

and economic sphere was inconsistent with the basic tenets of American democracy.

Thus today the economic problems confronting many black Americans, while quite severe, can no longer be wholly understood as the result of racially motivated exclusion. Many racial and ethnic groups in this and other societies have faced and solved problems like ours without the legal apparatus which we now have at our disposal. Today the main problem is not overt racism in economic life. The main problems are the poverty, disintegration of family life, lack of unity and mutual concern, absence of achievement ethic and dearth of positive role models which plague many of our communities today. The tendency to view the current exigencies of the black community as imposed from without due to racist disinterest (almost a contradiction in terms!), neglects those internal factors which certainly contribute to the problem, and more importantly which we can in fact control.

Surely we do not seriously advance the notion that white middle-class anger and concern about street crime in the central cities — crime often associated with urban minority youth — is racist in motivation. Nor can we sensibly assert that the responsibility for that situation lies with “the system,” or “society” in some abstract sense, as opposed to the individual perpetrators whose behavior occasions such cost for others.

Does anyone argue today that the current illegitimacy rates in excess of 40 percent among young black mothers arise because of racism? Are we to understand the growth in welfare dependency in this population, to the point that in most big cities more than one half of all black children are supported in part by AFDC, as the consequence of an external, societal failure?

It has become imperative that the individual young black man come to accept more *responsibility* for his fate. If our intellectuals and political leaders insist upon externalizing this responsibility, if they continue to tell this young man that it is racist American society which has wrought his current circumstance,

then they risk removing the single most important tool for change in that young man’s life — namely his belief in himself.

No, we have not suddenly all become Horatio Alger; but one does not have to pull oneself by the bootstraps into great wealth in order to recognize the objective relationship which exists in this society between effort and reward. There is much greater scope for change at the level of the individual than is often recognized in the political discourse on this question. In the current environment it is evident that survival will require both the recognition and the exploitation of these opportunities.

We must shift our emphasis from manipulation of the external political mechanism to the internal building of institutions and practices which directly improve the lot of low-income blacks. *We must start helping ourselves* — as a matter of necessity, not ideology. We must consciously begin the task of narrowing the distance among classes within the black community, and take unto ourselves more of the responsibility of our collective condition. We must be willing to identify and foster in the community those personal values which promote success. We must not be afraid to make judgments about faults and failings which can be observed in our community, and we must have the courage to voice these judgments. The “liberal” whites won’t do it.

Racism does not account for most of the problems which beset the black community in this country. We must abandon the pernicious and self-destructive tendency to imbue “the man” with ultimate control over our own destinies. This is an abdication of responsibility unbecoming of so proud and enduring a people.

Precisely because racism is a fact of life, the greater majority of blacks share a common, long-term fate. This being the case, it is in our own individual interest to contribute our time and resources to the advancement of those least well off among us. And it is a supreme political and moral failure for us to sit back in disgust, doing nothing but shouting epithets, while the consequences of inaction engulf us.

## The Cult of True Womanhood

### PAST AND PRESENT

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THE feminist movement has come of age — 18 years of age by some calculations or 20 by others. The feminist movement faces all the perplexities that many eighteen or twenty year olds encounter when they begin to participate fully in this society. This evening I would like to talk a bit about these perplexities. I believe that the feminist movement has had a great impact upon all of us, both women and men. I also believe that for both women and men the impact of the feminist movement has been largely beneficial.

This evening, however, I want to discuss three changes in expectations for women that have occurred in this society over the last century. I want to begin by talking about expectations for women in the mid-nineteenth century, views that shaped the lives of the founders of Stephens one hundred and fifty years ago. Then I want to shift to discuss expectations for women in

America in the mid-years of the twentieth century, 1940–1960. Finally, I want to talk about the expectations that we hold for young women of the 1980’s.

Our views, of what women, particularly those women who were middle class, should do and what they should be, what attributes they should exhibit, have changed a good deal. The experience for women over the last century has been toward increased options both for their attitudes and for their behavior. Given the choice of restricted vs. expanded alternatives for women, I unhesitatingly choose broader alternatives. Nonetheless, these greater choices have had their difficulties as well, and this plethora of alternatives has brought deep discomfort to many modern women, just as the bounded restrictions brought frustration to their mothers and grandmothers.

