October 25, 1994

Mary Beth Ruskai
Math Dept.
University of Massachusetts-Lowell
Lowell, MA 01854

Dear Professor Ruskai:

I hope you will agree to write a book review for the NWSA Journal. A publication of the National Women's Studies Association, the NWSA Journal emphasizes interdisciplinary, multicultural, feminist research. In addition to the essays, we publish reviews of recent feminist scholarship.

I invite you to write a review of 2100 words on the following books:

Educating Women for Success in Science and Mathematics by Sue Rosser
Increasing Girls' Participation in Math, Science and Technology by Jo Sanders and Starla Rocco
Lifting the Barriers: 600 Tested Strategies... by Jo Sanders

The books will be mailed to you when we receive your reply, and we would need your review by February 10, 1995.

We are unable to pay reviewers; however, you may keep the books you have received, and you will receive two tear sheets of your review. Please complete the enclosed form and return it or call as soon as possible. You may also email your response, if that is convenient, to: hew@christa.unh.edu.

Thank you. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Barbara A. White
Book Review Editor
Professor of Women's Studies

Enclosure

NATIONAL WOMEN'S STUDIES ASSOCIATION
Indiana University Press
November 14, 1994

Mary Beth Ruskai
Math Dept.
University of Massachusetts-Lowell
Lowell, MA 01854

Dear Professor Ruskai:

Thank you for agreeing to write a review of 2100 words of the following book for a forthcoming issue of the NWSA Journal:

Educatina Women for Success in Science and Mathematics by Sue Rosser and Bonnie Kelly
Increasing Girls’ Participation in Math, Science, and Technology by Jo Sanders and Starla Rocco
Lifting the Barriers: 600 Tested Strategies... by Jo Sanders

It is necessary that we receive your review by February 11, 1995.

I have enclosed copyright and autobiographical forms. Would you please complete these and return them to me?

Also enclosed are a copy of the journal’s guidelines for reviewers and NWSA brochures. If you are already a member of NWSA, please pass the brochures on to colleagues and friends.

I appreciate your support of the NWSA Journal and look forward to receiving your review. We are sending the Rosser and Kelly book under separate cover; the Jo Sanders books are being ordered (and will be sent to you as well).

Sincerely,

Barbara A. White
Book Review Editor

Enclosures
NWSA Journal Guidelines for Reviewers

In writing a book or film review for the NWSA Journal, please keep our guidelines in mind. Reviews should

--briefly summarize the book(s) or film(s).
--evaluate (but not censure) as well as describe.
--explain the ways in which the works relate to other work on the subject.
--note the extent to which the author addresses appropriate issues of race, class, and sexual orientation as well as gender.
--assess practical applications, especially teaching in the wide range of feminist contexts.

Please write in a language and style accessible to a diverse feminist readership, avoiding jargon, technical terms, and references to literature that would be unfamiliar to those outside specific disciplines. Manuscript form is in accordance with The MLA Style Manual (1985 ed.).

Reviews must be typed and double-spaced with unjustified (ragged) margins. Please be sure to precede the review with citation(s) double-spaced and in the following format:


Reviewer’s Name

Prices can be looked up in Books in Print, which is available at library reference desks.

Reviews that exceed the allotted word length may be shortened to fit available space. Endnotes should be used very sparingly, if at all, and double-spaced on a separate page.

Mail completed reviews to:

Barbara A. White
Book Review Editor
NWSA Journal
Women’s Studies Program
304A Dimond Library, UNH
Durham, NH 03824

Note: The NWSA Journal encourages reviewers to join the National Women’s Studies Association if they are not already members.
May 3, 1995

Mary Beth Ruskai
46 Lansdowne Rd.
Arlington, MA 20174

Dear Professor Ruskai:

Thank you for e-mailing us your new address. I believe the NWSAJ’s managing editor, Hayley Wood, already informed you that your review arrived too late for the current issue.

Having read your review carefully, I’m afraid that in several ways it doesn’t adhere to our guidelines. The guidelines state that reviews should both summarize the books and "evaluate (but not censure) as well as describe." Your review clearly censures, having hardly anything positive to say about the books; if the books are so bad, why should they be reviewed at all? (perhaps they shouldn’t). Furthermore, the summary and description of the books seems to get lost—the focus is on the reviewer’s thesis rather than the intentions and arguments of the works being considered.

In addition, your review does not follow the guideline that endnotes should be used sparingly, and it is 1500 words longer than the word length assigned. Perhaps this is an indication that the piece you sent might be the genesis of an article, rather than a book review? I could see it evolving into an essay criticizing some of the current tendencies in feminist thinking about mathematics. At any rate, if you should decide to pursue the review for NWSAJ, please cut it to the 2000 words assigned, focus on the works to be reviewed, and point out positive, as well as negative, characteristics of the books.

Sincerely,

Barbara A. White
Book Review Editor
Acting Editor

P.S. I’m returning your disk under separate cover.

Barbara A. White
Book Review Editor
Acting Editor
Dear Professor White:

Thank you for your letter of 3 May 1995. Before I making any decision on whether or not to pursue publishing my book review for *NWSA Journal*, I would like you to provide some clarification of your comments and editorial policies.

First, I must dispute your assertion that my "review clearly censures, having hardly anything positive to say ..." Censure and criticism are not the same. And while my review certainly contains considerable criticism, I carefully resisted the impulse to censure. Your guidelines ask the reviewer to "evaluate" rather than "endorse" books. Although my evaluation was quite negative, with only a few positive remarks, I believe that my criticisms are valid and well-documented. Does *NWSA Journal* only publish positive reviews, irrespective of the merits of the books?

