

Female Intelligence: Who Wants It?

There is plenty of it; the nation needs it—but our social scheme discourages it.

By MARYA MANNES

EVERY now and then there is a resounding call for a national resource—largely untapped and unmustered—referred to as the intelligence of women, or the female brain. Editorial writers, tired of outer space, say that if we are to win the race of survival and keep up with the Russians we must not squander this precious resource but rather press it into service.

Commenting on the number of women doctors, engineers, physicists and

which can analyze, innovate and create: the mind of the scientist and the artist, at liberty to roam in the world of abstractions and intangibles until, by will and effort, a concrete and tangible pattern is made clear.

Are women capable of this kind of intelligence? If they are not to the degree of genius—and the long history of man has produced no female Bachs or Shakespeares or Leonardos or Galileos—and although a Madame Curie is in lonely company, women have in every time given to the mainstream of the arts, letters and sciences. And when even a Jesuit priest-sociologist, Father Lucius F. Cervantes—whose recent book "And God Made Man and Woman" is a long and satisfied reiteration of the sacred differences between the two sexes—writes, "As far as has been ascertained there is no inherent intellectual capacity differential between men and women," then surely women are not by nature denied the ability to think creatively and abstractly.

IT is rather that this ability is unpopular with women because it is unpopular with men. Our prior need, in short, is to be loved. And if the possession of this kind of intelligence is a deterrent to love, then it is voluntarily restricted or denied by women themselves.

I have seen enough of this deterrence and this denial, since my youth, to believe it the common experience. And although it has not always been mine (I am fortunate in a happy marriage), I recognize only too well the signal of alarm in the eyes of men when a woman of intellect challenges their own.

It flashed even before I recognized it: boys at dances would forsake me soon for others, not—in Marty's language—because I was a "dog," but



A woman often suppresses her mental ability in favor of the primary need to be loved.

laboratory technicians in the Soviet Union compared to our paltry own, citing the desperate shortages in fields where the productive intellect is essential, they cry: "To the drawing-board, to the laboratories, to the computers!" And presidents of women's colleges beseech their students: "Use this brain you've got and we're training: society needs it!"

Gratifying though it may be to have the female intelligence not only publicly acknowledged but officially sought, these calls are met by a massive wave of indifference emanating from women even more than from men. We do not really believe either the acknowledgment or the demand for the kind of intelligence they speak of and claim they want, nor do we see any signs of a public attitude which would make its application either welcome or practical on a national scale.

The college presidents, the editorialists, the recruiters of resources are talking not of the intelligence which every woman needs to be a successful wife and mother or even a competent worker in office or factory or civic affairs. They are talking of the kind of free and independent intelligence

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The average American male is downright uneasy in the presence of an intelligent woman.



Drawings by Susan Perl

NO RESPONSE—As long as the old view of woman's role remains unchanged, women will respond to the call to "use their brains" for the nation's good with massive indifference.

because I talked to them of sonnets or senses instead of about themselves. Used to a family where ideas were as much a part of the dinner table as food, I knew of no special kind of talk geared to men rather than to women. Worse, I thought that to be interesting one had to say interesting things. This was possibly the greatest miscalculation since the Charge of the Light Brigade.

For most men, I duly discovered, prefer the woman whose interest lies not in her thoughts nor her speech nor her talents, but in her interest in them. Mind, they believe, interferes with this attention, and to some extent they are right. Right or wrong, the average American male is uneasy in the presence of markedly intelligent women; and the woman who wishes to change this unease into love must spend a good part of her life reining in her wits in the reluctant admission that they do her more harm than good.

Now there is a great paradox in all this. On the one hand, more girls go to college than ever before, and more colleges are equipped to develop their minds toward whatever intellectual goals they might aspire to. On the other hand, as President Thomas C. Mendenhall of Smith College recently—and sharply—deplored, there is a 60 per cent dropout of women students before graduation and most of this is due to their early marriage and almost immediate proliferation of the species.

