

Tidball M E. Perspective on academic women and affirmative action.

Educ. Rec. 54:130-5, 1973.

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Graduates of women's colleges are twice as likely as women graduates of coeducational institutions to be honored for their career accomplishments. For women graduates of all types of institutions, subsequent career achievement is significantly correlated with the number of women faculty available as role models. [The *Science Citation Index*® (SCI®) and the *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI®) indicate that this paper has been cited in over 40 publications, making it the most-cited paper ever published in this journal.]

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In 1968, as a newly elected and youngest-ever trustee of Mount Holyoke College, I wanted to be well informed about the then-current and highly charged debate over co-education. To my dismay, no data existed to enlighten me. Thus, in the manner of a life scientist, I proceeded to devise and carry out experiments in response to the question: what are the relative rates of post-baccalaureate accomplishment for women graduates of women's and coeducational institutions? No one had ever studied, on a national scale, the post-college career outcomes of women as a function of institutional characteristics. Indeed, my work inaugurated a new field of research that came to be called "environments for the undergraduate education of women."

Most of the work for this paper was done at home on nights and weekends in order to minimize certain criticism for failing to be fully engaged in the "right" kind of research, meaning physiology. But when no one was looking, I would creep into a lab where there was a desktop calculator and do the necessary mean paired differences and

t tests. Otherwise, I used the more primitive technologies of handwriting and index cards, the latter stored unobtrusively in a large brown grocery bag.

Securing publication in other than a physiology journal was a task of unfamiliar frustration and complexity. My statistical confirmation of a role-model theory for women seemed "too hot to handle." After four years of being sidestepped (never blatantly rejected), I was finally heard by a brave editor who published most of the results though little of the methods, tables, and other scholarly details. No matter; I was delighted that the work would see the light of day.

A number of unexpected outcomes have followed publication. One important result has been my own continuing research and publishing in this field¹⁻⁶ as well as the considerable variety of related research it has made possible for others. Although the response in my home institution may be characterized as noncommittal, if not negative, the outside world has been exceedingly generous. There have been opportunities to travel widely, to speak, and to serve on boards, committees, and commissions; and I have been privileged to develop an extensive correspondence with students, researchers, and academic administrators around the world. Several colleges and universities have honored me with distinguished visiting professorships, and 14 have awarded me honorary degrees.

I believe the work has been cited so frequently because of the simplicity of its design, the clarity of its scope and findings, and its wide applicability. I would note that these are qualities of research taught to me by my major professor in physiology. The paper does not say anything we might not otherwise have supposed, but no one before had ever thought to say it or to subject it to rigorous, scientific scrutiny. Beyond the scholarly citations, there have also been legions of accounts in the popular press and in the admissions and fund-raising brochures of most women's colleges, while the role-model findings have been used to good advantage in improving the number and status of academic women in all types of institutions.

1. Tidball M E. A search for talented women. *Change* 6:51-2: 64, 1974.
2. Of men and research: the dominant themes in American higher education include neither teaching nor women. *J. High. Educ.* 47:373-89, 1976.
3. Tidball M E & Kistakowsky V. Baccalaureate origins of American scientists and scholars. *Science* 193:646-52, 1976.
4. Tidball M E. Women's colleges and women achievers revisited. *Signs* 5:504-17, 1980.
5. Baccalaureate origins of entrants into American medical schools. *J. High. Educ.* 56:385-402, 1985.
6. Baccalaureate origins of recent natural science doctorates. *J. High. Educ.* 1986. (In press.)