**COVER STORY**

**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 moments 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 marks 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 meritocracy cuts across traditional lines of gender bias.

Ability has become the universal standard for Yale students. It applies to both academicians 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.

Dana 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 divided, 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.

What feminine mystique?

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

Mrs. Francis 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 leave meritocratic Yale for the real world? Prepared for what.

wonder whether 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 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 Corps (ROTC) as an undergradu-
of relative equality. Women may be equal to men, of 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 reality, 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.

Many think that women can succeed in their pursuits at Yale, finds that certain misogynistic conceptions remain: "There are some perceptions I find obvious, 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. "At Yale, women are working to have the dual degree," says Zielinski, "and it's very difficult for women to succeed in their careers."

Cultural differences also exist. A recent study by Yale researchers found that Yale women are more likely to be interested in women's issues than men.

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

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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, will go on regarding women be­coming egalitarians and patriarchalists ... just as most women waver be­tween the desire for independence and the longing for parity."

Differences between men and women have been written about and argued over for years. Usu­ally observations of these differences have been means for keep­ing 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 reports 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-science does not jump to projection of erection 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 grow and develop. It is not that women's brains are better at tasks 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 adm¬itted 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 womanness. For them, nothing could possibly ex­ceed the gratification of mother­hood. Other women take power from the control they possess over men.

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

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