**Carol Dyhouse**. *No Distinction of Sex? Women in British Universities, l870-l939.* London: UCL Press, 1995. xii + 288 pp. $46.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-85728-459-1; $115.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-85728-458-4.

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The history of women's higher education in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain has been situated in two main interpretive contexts. Historians interested in the development of higher educational systems have viewed women's admission to universities as an aspect of the expanded provision of higher education that was a marked feature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[1] Together with the multiplication of academic specialties, this expansion has in turn been linked to the growing professionalization of society. On the other hand, scholars primarily concerned with women's history have commonly considered women's higher education in relation to issues pertaining to gender. Carol Dyhouse's study falls within the latter camp. Piecing together evidence drawn from a great variety of sources (including university archives, government papers, and the records of professional associations, as well as a comprehensive collection of secondary works), her study examines women's early experiences in British universities with special reference to questions of gender equality.

Although women had been admitted to most degrees at most British universities by the turn of the century, there were significant exceptions. Oxford and Cambridge were the most notorious. Women's colleges were established at both universities in the late nineteenth century, and women students had gradually gained access to most degree examinations. However, Oxford denied otherwise qualified women degrees until l920 and Cambridge until l948. Dyhouse indicates that Oxford and Cambridge were widely perceived by contemporary observers as bastions of male prejudice and privilege. The situation elsewhere, however, was less clear. For example, it was sometimes claimed that the newer provincial universities and university colleges established in the later nineteenth century made no distinctions as to sex. Dyhouse's study aims to evaluate these claims. It considers women's experience of university life both as students and as members of staff in England, Scotland, and Wales. (Ireland is not included in the study.) Although Oxford and Cambridge are not ignored, the main emphasis is on other less intensively studied institutions.

The study is wide-ranging in its concerns. The first chapter examines the timing and process by which women gained access to British universities, student numbers and social catchment, the provision of scholarships and other benefactions for women students, and the social facilities accorded them. The second and third chapters examine residential patterns and the superintendence of women students–for example, the financing and development of halls of residence for women students, available models of communal life, and the roles assumed by Lady Tutors and others responsible for supervising women students. Chapter four considers women academics' experience–their numbers, career patterns, the daunting obstacles they faced, and their efforts to establish supportive networks and associations. The fifth chapter directs its attention to student life, including women students' extra-curricular activities, male undergraduates' response to the presence of women students, and the extent to which women's experience of student life diverged from that of men.

In contrast to some earlier studies, Dyhouse finds little evidence of a steady process of integration among either students or staff. Throughout the period, the extra-curricular activities of men and women students, she indicates, remained largely segregated. The academic labor market, too, she finds, was substantially segregated by sex. She indicates that sexual divisions may have been reasserted among both staff and students in the wake of

the First World War.

Calling attention to the celebrations and publications organized to commemorate landmarks such as universities' admission of women students and the founding of women's halls of residence, Dyhouse suggests that at least some university women were conscious of having an educational history of their own. While acknowledging that many second- and third-generation women graduates were not feminist in outlook, she traces the lineaments of a "feminine subculture" which, she suggests, was often imbued with feminism. Existing "on the margins of university life," this subculture radiated out from halls of residence and hostels for women students and included in its orbit the university settlements (established to help civilize the slums), associations of women graduates (for example, the British Association of University Women), and old girls' networks (p. 223).

A great variety of topics are touched upon in this many-sided book, and the evidence employed is somewhat disparate. (Some statistical material is used, but the study relies largely on individual case histories.) Sensibly, rather than attempting a general interpretive synthesis based on patchy evidence, Dyhouse's study underscores the diversity of women's experience of higher education and divergent possible readings of their educational past. For example, addressing the merits of integration as opposed to segregation as strategies for promoting women's interests, Dyhouse presents case studies showing that separate educational provision for women was promoted both by feminists and non-feminists and that feminists differed among themselves over the question. (Some considered women's interests would be best served by separate provision. Others were convinced that "separate" would always be judged inferior.) "The route towards securing women's best interests," Dyhouse concludes," was rarely clear" (p. 48).

On the one hand, this approach makes for a nuanced reading of the past. For example, women students' experience of residential life has been variously construed. Some accounts have emphasized its liberating aspects–for example, the new opportunities it offered for self-cultivation and for a social life of the students' own choosing. Others have underscored the restrictive rules imposed on women students. Dyhouse calls attention to the variations in students' experience of hall life, pointing out that the regimen varied from one institution to the next, and that students moving in different social circles had quite different experiences. Having pointed out the difficulties of generalizing, Dyhouse concludes that for all their limitations the halls of residence did offer women new space for developing a lively communal life of their own (p. 123).

On the other hand, the discussion of a good many of the points raised in this many-faceted study is somewhat fragmentary. The reader's attention is directed to the diversity of the historical record without any general conclusions being proferred. Thus, for instance, we learn that the proportion of women students varied across universities and was higher in Scotland and Wales than in England (p. 17), but the issue is not further explored. This and other interesting points touched upon in this study would bear further investigation. (Graduate students in search of a dissertation topic will find some promising leads.)

Dyhouse's study underscores distinctive aspects of women's experience of higher education. As these have often been neglected, this is a valuable contribution to scholarship. However, one should not lose sight of the fact that women's admission to the universities represented a convergence in the intellectual culture and social experiences of the small minority of men and women who attended university during this period.

Dyhouse's work invites reflection as to what historians working in different interpretive traditions relating to women's higher education might learn from one another. Studies such as Dyhouse's, focusing on women's distinctive experience of higher education, can direct attention to ways in which gender-related issues influenced institutional development. For example, government grants for intending teachers (many of them women) were a vital source of support for the struggling arts faculties of provincial universities. Dyhouse's work helps us understand why women students and faculty (whose career opportunities were limited) were attracted disproportionately to the universities' teacher training programs and departments of education. On the other hand, university involvement in teacher training cannot be understood in terms of gender issues alone. It was part of a general trend toward occupational professionalization and increasing diversity and complexity within higher educational systems. Women's experience of higher education cannot be divorced from these developments. It seems likely, then, that both the history of women and the history of education stand to benefit from a closer connection.

Note

[1] See, for example, the essays in Konrad H. Ja-

rausch, ed., *The Transformation of Higher Learning, l860-l930: Expansion, Diversification, Social Opening, and Professionalization in England, Germany, Russia, and the United States* (Chicago, Ill.: University

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