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HOW IT WAS, HOW IT IS

*Clare Dalton**

UNEQUAL COLLEAGUES: THE ENTRANCE OF WOMEN INTO THE PROFESSIONS, 1890-1940. By *Penina Migdal Glazer* and *Miriam Slater*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. 1987. Pp. xii, 295. Cloth, \$28; paper, \$9.95.

In part, this book is a celebration — a celebration of nine remarkable women who carved out illustrious careers for themselves in four different professions, against almost overwhelming odds, at the very end of the nineteenth century or during the early decades of the twentieth century. In part, it is a strategic analysis of the means these women employed to overcome the obstacles put in the way of their success by individuals, institutions, and society at large, for no other reason than that they were women. Above all, this book is a cautionary tale. None of the strategies, employed singly or in combination, allowed these women entirely to overcome the handicap of their gender, to achieve the professional status or success (measured in traditional terms) that would in all probability have fallen to the lot of equally determined and qualified men. Nor were these women able to wedge their feet so firmly in the reluctant doors of their professions that women of succeeding generations could slip in increasing numbers through the cracks. They lived on the margins. And, while history does not repeat itself, enough about professional life remains the same, the authors hint, that today's professional women have much to learn from both the successes, and the failures, of their foremothers.

The four professions selected for scrutiny are university teaching (where the authors focus on the special situation of women teaching in women's colleges); medicine; scientific research; and psychiatric social work. Within these disciplines, and in the particular context of the nine lives on which the study concentrates, the authors identify four strategies employed by women who struggled to carve out meaningful careers: separatism, superperformance, subordination, and innovation. In some instances it is meaningful to say that the strategies were consciously adopted; in others they were clearly imposed; in yet others they may have been chosen, but only for want of alternatives.

The lives of Mary Woolley, visionary president of Mount Holyoke College between 1901 and 1937, and of American historians Nellie Neilson and Bertha Putnam, both of whom graduated from Bryn

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Mawr, and subsequently served on the Mount Holyoke faculty, illustrate separatism as a strategy made possible by, and embodied in, the women's colleges of the period. Here academic women lived and worked, free from domestic and family demands, supported in their teaching, research, writing, and professional activity by a community in which their aspirations were respected and shared. Nor did this mean abandoning the idea of close affective relationships; again, the college provided a protected environment in which women frequently chose career-long or life-long women partners, without accusations of immorality or impropriety.

There were several striking features about this arrangement, as Glazer and Slater describe it. First, the complete unconventionality of Mount Holyoke as an institution, and of the lives of the academic women sheltered within it, was matched by the complete conventionality of the academic and educational ambitions harbored by president and faculty alike. Mary Woolley wanted the college to match the attainments of the major men's universities. She wanted a faculty with advanced degrees in their fields; women who would be active scholars, participate in professional activity at a national level, and achieve national standing. That was what she got in Neilson and Putnam. Neilson got her Ph.D. from Bryn Mawr in 1899, published many books and articles, was for many years the only woman invited to join the Medieval Academy of America, and in 1943 became the first woman president of the American Historical Association (pp. 48-49). Putnam got her doctorate from Columbia in 1908, received many honors for her work in medieval English legal and economic history, and was the first woman to be awarded a research grant by the Harvard Law School (pp. 46-48).

Another crucial feature of Mount Holyoke, in this period, was that it gave these very gifted women the opportunity to train other women as their successors; offering a sustaining medium for female excellence and ambition across generations. But this success was always contingent on the institution's dissembling; trustees and parents had to be persuaded that their girls were being trained for marriage and Christian service, while in fact the most talented and dedicated among them were being introduced to the different and seductive satisfactions of a single and scholarly life.

Ultimately, Mount Holyoke, like other of the women's colleges, was unable to withstand mounting pressures for change. Ultimately, since it could not marshal the resources, it could not match the accomplishments of the major research universities, nor equip its faculty to compete in the national academic sweepstakes. Ultimately, marriage became too attractive an option or too insistent a demand for even the most talented graduates to resist. And when ultimately, in the 1930s, the female faculty of the women's colleges began to be re-

placed by men, while the coeducational colleges and universities declined to make places on *their* faculties for qualified women, the job market for academic women shrank, and the separatist dream was over.