Your letter raises (for the first time) the question of whether, "if the books are so bad," they should be reviewed at all. Having devoted considerable time and effort to a thorough critique, I was both surprised and dismayed by this. Your letter of 14 November did not ask me for a quick opinion as to whether or not these books deserved review. Moreover, your e-mail response

Dear Beth Ruskai: The INCREASING GIRLS' book I mentioned in my letter was retitled by the authors before publication, so it is the rather uninteresting bibliography you received. ... Good luck. Barbara White, Editor, *NWSA JOURNAL* confirmed my impression that an editorial decision to seek review of these books had already been made.

Had you asked, I would have advised you that neither of Sanders's books is worth reviewing. These self-published books of lists are neither bad nor good — they simply fail to serve a useful purpose. I see no reason for *NWSA Journal* to give these opportunistic works free publicity.
Rosser's book is another matter. Her work has already gained considerable attention in some circles; and this particular book is directed to classroom teachers. It is not an academic book in which she presents theories and advocates change on that basis. She repeatedly claims that her methods have been thoroughly and successfully tested. Yet her own reports show only a very inadequate evaluation process whose data do not support her claims. **This is irresponsible** (and yes, here I do censure), and a review with unwarranted praise would be equally irresponsible. **Nothing less than the future of our daughters' education is at stake.**

However, your comment about "the reviewer's thesis" perplexes me because I was not aware that I was presenting one. What I did do was to try to place the book in context and (in accordance with your guidelines) "explain the ways in which the works relate to other work on the subject." In doing so, I very much kept in mind that I was writing for an audience of non-scientists. Thus, I did devote considerable space (thereby contributing to the length of the review) to a description of related work by others (but not my own). Only in the penultimate paragraph (on the ethical aspects of standards) did I discuss views of my own that might be regarded as only peripherally related to the content of these books.

I do concede that my review deviates from the guidelines on length and endnotes, (Although my word processor gives a count of 2850 for the text which is only 750, not 1500, words longer than the 2100 originally requested.) However, I thought that I was given "guidelines" rather than rigid "rules", and that my decision to exceed the recommendations (for both text and notes) was warranted in view of the subject and your instructions to make the review "accessible to a diverse feminist readership, avoiding ... [what] ... would be unfamiliar to those outside specific disciplines."

For example, were I writing for an audience of physicists or mathematicians, I could have confined myself to the brief statement "Rosser claims that C.S. Wu invented nuclear fission and Anna Pell-Wheeler functional analysis" and let the absurdity of these assertions speak for themselves. One might also question whether this minor point even deserves mention, much less a 300-word clarifying note. However, it should be remembered that Rosser is trying to influence classroom teachers, whom she repeatedly urges to "include the names of women scientists who have made important discoveries." Suppose that a well-meaning elementary or secondary teacher then presents this misinformation to impressionable young women. No good, and possibly some harm, could result. Therefore, I felt it important to set the record straight, using a lengthy note rather than digression in the text (though neither seems fully satisfactory.)

I also admit that I "describe" rather than "summarize" the books. For Sanders's lists I can imagine no alternative. Rosser's book also lends itself better to description than précis. One can quibble over the appropriateness of description vs. summary; the more important question is whether I have managed to convey an accurate impression of these books.
At this point there seem to be several alternatives to consider.

- You may regret having asked me to review these books and wish to forget the whole thing. In that event, I ask only that you promptly notify me and return the original signed copyright transfer form so that I am free to publish elsewhere.
- You may wish to reconsider your decision and publish my review after only minor corrections.
- You could ask me to revise my review to eliminate consideration of Sanders's two books. This should bring the length to the recommended 2000 words without need for other changes.
- You could ask me to revise my review by eliminating or shortening the final paragraphs on ethical concerns. This would also bring the length to the recommended 2000 words without need for other changes.

Should you want me to revise my review, let me emphasize that I would be pleased to consider any comments you have about specific passages which seem unclear or unwarranted. However, I am unwilling to make a positive recommendation unless it is deserved.

Until September, it is best to send mail to my home address: 46 Lansdowne Rd., Arlington, MA 02174. You can also reach me by e-mail bruskai@cs.uml.edu and by telephone at 617-646-9377.

Sincerely,

Mary Beth Ruskai
May 30, 1995

Mary Beth Ruskai
46 Lansdowne Rd.
Arlington, MA 20174

Dear Professor Ruskai:

Thank you for your letter, which I just received; it seems that because the address included "Women's Studies Program" as well as the Journal, the mail sorters couldn't decide where to deliver it!

I appreciate your spelling out various alternatives on page 3 of your letter. This makes it clear to me that I prefer the first alternative. The second and last would mean publishing a review that (in my view) censures the books, even if, as you say, your criticisms are valid. It seems that you don’t see much positive to point out, and I certainly wouldn’t ask you to "make a positive recommendation unless it is deserved." The third alternative doesn’t work because the "guidelines," or "rules" if you will, specify lengths that depend on the number of books being reviewed; so a review of one book would be approximately 750 words. It has turned out to be unworkable to relax these rules because almost all reviewers think more space is "warranted in view of the subject."

So it would seem that your publishing elsewhere would be best, and I'm returning your copyright transfer form under separate cover.

Sincerely,

Barbara A. White
Book Review Editor
Acting Editor