In an open forum recently, I asked Millicent C. McIntosh, president of Barnard, and Dr. George N. Shuster of Hunter what they considered the purpose of higher education for women if they left the campus in droves for a career of total domesticity. Their answer, roughly, was this: "Our main aim is to turn out women who can apply a trained intelligence to the problems of daily living, and whose intellectual resources can enrich their lives and those of their children."

They agreed that only a small pro-

portion of girls manifested a genuine drive toward intellectual excellence, or a sustained dedication necessary to the mastery of any art or science, and they deplored this. But the shared opinion seemed to be that a girl who went to college would not only be a more intelligent wife and mother than the girl who did not, but that in later life and increased freedom she could draw on greater reserves of mind and spirit.

And yet an English teacher at one of the Eastern universities said: "There is a terrible waste here. I've taught girls with as much, if not more, talent than many of the boys I've had in my classes: first-class writers and thinkers. And what do they do when they leave here? Work? Not on your life. They marry and have four children, and that's that."

THE argument, widely used, that a woman so trained can always return to her field when her children are grown and her time is her own, is specious, to say the least. In the sciences, if not in the arts, advances in theory and techniques are so rapid that a fifteen-year gap becomes unbreachable. Quite apart from that, the muscle of intellect degenerates with lack of use. The servantless young mother with small children has not the time, the place or the isolation necessary for any orderly process of thought or any sustained practice of the imagination.

Yet society—including most of the young women involved in this early and long domesticity—does not consider this condition even remotely tragic. On the contrary, there appears to be widespread approval of the return of women from the spurious and aggressive "independence" of their mothers to their prime function as the creators and guardians of the family.

Young girls (Continued on Page 44)

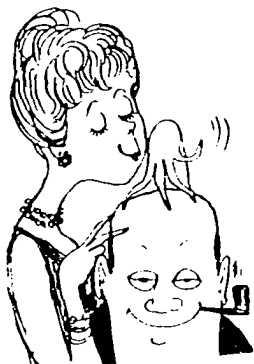
Female Intelligence

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themselves in countless numbers have chosen the security and closeness of a full household rather than the lonely road of individual fulfillment as creative identities. And although many young women work out of the home before and even after marriage, it is less for love of work than for love of a home in which a standard of living is more important than a standard of thinking.

Only a few seem to work because of an urgent need to be for once—if only part of every day—out of context and into their own skin, applying their intelligence singly toward matters not concerned with their personal lives.

Even this need, usually condoned for economic reasons ("She has to work to make ends meet") is criticized by those professionally concerned with allocating roles to the sexes, as an evasion of woman's prime responsibility and an indication either of maladjustment or of a false sense of values. And, although the country is full of educators charged with the development of the female intelligence, every social pressure is exert-



Women often find themselves curbing a differing opinion.

ed on women from their childhood on toward one goal: marriage—the earlier the better—and babies, the more the better. And the girl who feels that she has something to give beyond her natural functions as a wife and mother is lonely, indeed—pitied even when she succeeds.

If television drama serials and mass magazine fiction are any indication of the national temper, there is only one "right" fulfillment for all women. The "career woman" may be admired for her suc-

cess, but her absorption in her work—whether it be medicine, law, letters or art—is a tacit admission of her lack of fulfillment as a woman. And even if she marries and bears children, the assumption prevails that both her husband and her offspring will suffer from her preoccupation with the world outside.

Many housewives may secretly long for their independence, but they are secure in the knowledge that their own absorption in the home and the community is a guarantee against a continual conflict of loyalties and, indeed, against the natural hostility of men; a resentment, however covert, against the competition of the kind of female intelligence which, precisely because of its independence, is still called "masculine."

IF it is true that this kind of intelligence is undesirable to the majority of men, accustomed as they are to the "liberated" woman of today, what are the reasons?

I suspect that in the stormy sea of "equality," men are uncertain of the extent and nature of their dominance—if, indeed, they believe in it—and that they need a constant reassurance of their superiority in one field at least, that of the creative intellect.

