The Woman Graduate Student...

by BERNICE BROWN CRONKHITE

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 Sidneys' and the Wilkins' 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 be 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 call 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.

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