

From *National Business Woman*
Vol. XXXV · 1956

This candidate for the Ph.D. in Fine Arts lives in no ivory tower. She is the mother of three children.



The Woman Graduate Student...

by BERNICE BROWN CRONKHITE

1956 Model

IN a recent seed catalogue appeared a picture of a much-frilled petunia labelled "very double." That is the adjective that best describes the life of our young women in Graduate School. They are carrying a full program of advanced study, many are earning part of their expenses, almost one-third are married and keeping house, and of these many have from one to four children.

"Mary Jones"—to put a fictitious name on a real person—started her graduate work in anthropology several years ago. When she had completed the required two years of "course work," paying her tuition with what she earned by typing, she was ready to begin her thesis. At this point the U.S. Navy asked her to go to one of the islands in the South Pacific over which the Navy had control and to report to the Navy on the habits of the islanders. This represented a desire on the Navy's part to administer the islands in ways that would be consistent with native customs. Before sailing for the South Pacific, Mary married and while on the island had two children. She is now back in the Graduate School, keeping house, typing her own and her husband's theses, and bringing up two children.

"Jane Smith" was already in the Graduate School when she married. Her husband was called into military service and was lost over Korea. She is back in Graduate School, bringing up a young son, and helping meet expenses by part-time teaching.

The choice which a young woman used to be called upon to make between marriage and paid employment is no longer necessary. If she wishes to undertake professional training she may do so, whether married or single. This represents a minor revolution. Twenty-five years ago only a very small percentage of Radcliffe graduate students were married. This year many are. Neither the wife nor the husband regards this as anything unusual. Family budgets are drawn up to include tuition for both halves of the family, and whatever the two can earn around the edges of their study hours goes into the common purse.

What effect does this change have on the husband's self-esteem? If the wife is wise, she will be careful not to let her work loom so large as to crowd out her husband's needs and interests. Her job as wife and mother comes first. Only if she remembers this will her husband take pride in her scholastic accomplishments. A young wife who had completed the requirements for the Ph.D. before her husband could complete his degree, war service having intervened, was brought into the Graduate School office by her husband, who said, beaming, "I want you to meet Mr. and Dr. X." The new Dr. X had had three children during her years in the Graduate School, and there must have been many occasions when she had to push her own studies far into the background.

Among the growing number of married graduate students, we notice an increasing number of husband and wife teams. There was a time when the Curies' and the Sidney Webbs' were the only couples mentioned as achieving distinction in joint intellectual activity. The usual pattern appeared to be that of a husband engaged in research and teaching and writing, with a wife who could verify his references, type, and assist him in other minor ways. The great physiologist, Walter Cannon, when publishing a book on glands and digestion, said he should have dedicated it to his wife "without whose stomach this book could not have been written."

Today, with the increasing scope of scientific knowledge, a husband and wife can have specializations within what appears to a layman to be a very narrow field. Enrolled in the Radcliffe Graduate School this year is a young woman working in physical chemistry married to a student in chemical physics. They should prove a good team. In another case the wife is a student of Arabic, while her husband is specializing in Near East politics.

Some people ask, "What good does a Ph.D. do a married woman other than give her a pleasant feeling of accomplishment? She can hardly take a job while bring-



A Ph.D. in Medical Sciences, this mother of four teaches on university faculty and finds time to engage in research as well.

ing up small children." It is true that until the youngest child is well started in school, a mother cannot be away from home for any length of time. Even with good help, in any case hard to find, she will not want to be away every day. But in the case of Dr. X for example, when the youngest of her three children is in school, she will be only thirty-one. With the present extension of human life—particularly a woman's life—she can expect nearly forty years more, thirty-four years before reaching our present retirement age. If she has enjoyed her advanced study and done well in it, will the next thirty-four years not be happier for her and for her family and more fruitful for society if she takes up a professional task? If a woman waits, however, until she is thirty-one to start graduate work, she may find herself under a severe handicap. She will be in competition with women years younger who are continuing from college to graduate school without interruption. They set the pace, and although a woman can get back into full-time studying by making an effort, it is sometimes not advisable for her to undertake it.

When a married woman with her Ph.D. in hand seeks employment, she may run into difficulties. Society is still inclined to look for single women to take paid jobs outside the home even though the census figures show more and more married women in the wage-earning group. Public sentiment is not yet in step. In a large state university the women students were asked recently a four-question questionnaire:

1. Did either of your grandmothers earn money outside the home?

2. If they worked, what did they do?
3. Does your mother earn money outside the home?
4. If she works, what does she do?

In answer to the first question, 25 percent said yes; one or both grandmothers had worked. The answer to the second showed the favored callings to have been teaching and nursing. In answer to the third question 75 percent said yes, their mothers were or had been employed and the tasks they filled covered a very wide range indeed.

A young woman who recently completed the requirements for a doctor's degree in chemistry married a chemist in the research and development department of a large pharmaceutical house. She applied for a job in the same firm and was told that it was against company policy to employ husband and wife. The chief personnel officer offered, however, to interview her and advise her. In the course of the interview he said, "When you and your husband are alone, do you ever discuss chemistry?" "All the time," she replied. "If you do not come to us, what will you do?" he asked. "Oh," she said, "I shall look for a job at" naming their biggest commercial rival. The interviewer engaged her on the spot. She was given her own laboratory, a higher salary than she expected and two years later, two months' maternity leave. On college faculties the rule against employing husband and wife is widely observed but with the scarcity of college teachers predicted for 1965, a relaxing of this rule can be anticipated.

In the expanding field of the social sciences, especially in that area called "human relations," it is possible that women have something to say which men have not said and cannot be expected to say. Perhaps married women have a special contribution to make here. In the formulation of social aims, in the drafting of social legislation, a woman with the same training as a man may have quite different ideas. Both sides need to be heard and weighed. It is greatly to the advantage of society that young people capable of making contributions in these fields be educated, regardless of sex.

President Jefferson writing of education a century ago may have had women in mind when he said, "It is our duty to cull from every condition of our people the natural aristocracy of talent and virtue and prepare it at public expense for the care of the public concerns." Today he might have spelled it out "men and women, married and unmarried," for our society will flourish only to the degree that all our citizens are encouraged and prepared to make their maximum contribution in whatever field their talents lie.

There is hardly an important enterprise in our country which does not depend, in part at least, on research. Education, employment, women's special contributions and opportunities are no exception. There is need for a foundation set up to find answers to some of the many questions which both men and women are asking about women. I congratulate the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs on having taken this pioneer step.

BERNICE BROWN CRONKHITE
Dean, Graduate School
Radcliffe College