to drop in high school because it is at this time that a woman begins to feel the pressures of being "date bait," and she realizes the importance that society has placed on her face and body.

I remember reading a book in my hometown library called "Senior Panic." It was the sad story of a small group of pathetic high school girls who were seniors and had never had a date. This situation produced the "senior panic" and led the girls to abandon Algebra and World Lit in favor of charm classes at local department stores. No wonder that when the researchers came around with their intelligence tests these girls didn't know beans about history or anything else.

The frightening thing about this idea is trying to imagine change in a society which is continually sending out images of what this thing called "woman" is supposed to be.

It is an equally serious thought for men, because our society has just as many roles which men are forced to play as it has for women.

And it is just this fact which makes male resistance to the changes women are working for now almost unbelievable. Because it is their eventual freedom from the constrictions of narrow roles, as well as freedom of women, which hangs in the balance of the outcome.

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