The higher educational institutions in this country have

played a unique role in forming women's conceptions of themselves and in mediating society's expectations for women. Let us, then, review the role colleges played for women. To what extent did college attendance serve to modify, exempt, or reinforce societal views regarding expectations for women?

I raise these issues both as historical questions regarding higher education and as a contemporary matter. Are our colleges and universities today reinforcing or altering society's expectations for women? Or do colleges today have any influence at all on women students? Are they relevant to women's lives? What should they be doing? In order to approach some kind of answer to our question, we need to establish what society has expected women, principally middle class women, to do and to be.

Let us begin by considering these matters in the nineteenth century: The American historian, Barbara Welter, wrote in 1966 an article, which has triggered much comment and speculation, "The Cult of True Womanhood." I am sure that it is familiar to many of you. In it she argued that the prescriptive literature of the mid-nineteenth century told women, mostly middle class women, that they should embody four critical qualities. These were: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Clearly not all women manifested this quartet of virtues, but Welter argued that the conventional wisdom of the nineteenth century was that those four characteristics were desirable for a woman either to attain or at a minimum, to seek.

At the same time that women were supposed to be aspiring to be pious, pure, submissive, and domestic, they were also having their first opportunity to attend college. Oberlin admitted women in 1837, being the first college in the United States to permit coeducation. By the middle of the century a number of institutions were offering work of a collegiate grade both to women alone, and increasingly in settings with men students too. A prime spur to the opening of college doors to women was the Civil War, beginning in 1861 and continuing for four decimating years. The war itself, drawing the collegiate men away from their campuses to the battlefields, and the economic consequences of the war, Reconstruction in the south and profound financial uncertainty in the north, combined to diminish the number of young men seeking to spend four years in college. With such a shortage of male students, a number of colleges were willing to enroll the only other source of tuition-paying students, women.

Thus the early college women understood that they were challenging the canons of true womanhood by deciding to attend college. They knew that their piety might be affected, that their purity was endangered by attendance away from their familial environs, that their submissiveness might be undermined by the necessity to study new material that might challenge existing dogmas or views, and finally, that their future domesticity might be threatened by becoming so learned and even worse, so non-traditional that they might not either seek or be sought for matrimony. In fact, the early generations of college women married at much lower rates than the population at large. One study has found that only half the graduates of the women's colleges in the late nineteenth century married, roughly the same proportion of women PhD's in the mid-twentieth century.

Probably what is most significant about the experience of the nineteenth century woman college student, in distinction to that of the twentieth century one, was that attendance at college seemed to exempt many of them from the expectations of the

cult of true womanhood. This occurred primarily for two reasons: one, because such small numbers of either men or women were enrolled that college itself was a deviant choice and two, because attending college flew in the face of several of the behaviors that women were supposed to exhibit.

As Marion Talbot, class of 1880 at Boston University, recalled many years later, "Three questions had to be faced by any thoughtful young woman who in 1880 had a college or university degree: First, what especial value had a college degree been to her individually and personally? Second, if there were value in such a degree, how best could she assist in forwarding the aims and ambitions of other young women who also wished such training? Third, how best could she fit herself into her community and play the part in its life and program which was at once her interest and her evident obligation?" All this was very different from the injunction to be pious, pure, submissive, and domestic.

Women college students made up a tiny fraction of the age group in 1870, but what is also very important, men college students also made up a very small fraction of the age group then. In 1860 about one percent of the age group was in college, and the proportion of these who were women was very small indeed. A decade later, the one that included the Civil War, the proportion of the 18-21 year olds who were in college was half again as much, 1.68 percent. What is most striking about that increase, however, is that already 21 percent of the undergraduates were women. A decade later, 1880, almost three percent of the age group were in college, and 32 percent of them were women. Undergraduates of whom 32 percent were female is the same proportion that was true for the U.S. in the early 1950's. The great difference was that in 1880, roughly one hundred years ago, slightly under three percent of the age group was in college. In the 1950's nearly thirty percent of the age group was in college. Thus, the late nineteenth century students who attended college were a tiny fraction of the population, and by virtue of being such a small group they became exempt from many of the strictures of the society. They enjoyed some of the benefits of an elite, of a group who somehow did not have to play by the same rules as the rest of America.

