

BRAINS OR BROOMS

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Quite a while has passed since the last band of sturdy crusading women rustled down the street indigently waving banners of women's suffrage. It is a long time since the last bold poster demanding women's equality yellowed, crumpled and blew away. Once again the green grass has grown on the town's square after the trampling of many noisy rallies to vote for female equality.

The dust has settled and the American woman has emerged with her long fought for equal opportunities. Most graduate schools welcome her, most P. T. A. groups demand her, the vast majority of industries accept her and all supermarkets cater to her.

But my purpose here is not to laud the progress in the status of the American female; nor my theme, an eulogy to those who fought to obtain her equal opportunities. Rather my intent is to stop and ask why--if equal opportunities are truly available do less than 4% of our women aspire to executive position--how can we account for the fact that less than one half of the upper 30% of high ability girls go on to school while 60% of the boys of the same ability level do? Or how do we explain that one-fifth of the U. S. women feel that women in politics, quote Saturday Evening Post, is a "bad thing?"

The American woman is now confronted by a grand and gaudy showcase proudly displaying unlimited opportunities for her, she anxiously grasps for those enticing exhibits, but her fingers crumble on the cold invisible double plated glass barrier.

Her expectant reach is abruptly curtailed by the imperceptible but very real social ostracization. She is painfully aware that any pursuit of professional ambitions will subject her to cruel and unmitigated classification. The branding iron held by all of us is ever glowing, ready to burn career girl on her back.

Career girl. You only have to say the word out loud to notice what an odd even sinister label it denotes. Career girl: a tall thin semi-shapeless woman, wears brown or gray tweed suits and dark framed glasses that she can hang pensively on her hip while making an important decision. She lives in an immaculately well-kept apartment abounding with original touches. The career girl gets along better with men than women and is quick to criticize her own sex. But underneath her care free exterior she is basically unsure of her femininity and ability to meet the challenges of motherhood so therefore has been forced to join the competitive man's world.

Honestly now isn't this our conception of the professional woman. As the noted anthropologist Margorie Mead stated, "those dedicated professional women are suspected of having neuroses."

But we aren't content to erect just one barrier to the professional drives of the American woman, we must reinforce it with that second plate. We must make the U. S. woman aware that it's more fashionable to flaunt the wedding band before the graduation ring or display the marriage license instead of the college diploma. Society instructs the college girl her purpose in school is not to determine her chosen profession but to find a man in a choice profession.

When I entered college last fall our class was told by our Academic Dean in our opening convocation that here at school we would meet new people, receive a liberal education, gain new experiences, and in more cases find the person we shall marry.

Those were the goals outlined for us on the very first day of school. Warning us to make good use of these four years.

Unfortunately we issue a curt decum to our women: Sacrifice brains for brooms.

Consider the crushing and painful effects this double plated shield has on the individual. I wish you could be with me some evening in the dorm. One night after a group of my friends had returned from the canteen they came to my room very disturbed. "Jean," they told me, "you wouldn't believe the number of girls that are engaged. I just bet we'll be old maids. Why we've been here two months and we're not serious about anyone."

This is what I decry. This pressure imposed on us--forcing girls to abandon their own plans for self-development and narrow their vision and ambition. I am disgusted with the readiness to classify and categorize as being different every woman who wants to postpone marriage until she can develop her own identity interests and abilities. I am tired of hearing career women branded as cold non-feminine misfits. I agree with Margorie Mead in her book Women in Mass Society. "How long are we going to perpetuate the distrust of every woman who wants to devote herself to work whether it be art, science, medicine, or the religious life. Are we going to continue to accept the popular thesis that every woman who isn't conspicuously involved in married life every minute has something wrong with her?"

Now I hope it isn't necessary to explain that I'm not denouncing marriage. Neither am I pleading for a nation of spinsters or a union of cut-throat competitors. But rather my aim is to unveil the great American hypocrisy. The Janus-faced proclamation of complete equal opportunity for women while at the same time maintaining the most insidious societal pressure if she dares to accept those opportunities.

What remains after the pursuits and searching reaches of the American female are brusquely terminated? Merely the marred and dirty fingerprints streaked across the glass mute testimony to our idiotic folly. The folly that allows us to talk about producing at full capacity and yet ignore the talents of our able women. The naive ignorance that makes us concerned about moving ahead with vigor and still waste the potential of our females. "It's a bad thing," notes Business Week, Sept. 29, 1963, "that in an age when we need all the talent we can generate that few women aspire to top positions. A vast number of college graduates are going unused." The U. S. cannot long afford such wasted potential.

How can we shatter this glass barrier, and guarantee that the showcase of unchecked opportunities is not a mere display.

First we may do well to pattern our thinking after Sweden's, where it is recognized that the individual and nation will profit by women's unlimited development. Twenty-five per cent of the students of medicine and dentistry are women. Fifteen per cent of the students in law school are women. The Swedes are aware that you can combine motherhood, usually a 20 year task with a profession. After motherhood is completed, the women can again enter into the competitive world.

But more importantly let us never forget that the rightful status of women will have to be brought about by women. Let everyone of us be willing to pursue her own ambition regardless of external pressure. Each must fulfill her own productive capacities. Let us in one voice deny the dismal decrees of Louise Bogan "that women have no wilderness in them. They are provident instead, content in tight hot cells of their hearts to eat dusty bread."