They need not look far to see that it is they who formulate national policies, send rockets into space and govern the world of business, art and science. The challenge from women in these fields is still negligible, but it exists; a source of discomfort rather than satisfaction. And although many men are generous in their admiration of the few women who have achieved distinction in the laboratory or in letters or in scholarship, most men have no desire to be married to them. They take too much trouble.

And here we come, I think, to the root of the matter: a masculine laziness in the ways of love which inclines them to avoid rather than surmount this particular kind of challenge. It is far easier to choose the relaxed and compliant woman than one who makes demands on the intelligence. They may be intrigued by the brilliant woman, but they rarely want her for themselves.

For the qualities that form a creative intellect are hard



AND SO TO WED—Teachers say that marriage nullifies college training.

to live with. The woman cursed with them can retain the love of men and the approval of society only if she is willing to modify and mute them as much as she can without reducing them to impotence. As one so cursed, however modestly, I herewith submit some hard-won suggestions:

I would counsel the woman of intellect to watch her wit. Though it need not be tinged with malice, it has of necessity an astringency which many people find disconcerting. In a bland society, the unsheathed dart can draw blood, if only from vanity. And after the tide of laughter at a woman's wit has ebbed, the wrack left in the public mind is a sort of malaise: "She has a sharp tongue" or "I wouldn't like to tangle with her."

CANDOR is a second danger. The woman who is honest with men is so at her own risk if this honesty requires either criticism or skepticism of their position. And if she has convictions opposed to those of the man she speaks with she will be wise to withhold them or speak them so softly that they sound like concurrence.

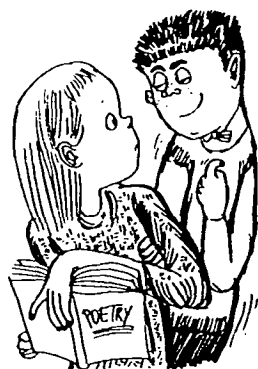
She must, above all, have no conviction that what she has to say is of importance, but train herself instead to listen quietly to men no more knowledgeable in a given subject than herself and, what is more, to defer to their judgment. This is not always easy, but a woman cannot afford the luxury of declarations, however pertinent, if she seeks—and what woman does not?—to attract.

A man who is intense or excited about his work can be highly attractive, but woe to the woman who is either. Most people cannot distinguish between the tiresome

garrulity of a woman preoccupied with her affairs and the purely abstract passion of a woman concerned with the process of thought. A state of tension is inseparable from active intelligence, but it is socially unpermissible in women.

If such women are artists—and I use this to cover all forms of creative expression—and particularly if they have achieved any stature as such, they may have the attraction of rarity. There are even men who are mature enough and secure enough to cherish in them the capacity to create abstractly as well as biologically.

But they are rarer still, for the care and cultivation of an artist is a job that wives are



Modern courtship patterns hinder a thirst for culture.

trained for and few husbands want. The woman artist who has a husband and children must then, to quote Phyllis McGinley, have "three hands"—a mutation still infrequent but which the irradiation of women's minds may yet produce.

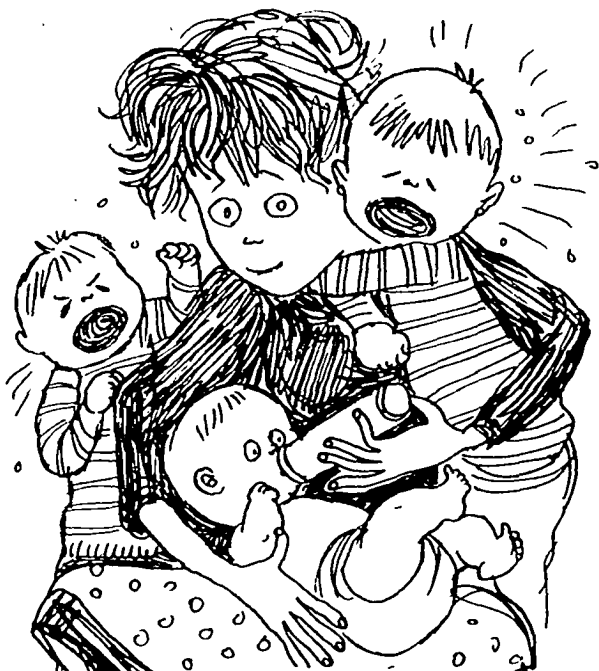
Is this irradiation really desirable? Are the full resources of the feminine intelligence really needed? And if