College attendance for men in the nineteenth century had a different consequence than college attendance did for women. Fundamentally, it did not contradict society's expectations for manliness. It might not support them, but it did not contradict them. Middle class men in the nineteenth century were supposed to prepare themselves in some way to support themselves and their families successfully as adults. Clearly college attendance was not required to do this, but few believed that college would be a decided hindrance. Therefore, the decision to attend college for men did not challenge the existing conceptions for men as the same decision did for women. Men were not supposed to be pious, pure, submissive, and domestic, so an activity that made the acquisition of those qualities less likely was not threatening to them.

One important consequence for women, particularly for the small number of professional women, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the development of a series of separate feminine networks. Patricia Palmieri has written a fascinating study of the faculty at Wellesley College arrestingly titled, "In Adamless Eden." Their feminist and feminine culture in the years 1890 to 1910 give evidence of the way that these early college women who became professors rejected at least two of the fundamental canons of the cult of true woman-

hood of their youth, namely they did not achieve conventional domesticity since none married, although all participated in households which held great significance for them. Neither were they submissive in the usual sense since they engaged in vigorous discussions with each other on various academic and intellectual matters. One might argue that, in fact, they pursued their own form of domesticity in their carefully structured and supportive community. Similarly one might believe that they engaged in a version of submissive behavior in their unwillingness to participate (for those few for whom the option ever arose) in the entirely male world of the research universities, such as Harvard, Yale or Columbia. Few have challenged the purity of these ladies. By the end of the nineteenth century in the environments in which these women lived "piety" was out of fashion as a religious expression so they were exempt from that too. For some of them the energies that previously had been committed to religious issues had been transformed into social reformist zeal.

The old expectations continued to have meaning for some of the college women, of course. The "exemption" was neither uniform nor complete. As Joyce Antler has observed in her article, "After College, What?: New Graduates and the Family Claim," the college women of the late nineteenth century whom she studied all recognized that there were many more options in life than those embodied in the traditional virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. What many of these women found was that college opened many new possibilities and ideas for them but society, including the society of their families, made it difficult for many of them to organize their own lives in ways to take advantage of these entrancing options. Many reported illness, depression, and despondency on their return to their home communities from college. In their post-college lives convention reigned and for many, the interlude between college and determining their subsequent professional course was painful. Two of the best known examples of women who found that transition extremely difficult but who subsequently triumphed professionally were Jane Addams, who eventually established Hull House in Chicago and M. Carey Thomas, who became president of Bryn Mawr. Similarly several Wellesley alumnae of the class of 1897 who wrote back to the college about their lives as wives and mothers, apparently felt compelled both to justify their choices while admitting that their lives were not as full as they had hoped. One wrote, "The rest of my report is distressingly negative . . . Public services? Nothing greater than an underling in hospital fairs" or another, "I have done nothing wonderful . . . two children." But perhaps their partial exemption from the traditional canons of true womanhood were best expressed by a Vassar graduate who wrote, "We college girls are made to feel that we are different."

Indeed, they were different. By the mid years of the next century, 1940-1960, how different were college women? What was the set of expectations by which women of that generation were to live their lives? To what extent did college attendance influence either those expectations or women's adherence to them?

By the mid-twentieth century college women were no longer different. In 1940 nearly 15 percent of the 18-21 year olds were undergraduates, and of those students, 40 percent were women. Although the proportion of young people attending college had increased significantly from the 8 percent in 1920, the proportion of women among the undergraduates had declined from a

high of 47 percent in 1920 to the 40 percent in 1940. At the beginning of World War II, then, we were beginning to see a new trend that developed during the ensuing twenty years: college attendance was becoming increasingly common, especially for young men. Clearly, participating in World War II from 1941 to 1945 affected college enrollment for men, but similarly that participation made available college attendance in the late 1940's through the G.I. Bill for ex-servicemen, almost entirely men, some of whom would not otherwise have attended college. There were 1.5 million college students in 1940, 2.3 million in 1950, and 3.6 million in 1960. The numbers of college students so substantially increased in the period that no middle class woman could consider herself "different" by virtue of her college attendance in the mid-twentieth century. By the latter years of the century a middle class woman was becoming "different" if she had not gone to college.