Within the medical profession, Glazer and Slater highlight the careers, oddly similar and dissimilar, of Dorothy Reed Mendenhall and Anne Walter Fearn. Reed, although a graduate of Smith College, was “uncomfortable” with the notion of “separatist strategies for women” (p. 88). She became one of the first women to graduate from the relatively new Johns Hopkins Medical School, “a superperformer committed to progress by extraordinary achievement in male-dominated institutions” (p. 102). Upon graduation, she remained at Hopkins, fighting first for an internship, and then for a fellowship in pathology. Her early work on Hodgkin’s Disease was distinguished. But Dorothy Reed’s strategy was derailed by marriage; she found herself shut out of mainstream medical research and hospital practice by the demands of family life and her husband’s academic career. She turned instead to the overwhelmingly “womanly” field of public health, with a twenty-year commitment to an effectively separatist institution, the Children’s Bureau.

Fearn, by contrast, received her medical education at the Women’s Medical College of Pennsylvania, one of several separatist institutions for the medical training of women. Yet in that setting she became the protégé of an influential male mentor, Dr. Joseph Price, to whom she served as both “nurse and assistant” (p. 106), before embarking on an independent career. Fearn never attempted to break into the mainstream, opting instead to work in China, first in a hospital founded by another pioneering woman, and then in her own hospital. Fearn’s career was also significantly shaped by her marriage to a missionary-physician; in the most satisfying period of her professional life she felt compelled to close the doors of her hospital to attend to her husband’s failing health. Glazer and Slater present both women as superperformers and innovators, giving less emphasis to their dependence, at different times, on woman-centered or separatist institutions, and not identifying as subordination their common choice to give their own careers a lower priority than that accorded their husbands’.

Scientific research is presented as a field in which most women, despite the excellence of their initial training (frequently provided, again, by the women’s colleges), found themselves steered towards hierarchically inferior employment opportunities. In astronomy, large numbers of women were employed as research assistants, and this model was followed in other fields — the government, for example, employed women as research assistants in plant physiology at a time in which botany was expanding as a field. Virtually the only faculty positions regularly made available to women in science, outside the

women's colleges, were in applied domestic studies, where "it quickly became evident that home economics was to play second string to chemistry and biology" (p. 127).

Florence Sabin was an isolated exception to that rule, a brilliant superperformer who because of some uniquely favorable personal circumstances was able to reach the heights of her profession. Like Dorothy Reed she was a graduate of Smith, and then of Johns Hopkins Medical School, and like Reed, remained at Hopkins first as an intern, and then as a research fellow with Franklin Mall. But unlike Reed she never married, and her continuing close professional association with Mall eventually brought her a regular faculty appointment in his anatomy department, where she remained until 1925. In 1917 Mall died and Sabin was passed over as his successor, much to the surprise of his family, students, and alumni. It seems that this unwarranted check in her career prompted her move in 1925 to the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, where she was the first woman to become a full member; she spent the rest of her career investigating tuberculosis. After retirement she turned, as so many women did, to active involvement with public health issues in her native Colorado.

Alice Hamilton was another exceptional woman achiever in scientific research, but in her case only because she was willing to carve out a field — industrial medicine — that, at the time she entered it, had no visibility or status. And rather than finding her support within the medical establishment, she found it at Hull House, the Chicago settlement house headed by Jane Addams. There her political and social consciousness was raised, and her exposure to the health problems in the surrounding community sparked her interest in the workplace environment. When, after World War I, universities were prodded into developing a curriculum in industrial medicine, and Harvard determined to make an appointment in the field, Hamilton's own assessment was that she "was really the only candidate available" (p. 153).

She got the job, becoming the first woman faculty member of the Harvard Medical School. But her appointment was hedged about with restrictions. She could not "use the faculty club, nor request faculty football tickets, nor 'embarrass the faculty by marching in the Commencement procession and sitting on the platform'" (p.154). She spent fifteen years on that faculty as an assistant professor, being promoted — to the rank of emeritus — only on the occasion of her retirement. More important, perhaps, was that her isolation on the faculty prevented her from being able to promote the cause of other women, although she was quite outspoken on the subject. On the occasion of her appointment she said that she was not "the first woman who should have been appointed to the faculty of Harvard," and that she "of course" believed in admitting women to Harvard as students (p. 155). "Isn't it," she inquired, "the last stronghold that is now holding

out against them?" (p. 155). Undeterred, the medical school held out against the admission of women students until 1945.

