

**Being a woman at Yale means living in a world of
but the real world will show them that they are not
but we must all learn to say ...**

Vive la différence!

Neomi Rao

ON THIS 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF CO-education at Yale, everything indicates that the transition has occurred smoothly. Women stand on equal footing in almost all aspects of student life.

In the meritocratic world that Yale has become, one hardly notices differences between the sexes. Celebrations and monuments to women all seem a little silly. Who understands anymore how being a woman is different? Is it biology? Brain structure? A heightened sensitivity? No one can really say.

After 25 years of coeducation, women still face a unique set of questions, questions which in the pursuit of equality we often ignore. Maybe men and women are fundamentally different. Our educational nurturing often masks differences in nature. For women, happiness requires more than a navy blue power suit.

Studying with the boys

So, most people ask, is there discrimination in the classroom? Do women have difficulty keeping up? Almost no one would say that discrimination occurs within the confines of the classroom. Equality in the classroom is pretty much de rigueur, according to women majoring in everything from physics to English.

But this should come as no surprise. Over the past decades, Yale has dedicated itself to a relatively firm meritocracy, which drops its standards only for a few minorities, some legacies and a football player here or there. Otherwise, a Yale student need have no privilege or status, only than a good mind. Women have undoubtedly benefited from such a standard, because a meritocracy cuts across traditional lines of gender bias.

Ability has become the universal standard for Yale students. It applies to both academics and activities.

Women edit the major newspapers, run things in the Yale Political Union and start their own groups when they see a need for it.

Danna Drori founded ECHO (Eating Concerns Hotline Outreach) to answer student questions about everything from eating disorders to general questions about healthy eating. The hotline serves as an intermediate step for students who don't necessarily want to seek formal counseling.

As Drori said, "If you take the initiative you can do whatever you want at Yale. I haven't felt restricted in anything that I've wanted to do."

The only area of possible discrimination seems to be up on Science Hill, where few science majors are women.

Yet this distribution seems a result of personal choice, rather than sexism. There are not many women majoring in theoretical physics or applied math, but those who do don't feel any discrimination.

Elizabeth Wellington, a senior

What feminine mystique?

Does studying with the boys demystify the relations between the sexes?

Mrs. Francie Field, who graduated in 1942 from Vassar, married a Yale man. When she attended his junior prom, from her wrist dangled a card which listed her partner for each dance. Her date made sure that she received a dance with all of his friends, and such notables as the captain of the football team.

Today, if a man handed a woman such a card, he would

be treated as students into its large gothic buildings. Traditions evolved as our society changed, making students a little more cosmopolitan, and a lot more cynical.

The dance card might seem like a joke now, but at one time it represented all the magical excitement of courtship. Leaving school on the weekend and meeting your man under the clock at the Biltmore in New York—how different from the relationships of Yale, circa 1995.

Baby it's a wild world

So what happens when women

Corps (ROTC) as an undergraduate, said that her views about gender have changed dramatically since she was an undergraduate. She arrived at Yale believing in a strict equality: "I thought that differences in gender lead to subjugation. I don't want to be subjugated, so therefore I'm not different."

But now, several years after Yale and Duke law school, Zielinski said, "Yale students are generally naive about gender issues... Most women [there] have never been held back, never hit a wall they couldn't climb. They don't think that there are limitations, why should they? As you get older and start thinking about having a family, you make certain choices."

Many undergraduate women do seem aware that they will have to make certain choices, but this does not limit the way that they think about the future. Govindini Murty '97, vice chair of the Independent Party and former coordinator of the Women's Caucus of the Yale Political Union, said, "Women do have a harder time in the real world. But I plan to have a career and a family and do it all. I think it's all a matter of perception. I see the world as a place which is open to me. Obviously I will have to make trade-offs, but I don't think women focus on their limitations. They shouldn't feel victimized."

Most of the women interviewed for this article said that they have rarely, if ever, experienced any gender-based discrimination. Most also did not expect their career plans to hinder their desire to have families. But seniors heading into the unknown could not say with certainty how they would work in family commitments. Drori said, "I guess my friends and I don't talk that much about having families. We don't think that it's going to be huge problem—maybe that's naive."