"Difference" was increasingly becoming a suspect characteristic for Americans who sought full participation in American life. The cult of conformity that overcame America in the first two thirds of the twentieth century probably had its roots in the Americanization campaigns of the early years of the century when immigrants were coming to the United States in large numbers and when the widely held view was that they should be "assimilated" into American society. For many immigrants "assimilation" was something that they equated with participation in the favorable economic opportunities that seemed better in the United States than in the nation from which they had come. The manifestation of assimilation, however, was frequently a disdain and sometimes a discarding of the cultural traditions of their heritage in favor of what they took to be the new American standards. Most of these new Americans wanted to be middle class. Often they believed their sons would be middle class and American before they felt obligated to assure that their daughters would be as well. One way to become American and middle class was to follow the standards of American behavior that were becoming increasingly comprehensive in their applications to many Americans.

Despite the trauma of the economic recession of the 1930's, a common cultural standard was emerging by 1940. Class differences were being minimized as both the lower and upper classes gravitated toward the attitudes and beliefs associated with the middle class. Regionalism played a diminishing role in American life. Accents, except for southern and a few Brooklyn or New England ones, began to disappear from American speech. Even ethnic differences were reduced as Jews anglicized their names and Slavs and Scandinavians dropped syllables and unwieldy consonants from theirs.

The peak of cultural homogenization probably came about during World War II when the common experience of military service, much more widespread for American men than World War I had been and certainly much more unifying than the Civil War had been, brought together Irish-Americans from Boston with Hoosier Protestants. Even some of the traditional distinctions between officers and enlisted men and their distinct social class origins blurred during World War II under the pressure of mass mobilization. Betty Grable and Rita Hayworth were popular pinups with a very large portion of the male population. *Life* was a magazine with appeal for many GI's as well as for lawyers and for shopkeepers. By 1950 listening to network radio was a national experience for Americans. Comparable adventures on television were approaching with even fewer opportunities for a variety of channels on the tv screen than

radio had provided for different stations. Local newspapers were failing, and many cities soon found themselves with only one paper where a decade or two earlier they had had several from which to choose. Big purveyors of information were getting larger; the small ones were dropping by the wayside. The homogenization of American culture had become so noticeable that by the early 1950's Will Herberg and others were arguing for cultural pluralism as an antidote to the monotony of American Life.

In this milieu there were, of course, a revised set of expectations for middle class women, and they were much more uniformly applied than previous ones since many more Americans then either considered themselves or aspired to be middle class. One way to achieve that pinnacle was to have your daughter follow the mid-twentieth century cannons of true womanhood. The constellation of virtues to which these women were expected to aspire were: youth, appearance, acquiescence, and domesticity. Every woman was supposed to enhance her youth and her appearance and foster her natural predilection for acquiescence and domesticity. The parallel between these qualities and those previously noted as the female virtues a century earlier (piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity) is considerable and pointed in many minds to the legitimacy of the persistence of these qualities as natural or divinely right. Yet piety was not important for the secular, twentieth-century woman. Neither was purity, particularly after the availability of effective contraception. For many Americans the fabled emancipation of women in the twentieth century amounted to a rejection of those two nineteenth-century virtues and adoption of the twentieth century one: acquiescence. One should not submit, but one should acquiesce. There was a subtle difference between the two, placing a premium upon a woman's tact. Finally, the eternal theme of domesticity recurred. The American woman of the mid-twentieth century was to appear young, beautiful, and ardent on demand. She was also to find happiness in her home. Many found that combination difficult.

Unlike the nineteenth century's prescriptive behavior for women, the mid-twentieth century's was not in conflict with college attendance. In fact, undergraduate study was either consistent with or irrelevant to it. To be an undergraduate became proper youthful behavior for a young woman, whose appearance was not harmed by such a step. The posture of any student should be acquiescent, not assertive. In addition, college was frequently considered the ideal place to meet the one with whom the domestic life would be shared. At the end of this era of the mid-twentieth century a women reporter on the *New York Times* described the college girl of that period: "After four years of studying everything from ancient art to modern psychology, the average college girl views her future through a wedding band. Despite compelling evidence (already the evidence was accumulating that the expectations for young women did not meet the reality of a woman's life) that she will be working at 35, by choice or necessity, today's 21-year old woman has difficulty looking beyond the ceremonies of her own marriage and her babies' christenings." College had begun to play the role that high school had in the lives of women at the turn of the century, for many simply a pleasant interlude on the way to growing up. It was an educational experience that prosperous and middle class families sought for their daughters, an experience that all considered fully consistent with society's highest expectations for women.