Psychiatric social work was a profession created in the opening decades of the twentieth century by innovative women, chief among them Mary Jarrett and Bertha Reynolds, both of whom held, for consecutive periods, the post of Associate Director of the Smith College School for Social Work. By the end of the nineteenth century, social work had two components: the volunteer work of "friendly visitors," unpaid and untrained women; and the reform efforts mounted by a generation of women working, again as volunteers, out of the settlement houses in the major cities. Those promoting psychiatric social work, as Glazer and Slater describe it, sought "to convert the traditions of charity and reform into paid professional work and to use psychology and psychiatry as the intellectual core of the field" (p. 166). Specifically, they sought to provide professional training both in the relevant bodies of scientific theory, and in the development and deployment of a psychiatric casework method.

Mary Jarrett, after a volunteer and paid career as a social caseworker, became the protégé of psychiatrist E.E. Southard, with whom she developed a clinical team approach to psychiatric patients, and with whose encouragement and support she founded the Smith College School of Social Work. From the beginning, one of the profession's major problems lay in inculcating a professional demeanor "that did not threaten men but still gave evidence of professional rigor" (p. 179). Another problem lay in the simultaneous development of some rather different approaches to social work, and competition between their proponents. This may have been Mary Jarrett's downfall when, after Southard's death and the departure of the sympathetic director of the School, F. Stuart Chapin, she found herself without support from the new director, Everett Kimball, and under attack by the committee of Smith alumnae asked to review the direction of the program and to consider its potential as a full-fledged graduate school.

For a while it seemed that Jarrett's replacement, Bertha Reynolds, would be able to do what Jarrett could not: develop a solid and supportive relationship with Kimball. But eventually Reynolds too came to grief over another issue that loomed large within the developing profession — the tension between the inherently conservative emphasis of the psychiatric approach, with its focus on the intrapsychic causes of individual misfortune, and the reformist impulses of those more inclined to focus on the systemic roots of individual misfortune. Reynolds became more overtly political in her orientation as her career progressed. She fell out with Kimball, who certainly differed from her ideologically and may well have feared her strength and independence, and was forced to resign.

In their concluding chapter, Glazer and Slater set their account of

professional women's strategies for success in this period in the larger context of the struggle of the professions to consolidate both their bodies of expertise and their monopoly positions. They note that women were drawn to the professions in part because of an expressed professional allegiance to the ideals of meritocracy and disinterested public service, and that many women clung to the belief that these ideals would prevail even when they personally experienced prejudice and discrimination. In placing more faith than was warranted in articulated professional ideals, women were just one constituency among many affected by a professional strategy designed to assuage public concern about the power accumulating in professional hands. The other major justification for the consolidation of professional power was its basis in, and commitment to, knowledge and expertise. But here again, the authors suggest, the claims surpassed the reality, and the professional inclination to close ranks against outsiders was prompted, in part, by a desire to present a seemingly united front in the face of considerable uncertainty about what constituted good science or good professional practice.

There is one set of issues I found myself puzzling over throughout the book. Glazer and Slater do not explicitly identify these issues for discussion, although they edge up to them at any number of points, not least in their final remarks about the professional contexts in which their chosen women worked. One way to focus these issues would be to ask: To what extent did each of these women view herself as a woman, and identify herself with other women? Related to this primary question would be others: To what extent did any of the women seek refuge from the constraints of her gender by making her "professional" identity her primary identity, thereby identifying more with her male colleagues than with other women? Where did these women look for support — primarily to other women or communities of women, or primarily to men? Were some of these "strategies" consistently more successful than others, or does the answer to that question depend entirely upon the particular context, or upon a choice among different possible criteria of success?

In some cases, the answers to at least some of these questions seem clear. Mary Woolley, with whom the book opens, was a feminist with a clear understanding of the special measures necessary to provide support for academic women. Woolley was committed to creating a women's community with the capacity both to provide that support to her faculty, and to foster in her students a sense of what women could accomplish. Nor was it necessary to the success of her institution that all her faculty share her understanding and vision — indeed, it was important that there be women, like Neilson and Putnam, who offered role models of engagement and success in predominantly male organizations and male fields of scholarship. But the success of Woolley's

enterprise *was* dependent on the tolerance of crucial constituencies, and when that tolerance eroded, the enterprise could not be sustained.