(Continued on Page 48)

they are to be mobilized for the national good, what is to be done about a climate of opinion satisfied with the overwhelming emphasis, on the part of the younger generation, on domesticity and large families? Do we need more babies or do we need more doctors and scientists and thinkers and innovators? Is it enough that we have a great pool of college graduates applying their intelligence to the problems of their homes and towns, or do we really need more women able to come to grips with the major issues of our time?

If we do, changes will have to be made, many of which may well be unattainable at this time. But if the nation's leaders really want and need this kind of woman, the opinion molders of the mass media will have to start right now giving her an honorable place in society, and men will have to start giving her an honorable place in their hearts as well as in their professions.

For one thing, parents with daughters who show a genuine intellectual talent and aspiration in any field should



QUIET!—A woman with a family seldom finds time to indulge in study.

cocoon of a large-familied home is—like that of a large corporation—the best protection from the loneliness of thought and a voluntary abdication of the burdens of personal freedom.

IF a woman wishes to resume her chosen work after marriage and the bearing of children, there should be no stigma attached if she can afford to hire outside help for either home tasks or the care of the young. And we might begin to consider a pattern of community-supported nurseries which would permit the woman who cannot afford help to pursue her profession at least partially free from the continuous demands of child care.

A few months ago a delegation of Russian professional women visited this country, and one of them remarked in amazement at the lack of any such service. Our profusion of labor-saving gadgets did not, it seems, blind her eyes to the domestic entrapment of the young American woman.

As for college education, there should, I believe, be a division made between students merely marking time before marriage and girls seriously bent on a career or profession, confining the do-

mestic-minded to a two-year course of liberal arts and reserving the four-year, degree-granting course for the latter. After these have graduated, their entrance into the laboratories and offices of the country should be made on the same basis as that for equally qualified men—not, that is, as an interim occupation but as a chosen, sustained career.

And here, of course, is where the woman herself must be prepared to pay a fairly high price. If work is important to her she cannot allow herself the luxury of a large family or the kind of man who insists on one. Nor can she afford the close, and often cozy, community huddle in which women share their domestic preoccupations daily with one another. She must be prepared to fight for the freedom she wants at the risk of loneliness and the denial of a number of things dear to any woman.

AS for men, they will have to stop thinking in terms of competition and think in terms of alliance instead: the alliance of companion intellects toward similar goals. If they can bring themselves to consider women primarily as human beings, they will be able to treat them intellectually as men and emotionally as women. If they do that, they will find the brilliant woman surprisingly docile and far from unfeminine.

If, however, men continue to subscribe to the prevailing belief that the American heroine must never be too intelligent for her own good and their own comfort, the cry for female brains will go largely unheeded—unless a national emergency makes it clear that we have for years been wasting one of the resources on which our strength depends and which other civilizations are using to their advantage.

LOSS

A science teacher in a college tells of a girl who gave every indication of deep and original thinking in genetics. He says: "I've never met a better mind. But six months after she graduated she married a business man and now lives in a Chicago suburb taking care of four children. I hope she's happy, but sometimes you wonder what you're teaching them for."

not feel compelled to enter her in the infantile mating-marathon that pushes a girl toward marriage from the age of 12 on. It should be possible for such a girl to prefer an exciting book to a dull date without the censure of her family or her peers, and to continue her training through her twenties without courting celibacy.

Much has been said about the new sense of responsibility shown by the young in their early acceptance of marriage and parenthood. But time may show that the