Graduate school, however, was a different matter. For most

women, the psychological and financial factors considered in that decision were much more serious than those for college. Fundamentally this was true because graduate school was seen not as valuable general education, which was useful to the enlightened citizen, but rather it was seen (although rarely stated as such) as intensely vocational. One went to graduate school because if one did and completed the curriculum successfully, then one would be able to get certain distinctive and generally prestigious jobs. Certainly not all jobs of that sort required graduate school — one could become president of General Motors when that was a booming company without any graduate work — but one could not be a lawyer, physician, professor, or even an advanced teacher — without graduate study. In the post World War II years the number of men going to graduate school increased dramatically, particularly as young men of middle class and lower middle class backgrounds found entry into the professions. Women, who had received 15 percent of the doctorates awarded in 1920 and 18 percent of them in 1930 had dropped to only 10 percent in 1950 and in 1960. The relative decline of women was indicative of the substantially larger number of men who were seeking these degrees. The proportions of women in the prestigious professional schools, especially law and medicine, were even lower.

Graduate school by the mid-twentieth century provided the key to the professions, and one element of the great drive to become middle class was the desire also to become a professional. This current widely recognized in American popular culture, even permeated the elite scholarly literature, as the 1963 issue of *Daedalus* on the professions indicated. Kenneth Lynn introduced that issue with the statement, "Everywhere in American life, professions are triumphant." David Halberstam published his paean to the leaders of the sixties, *The Best and the Brightest*, and praised that unity of intelligence, rationality and tough decisions that supposedly embodied professionalism. Needless to say, all the best and the brightest were men.

The mid-twentieth century female virtues were seriously at odds with professionalism. It is difficult to imagine anything more hostile to professionalism than eroticism. Professionalism supposedly implies a commitment to rationality and rigorous objective standards. Eroticism, with its component of sensuality, is the antithesis of such rationality. Yet if a woman were to be truly a woman in mid-twentieth century America, she had to have some qualities considered erotic. The possession of those characteristics so necessary to her definition as a woman denied her professionalism. While it was not a bad thing for a man to be sexy or good-looking, those qualities were not as essential to his self-definition. In those years discussions of problems of sexual dysfunctionality typically focused on women's difficulties: they were frigid; they failed either to achieve orgasm or the right kind of orgasm. Lundberg and Farnham discussed these and other "problems of the modern woman" in *Modern Woman, The Lost Sex*, a volume that found a wide readership among educated women in the years after it was published in 1947. Only later did sexual problems for men achieve prominence in the popular literature, and then they were frequently blamed on women's new, inappropriately aggressive behavior.

A successful man, in the mid-twentieth century, was to be assertive, and it was widely understood that he would — and probably even should — place a higher priority upon the demands of his job than his responsibilities within his family. For him to fail to do so would lead many to question his professional commitment, a surrogate for his manliness. Yet just the reverse

were the expectations for women. In that era an assertive woman was likely to be called a bitch — or worse — and one who placed her job above the needs of her family was violating a fundamental standard of the society. Domesticity reigned triumphant as a goal, though not as a reality, in women's lives, and they continued to seek to appear youthful, attractive, and acquiescent.

The sixties were a decade of tumult for the nation. They began on a hopeful note with the election of a new president with a charming and entrancing family, particularly his wife, who had had a career — not a very imposing one, but a career, nonetheless — before she married him and began to bear his children. She represented many new, emerging virtues for American women. Jackie Kennedy was beautiful, intelligent, sophisticated, devoted to her children, and until the tragedy struck in Dallas in November 1963, many believed that she represented the new, classy life style that hopeful Americans thought might be theirs. Their dream was short; Camelot remained a mythic entity.

Kennedy's presidency, brief though it was, inaugurated a coming of age of the young, persons who reached maturity in a world shaped not by the great depression of the 1930's but by the affluence of post war America. As Kennedy had urged them, many undertook to do something for their country, not just something for themselves. Not all of their elders were pleased with the projects they undertook.

First came major activity in the civil rights arena. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 followed the harsh actions of white police against blacks in the south. The following year Martin Luther King led thousands in a march from Selma to Montgomery which attracted many liberals, both blacks and whites, from outside Alabama. One of them, a working class white woman from Detroit, Viola Liuzzo, was killed, ambushed in her car by white southerners who believed she should have stayed home.