Not all the young women who benefited from the feminist endeavors of women such as Mary Woolley were appreciative of their efforts or sympathetic to their cause. Dorothy Reed, although she owed her excellent undergraduate training to Smith College, and her access to Johns Hopkins Medical School to the work of M. Carey Thomas and the Women's Committee of Baltimore, distanced herself from feminist principles, and found their proponents "repugnan[t]" (p. 89). Reed "based her sense of achievement and professional attainments on male models of activity," considering her femininity "an intrusion that weakened the possibility of being taken as an expert of some substance" (p. 85). Throughout her life, the authors suggest, she retained an "ambivalence about herself as a woman" (p. 90).

Also at the other end of the spectrum from Mary Woolley, and very closely allied with Reed, was Florence Sabin. From her perspective, all that stood between a woman and professional success was hard work. That was the lesson she drew from her own experience, and she showed no inclination to offer particular support to other women attempting to follow in her footsteps. Consistent with the primacy of this professional self-identification was her close mentor-mentee relationship with Franklin Mall. Under his protective wing she was indeed, for a period, able to circumvent the obstacles routinely put in the way of talented and ambitious women. And until his death her route seemed a supremely successful one. But what must she have made of the obvious injustice involved in not being chosen as his successor? If she did not attribute the slight to her gender, was there some other external factor she could attribute it to, or was she inclined to read it as the legitimate consequence of some real failing? Was it a wound she carried with her, in silence, for the remainder of her career?¹

The limitations of attaching one's fortunes to a single mentor are illustrated again in the career of Mary Jarrett, who depended to such an extent on E.E. Southard's authority and prestige to sustain her own career that her fortunes fell with his. There are even hints in this account that she was ultimately disabled in her relations with others in her field, both women and men, by a "cool aloof manner" borrowed from Southard, and bolstered by his support (p. 188). The perils of outgrowing one's mentor, while still institutionally dependent on him, are demonstrated in the career of Bertha Reynolds and her relationship with Everett Kimball; and the perils of abandoning mentor for husband are suggested in the career of Dorothy Reed Mendenhall. Alice Hamilton, on the other hand, seems to have derived her support

1. Slater and Glazer's account of Florence Sabin reminded me strongly of the life of Barbara McClintock, as sympathetically portrayed in Evelyn Fox Keller's biography, *A FEELING FOR THE ORGANISM* (1983).

from sources outside of the Harvard Medical School — largely from the women friends she made in and through her work at Hull House — so that she proved relatively impervious to the indignities that Harvard heaped upon her. Befriended by women, she was ready in turn to champion the cause of others, although her position as token left her with little power to effect change.

It would take more determined biography than the scope of this book allows to pursue these questions further. But the questions are fascinating ones, not only as a further key to history, but as a way of understanding the potential consequences of the similar choices professional women must make today. This, in turn, raises a final question: How does Glazer and Slater's historical account relate to the contemporary situation of professional women?

In a recent issue of *Daedalus*, Slater and Glazer themselves address this question, looking at "the second expansion of women's recruitment into the professions," resulting from the "second wave of feminism" in the 1960s and 1970s.² An important factor in understanding this "second wave" phenomenon is that women's involvement in the professions actually suffered a decline in the period between the thirties and the late sixties, due first to the political conservatism of the twenties and economic depression of the thirties, but then too to the post-World War II resurgence of an ideology that put women back in their homes (preferably suburban), fully occupied with rearing their children, managing their households, facilitating their husbands' public lives, and satisfying their private needs.

Slater and Glazer suggest that in this most recent move into the professions, women have drawn on the same basic strategies as those developed in the earlier period, and that those strategies have had only the same partially successful results.³ They warn that while the overall figures for women's entry into the professions may look encouraging at present, "we should remember that the professions continue their traditional hierarchical organization and that the small core of powerful positions at the top of the hierarchy remain male preserves."⁴ In particular they fear that unless the gains can be consolidated they may be lost again in the next sustained period of low economic growth (which may, of course, already be upon us).