Wellington, who wants to raise a family but also maintain a career, sees her future as somewhat of a challenge. "As a woman you have to be stronger. You just learn to balance the needs of others along with your own."

Certainly some women go into the world and balance successful careers with raising a family, but the questions they face in the real world will ultimately be different from the concerns of men. As



who designed a special divisional major in biology management, says that she has never experienced any discrimination: "Being a woman in the sciences, I never felt as though I was treated differently."

Women might feel intimidated by not seeing other women in science, but that's a personal choice. Yale really encourages you to do your own thing."

Many people speculate about the small number of female science majors. Is it some inherent difference in the mind? Social discrimination in elementary school?

Wellington said that women don't major in sciences because they "don't want to be with science geeks, and they don't want to turn into science geeks—although of course not all science majors are geeks. It's just the perception that you're going to spend all of your time alone with mice."

have to be prepared to endure fits of laughter and ridicule. In fact, holding open a door might receive a similar response. Liberation has surely brought the demise of certain social graces. But for women at Yale, it's tough to understand the trade-off. If a few more social graces means not attending Yale,

leave meritocratic Yale for the real world? Prepared for whatever careers await them alongside their male friends, women can compete for the most competitive jobs, for spots at the most elite graduate and professional schools. Yet for those who want to have families, they will have to step

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women today would certainly lose the dance card.

Old Yale did not vanish with coeducation. Its decline began well before women were admit-

outside all this for at least some amount of time, and confront the choices which face them.

Alana Zielinski '91, a member of the Reserve Officer Training

of relative equality. Women may be equal to men, but not the same. It may not always be easy to accept,

Zielinski said, "I still believe in equality, but no longer in sameness."

Sugar and spice ...

Women and men are not the same. Even if they receive equal treatment in the classroom, ballroom and the boardroom, that does not eliminate this fact.

But we still do not understand exactly what the physiological differences are, or what they mean. In a world of meritocracy and virtual equality between the sexes, coming to grips with the reality of gender differences raises difficult questions.

Should gender have any consequences for the way we approach the world? Yale women seem generally torn on this issue. They want to succeed in their grand ambitions, and yet at the same time they do not want to have to act in a particular manner in order to achieve their goals.

Murty, who believes firmly that women can succeed in their pursuits at Yale, finds that certain misogynistic conceptions remain: "There are some perceptions I find obnoxious, like for women to succeed they somehow have to act like men. It makes it seem like success, ambition, and drive are only male qualities, when they are not an exclusive male preserve."

Other women find that the single-minded pursuit of careers can be limiting to their other goals and aspirations. Wellington, who would like to have a biotechnology career but places an extremely strong emphasis on raising a family, believes that: "Women definitely have to face a different set of questions. At Yale they teach you all about being a strong person. They encourage you to forget that you're a woman. If all the smart women go to Ivy League colleges and have careers and never have kids, then we'd have a big problem."

While there may not be overt sexism, Yale's careerism encourages a belief among students that a Yale education is wasted on women who decide only to raise a family. Many argue that maintaining a household does not require a Yale degree. Yet this attitude takes a very narrow perspective on motherhood, which requires a full range of talents to raise successful children.

Furthermore, raising children

does not always simply mean a few tortuous months away from the office. Having a family can quite legitimately be the focus of an intelligent woman's life. She may choose to work before and after having children, but take time to, as one friend said, "walk my kids through the park and buy them pretzels."

Zielinski echoes a similar concern. As a woman concerned with starting both her career in law and her family, she worries that motherhood has been devalued:

"It's almost as though motherhood is not considered a job for which additional intelligence or charm were necessary. People think it's a waste if you become a mother first. It's so sad. How can it not be true that some people would raise better children than others?"

Women can wear different hats at different stages of their lives. As Anna Quindlen said recently in an address to Yale students—it's not that women cannot have it all, it's just that they cannot have it all at the same time.

Women may have different priorities than men, but this does not imply subordination or inequality.

As Wellington observed, "To me it's not paradoxical to be equal to men in the classroom, and then differ in my personal hopes and dreams."