Staying home proved to be one of the most devious issues of the decade. Hard on the heels of the civil rights movement, which had been initiated by blacks seeking full participation for themselves in the society, came efforts by women, mostly white, middle class women, who began first by challenging the primacy of domesticity as a virtue to which they should aspire. Viola Liuzzo had probably not read the book published two years earlier, *The Feminine Mystique*, but her actions in the civil rights movement represented the change that was coming upon women who made this critique a best seller. Its author, Betty Friedan, a housewife in Rockland County, New York, argued that the media were trying to create an environment in which women were placed on a pedestal and in that isolated, awkward but supposedly admirable position, their opportunities for full participation in the society were impaired.

Both men and women worked together in the civil rights movement, both black and white men and women initially. Later in the decade both men and women worked together on college campuses in the student protests, but women increasingly came to the conviction that in these efforts, they should, as the slogan went, "make policy, not coffee." Generally that was a conviction that the men did not share. Following the deaths in the spring of 1968 of Martin Luther King and of Robert F. Kennedy, the fragile coalitions split. Blacks and whites no longer worked collaboratively on civil rights issues. As the student protest movements on the campuses turned increasingly toward anti-Viet Nam activities, the women lost what leadership they had had. Women, mostly white, mostly

middle class and mostly beyond college age, became involved with the women's movement. "Feminist," initially a derisive term, gradually became a descriptive one.

At first the women's movement had looked as if it might attract only a following from the radical fringe. It was identified with bra burning, attacks on conventional feminine activities (Kinder, Küche & Kirche), and widespread allegations of discriminations against women in all areas of American society. The initial charges were so fundamental and so broad that many women, unsure what the consequences would be of aligning themselves with such a movement, cautiously waited.

By the end of the turbulent 1960's, however, the women's movement was achieving a new legitimacy. In 1969 both Yale and Princeton, bastions of collegiate conservatism, had admitted their first classes of women students. Both institutions argued that it was morally wrong to deprive young women, who they now argued were academically and otherwise equal with men, of an education at Yale and Princeton. Actually in both cases an important component of the decision to become coeducational was the recognition that some of the most talented young men who had been admitted to either Yale or Princeton had decided to go to institutions that were coeducational. The action of Yale and Princeton, however, gave a face validity to the notion that these prestigious and traditional institutions were willing to accept women into their student bodies. Naturally they would not do so initially on an equal basis with men (there were quotas limiting the number of women who could be admitted to a proportion substantially under 50 percent of the undergraduates), but admit them they did.

By 1970 *Time* magazine, that quintessential journal of the middle class, provided evidence that the women's movement was now news for everyone, not just an aberration limited to a few freaks in New York, San Francisco and other exotic spots outside the heartland of America. For its August 31, 1970 cover (the back-to-school issue, perhaps) it pictured Kate Millett, author of the new book, *Sexual Politics*. Although the book, begun initially as a PhD thesis in the Columbia University English Department, was much too abstruse for most readers, the title caught on, symbolizing for many the manipulation of women by men into acceptance of values that women would neither have chosen for themselves nor believed were beneficial for them.

During much of the sixties and the seventies, I believe that it would be impossible to identify the qualities that many women or men would have agreed characterized "true womanhood." Gradually I think we are moving from that period of uncertainty. This evening I want to propose four qualities that encompass what many in this society, both women and men, believe that women should be. The woman of the 1980's should be attractive, active, ambitious, and ambivalent.

The qualities of the eighties differed significantly from those of the mid-years of the century, an evidence of the power of the women's movement itself. The first quality of the mid-century, youth, became for the last twentieth century, attractive. Certainly one of the messages of the last two decades was that while it was certainly desirable for a woman to be young, even more important was for a woman to be attractive. The woman of 30 or 40, or even God forbid, 50 had an obligation to preserve and enhance her attractiveness. Oil of Olay was specifically designed for those of us who are older to keep our skin attractive, as the advertisements with women with slight, lilting foreign accents attest. In an earlier era one accepted the natural beauty

that came with youth; in the present one a woman has a perennial obligation to make herself attractive, regardless of age. In my mother's or my grandmother's generation, at 48 I could have expected to wear shapless cotton housedresses, become dowdy and no longer feel obligated to try and fit into a size 10 dress. Today, despite the efforts of some authors to argue otherwise, such as Susie Orbach in *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, the reigning best seller is by another woman, like Orbach also a feminist, Jane Fonda, whose workout book has been on the *New York Times* best seller list for 56 weeks. All of us have an obligation to work at being attractive and being fit.