Slater and Glazer urge a combination of political and psychological awareness on today's professional women. Women should understand the professional commitment to meritocracy as containing a

2. Slater & Glazer, *Prescriptions for Professional Survival*, 116 DAEDALUS 119, 119-20 (Fall 1987). Slater and Glazer's account of Florence Sabin reminded me strongly of the life of Barbara McClintock, as sympathetically portrayed in Evelyn Fox Keller's biography, *A FEELING FOR THE ORGANISM* (1983).

3. *Id.* at 120.

4. *Id.* at 131.

substantial element of window-dressing, and not accept the invitation to reinterpret experiences of prejudice and discrimination as experiences of personal inadequacy. They should not imagine that superperformance will be an amulet against such experiences. They should not accept the argument that women "choose" subordinate professional roles in order to accommodate their "choice" to be the primary home-makers and care-givers in their families, without attention to the way these "choices" are culturally constrained. They should be similarly suspicious of the reasons women turn to innovation, instead of following the tried and true routes to success. And they should recognize that, for all the necessary support functions provided by women's institutions, organizations, and groups, "these institutions cannot change the structure of existing hierarchies any more effectively than superperformance can."⁵

Why should this advice be necessary to the new generations of professional women Slater and Glazer address? Is it in fact necessary? My own experiences, as well as the experiences of the women lawyers, legal academics, and law students I meet and know, suggest that the answer to the second question is yes — the advice is necessary. Many of these young women, and the younger they are the truer it seems to be, do not feel that they have, as yet, experienced discrimination. Most have been educated in coeducational undergraduate institutions where they have done exceptionally well, and they come to law school feeling confident that they will continue to compete successfully against, and relate successfully to, their male peers. Nor do they expect to encounter prejudice or discrimination in their job interviews, or in their jobs. Those bad old days are over. Many plan to marry, but are not yet married, and have not yet had to test an intimate partner's commitment to an egalitarian relationship against even the realities of job changes, let alone babies, sick babies, sick baby-sitters, and child care centers with snow-day policies more lenient than the average large law firm's. Many are grateful, in a hazy way, to the "shrill" feminists of the sixties who cleared the paths through recalcitrant professional thickets, but would never call themselves feminists, although they might feel some guilt about dissociating themselves from these pioneers. Many will not join their institution's Women's Law Association unless membership is open also to men. They are, in short, the contemporary counterparts of Dorothy Reed and Florence Sabin.

But what's wrong with that — given the success those women achieved? Only that both were stopped short of their full potential, and might have been able to do more, or suffer less, if they had been able to locate the problem firmly outside themselves, if they had felt comfortable working politically with other women, and sympathetic men, to combat the forces arrayed against them. I am suggesting, in

5. *Id.* at 133.

other words, that their denial of some of the realities of their lives carried a personal cost. It was also costly to other women, who could not look for support to those who were intent on effacing their gender, and passing, if not as men, then as somehow genderless.

There are at least two other reasons why professional women, today, should make common cause, reasons that were not present in the earlier period. Whatever the remaining barriers preventing professional women from assuming positions of highest rank, women are present in the lowest ranks of the professions in greater numbers than ever before. They form one-third of entering medical students, one-half of entering law students,⁶ twenty percent of faculties at four-year colleges, and thirty-three percent of corporate middle management.⁷

Just as an initial matter, numbers are powerful; women standing together can surely begin to exert some political muscle on behalf of other women, if they will. As significant, I think, is the fact that this body of women's professional experience, allied with the growing body of empirical research into gender issues, and the growing body of formal and informal feminist and gender theory, offers the real possibility that professional cultures themselves will begin to change in ways responsive to women's perspectives and experiences. But women as well as men must be ready to embrace these changes before they will come about, and men will to some extent be looking to their women colleagues and peers for guidance in assessing the importance of these changes. Women too solitary to count on the support of other women, women too nervous about their vulnerabilities as women to take the risk involved in identifying politically with other women, will find it difficult to provide that guidance. As professional women, we should avoid, if we can, complicity in slowing the momentum for change, or reinforcing a status quo that is still, after not just two decades, but more than eight, stacked against women who seek to participate as equal colleagues.

6. *Id.* at 119. But only 1 of 127 medical school deans is a woman, and only 13 of 185 law school deans are women. Figures are for 1987. *Id.* at 132.

7. *Id.* at 132. But only 10% of tenured faculty at four-year colleges, and only 1.7% of corporate officers in Fortune 500 companies are women. *Id.*