Certain biological facts about motherhood cannot be ignored—they are realities dismissed only by the naive. Questions about child-raising and work confront women in a way that even the nicest SNAG (Sensitive New Age Guy) could not understand.

Nature vs. nurture

In an environment free from most debilitating gender stereotypes, women at Yale compete on an equal footing with their peers to become successful, educated and powerful. Yet at the same time, they must internally grapple with often irreconcilable conflicts between the nurturing which has liberated them, and the nature which calls them to a life of the family.

Even Yale graduate Naomi

Wolf, who speaks of power feminism "rocking the world," must admit that both men and women often have conflicting desires. In her most recent book *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century*, Wolf writes, "Many men, perhaps most, waver between being egalitarians and patriarchalists ... just as most women waver between the desire for independence and the longing for passivity."

Differences between men and women have been written about and argued over for years. Usually observations of these differences have been a means for keep-

admitted by intelligent women who no longer fear being thrust back into the kitchen to live barefoot and pregnant. Gender differences need not only limit; they can also empower.

Many traditionally conservative women derive a great and simple joy from their womanhood. For them, nothing could possibly exceed the gratification of motherhood. Other women take power from the control they possess over men.

Camille Paglia, noted vamp and tramp scholar, writes, "The male projection of erection ... is the paradigm for all cultural projec-

and material equality women feel as though they have fewer battles to fight in the real world. This has forced women away from "feminism"—that pejorative label which pertains to an ideology and movement with multiple definitions.

While most women might shy away from feminism and its contemporary associations with radicalism and lesbianism, in reality most Yale women live with the expectation of social and economic equality. If they were to return to the America of 1970, they would most likely burn their bras with the most radical of the female activists.

Yale, it seems, lures women into a false sense of security. Familiar with equal opportunity, they do not need any sort of feminism. But after having grown up in a reasonably fair and equal environment they face a much more hostile world. As seniors go through the interview process for jobs in investment banking and consulting, many women have found that their male peers have a definite advantage.

One man, interviewing with a prominent investment bank on campus, was told by his male interviewer, "I want to hire the kind of man who could back me up if I got into a fight in a bar." Now that kind of interviewer is never, ever going to hire a woman.

Where does that leave a woman headed for the business world, who has forgotten her womanhood only to be painfully reminded of it by some meathead interviewer? Certainly women should not be told by the ladies at career services, "Give up, (or wear a short skirt!) The world is too hostile for you!" But at the same time, women can only benefit from a more honest discussion of the unique questions and difficulties which face them.

Women at Yale give men a run for their money. We have achieved virtual equality, yet we will never achieve sameness. Nature has been kept hidden under power suits as women have climbed the corporate ladder. Perhaps now, after 25 years of coeducation, the power suit can be put away just long enough to hear the questions asked by nature.

—Neomi Rao, Editor Emeritus, is a senior in Silliman College and owns two power suits.

Women may have different priorities than men, but this does not imply subordination or inequality. As Wellington observed, "To me it's not paradoxical to be equal to men in the classroom, and then differ in my personal hopes and dreams."

ing women subordinated. Recent studies have revealed that women use more areas of their brains when reading and speaking—showing at least the initial intimations of cognitive differences. Yet reporters must always be careful to qualify their findings. Scientific differences seem dangerous because they might translate into sexism.

The New York Times carefully described the study to assure that the non-scientific do not jump to

tion and conceptualization—from art and philosophy to fantasy, hallucination, and obsession. Women have conceptualized less in history not because men have kept them from doing so but because women do not need to conceptualize in order to exist. I leave open the question of brain differences."

Women, like men, have numerous sides to their personalities. Paglia writes that women do not need to think in order to exist, and yet in modern society women can

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any hasty conclusions. "It does not say that women's brains are better at this task than men's or vice versa." They are just different, and no judgment can be made about the differences. Murty expressed some concern over the new studies, saying, "I just hope that they aren't used by silly revisionists as an excuse to limit people's freedom."

In today's more open world, perhaps these differences can be

think and produce great works if they have the ability and the desire. Women can be reduced neither to the Hillary Clinton bitch-model nor to the primeval earth mother wielding mystic powers over men. In 1995, the female paradigms for Yale women are much more complex.

Where do we go now?

In a world of relative academic