Secondly, in addition to being attractive, we must also be active. Being active is, of course, related to being attractive, but it goes beyond simply physical activity, much as that is praised. Aerobic exercise, jogging, swimming are all activities for the woman of the eighties. For some of us who recently got into a leotard for the first time since college physical education some years ago, there was a sense of terrible *deja vu*, as if this were an experience that was appropriate for youngsters but why must the rest of us still have this inflicted upon us! Partly we are active to make us attractive, the first goal of the woman of the eighties, and partly we are active to preserve the flexibility of our youth and enhance our appearance, goals of the mid-twentieth century woman. But we are active for another very important reason as well. The contemplative or sedentary model is no longer one which is highly regarded. The woman whose energies are given to writing letters — even to the sick; to reading — even broadly and in esoteric literatures; to needlework — even if it is lovely; to painting water colors — even if they are breathtaking; such a woman, who in the Victorian era would have been highly praised for embracing the qualities of true womanhood, would be disparaged today as not being active enough. She need not wear British Brevitts and hike briskly through the woods, but she does need to move, to participate.

If the first two characteristics defined the way she should look, be attractive, and the mode in which she should act, be active, the third and fourth determine the attitudes she should hold. The third replaces the submissiveness of the nineteenth century and the acquiescence of the mid-twentieth with ambition. No longer is a woman to arrange her world around a man's. Now she is to have goals for her life, and she is expected to admit them frankly and more than simply admit them, she is supposed to act to attain them. Many women expect to achieve their ambition through employment, although for some women ambition is not simply in terms of vocation. One recent study of Barnard College undergraduates found that only six percent expect never to work while 53 percent expect to work full time. The balance expected to work full time and part time, arranging their working schedule around the needs of their families. A Roper poll recently reported that twice as many women are working full time now as ten years ago, now 35 percent vs. 18 percent at the beginning of the 1970's. Three months ago the Department of Labor revealed that the total number of women working rose 95 percent in the last twenty years. Given the high unemployment rates, especially for women, these current figures are probably lower than what women would like.

Perhaps even more indicative of the ambition that young woman, especially, now feel comfortable in expressing is the sentiment of a senior at the Emma Willard school, who explained to a researcher who inquired about her plans, "I am going to be **VERY SUCCESSFUL** and at 25 I am going to retire and have a family." Such is the level of realism among some of

the young! Only slightly more realistic are these two examples of changing ambitions among Radcliffe alumnae, the first from the class of 1969, "While I was at Radcliffe, I thought about choosing a safe profession, one that I could leave in order to have children and then resume again later." The second is from the class of 1979, "I want a career that will allow me to be financially independent. I'd like to get married, but it is important for me to have a professional identity first." The most popular academic majors for Radcliffe students in the first group were English, history and philosophy but for the second, those who want a career and financial independence, the most popular majors were biology, economics, and government.

Young women, especially, anticipate a life that will bring an interesting and compelling job. With such, they believe, will come fulfillment. Most undergraduate women today have never faced the overt discrimination in employment encountered by their elders. Many women in graduate and professional schools have not faced it either. Hopefully they never will, but the persistence of the female wage at 59 percent of the male wage is discouraging in this respect. For most young women immediately out of college or professional school, the job opportunities are remarkably similar as those for young men of the same academic preparation. Perhaps what is most important, young women's and young men's expectations for career possibilities in first jobs are also remarkably similar, and in that similarity we find a profound difference with the past.

The attractive, active, ambitious woman of the 1980's has one other characteristic, one that society expects her to have and one that is, in fact, widely shared among women of all ages today. She is ambivalent. Her ambivalence in the eighties replaced the domesticity of her mother and her female ancestors. She is ambivalent, of course, because neither she nor anyone else knows how to combine successfully her ambition with her desire for a compelling personal life. If her personal life is to include a family, either a husband, or husband and children, or just children, adjustments must be made in her expectations for her career. Just what adjustments are those? What agencies in the society have responsibility for assuring those adjustments? Is she expected to make these adjustments all alone without any help from the outside, from social institutions, from her employer, or, most of all, from the father of her children? If there is one thing that women learned from the women's movement of the last two decades, it is that the problems which they thought were theirs individually were actually part of a larger set of social problems that affected them all. Yet this question of the appropriate balance between career or employment and family life is one to which still women are seeking individual, not collective, solutions.

The ambivalence of women, characteristic of nearly all generations today, is perhaps most clearly seen among those who came to maturity during the uncertainty of the last two decades and who found themselves as young women just out of college supported by the society to seek an important job or significant post-graduate study. Many of them did so successfully and now in their mid or late thirties or even early forties, having forthrightly pursued an elusive goal called "success" with its concomitants of money, prestige, and recognition, they discover that other elements of their lives need attention. For those who are married, there is the question of children. Their biological clock is running down. But what will children do to their life style? The one answer to that question is that children will change their life style, but in what ways? For those who are not



married, there may also be the question of children, either of their own, or adopted or jointly reared with the child's natural parent. In any case, well-educated women are concerned about the matter. The higher the level of a woman's education, the fewer children she is likely to have and the later in life she is likely to have them.

At least as important as the question of children in fostering the ambivalence that a woman feels, is her uncertainty regarding the adult or adults whom she will love. How important should that relationship be? To what extent should one make accommodations to the needs of another? Traditionally issues of morality have been expressed in terms of one's rights (I have the right to do x or y or z) but recent work by Carol Gilligan has revealed that women often view these matters in terms of responsibilities. For the women, then, the question is likely to be, "What is my responsibility to myself and to the one whom I love?" Most do not find the answer immediately apparent.

An ongoing study of undergraduate women in the so-called "Seven Sister" colleges (Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Mt. Holyoke, Radcliffe, Smith, Vassar, and Wellesley) finds that most expect to have a very good career in a prestigious profession and have two or three children. The women undergraduates' goals are very similar to those of a sample of men undergraduates at Harvard. In addition, less than 3 percent of the women surveyed are interested in traditional women's careers, such as teaching or social work. On the basis of very tentative findings the seniors seem to believe that they can work full time and have their children while the freshmen are more inclined to believe that some modifications in working (either taking time out from employment or working part time — both sure to reduce opportunities for career ambitions to be realized) are required.

What is obvious is that in the older generation of women, ones now in their 40's and 50's, the opportunities for combining successful career and parenthood were limited. Whether those limitations occurred because women and society in general discouraged such combinations or because women were not prepared to undertake such responsibilities is unclear. Undoubtedly both factors contribute to an explanation. Now it is reasonably clear that women are prepared to undertake such responsibilities and are educated through undergraduate and professional schools to do so. Whether society is yet ready for these women when they are middle aged to have the same opportunities as middle age men is much less clear.

One may observe that while ambivalence may be characteristic of many modern women, it is not socially sanctioned. Women may be ambivalent, but society does not expect them to be ambivalent the way they are expected to be active, attractive and ambitious. I would argue that indeed society at the present time does expect women to be ambivalent about the commitments to job and to personal life. This ambivalence is expected, I believe, because we are in a transitional period in which we as a society have not yet resolved what, ultimately, we believe should be the priorities of adult lives for persons of both sexes. In the face of this ambiguity, we prescribe ambivalence for women.

Again the question returns: to what extent does higher education have any role to play in affecting these expectations for women? The first observation is that women now constitute a majority of the undergraduates, both among the conventional age group (age 18 to 21) and among the total. There are also lots more undergraduates now than there were twenty years ago. In 1960 there were 3.6 million students enrolled in college; in

1970, a phenomenal rise to 8 million, and in 1980, 10 million. Secondly, college or university attendance today is a necessary prerequisite for most prestigious (and some not so prestigious) careers. Enrollments of women in professional schools, such as law, medicine, and business, have jumped from under five percent in 1960 to over thirty percent today. Still substantial but less dramatic increases have occurred for women PhD's, from 10 percent in 1960 to over 25 percent now.

Higher education has continued to play an important role in preparing women so that they can meet entry level requirements for jobs, but it has not been as helpful to them in providing adult examples in their own institutions of women who have successfully combined career and family. The proportion of women in senior, as opposed to junior, positions in faculties and administrations has not grown dramatically, although it has increased. Men faculty continue to be substantially more likely to be tenured than women (70 percent v. 49 percent), and men faculty continue to be paid more than women in the same ranks (about \$5000 for full professors in private universities). Higher education today gets a woman started, but it does not give her much guidance about what to do after she has begun.

One of the most interesting aspects of these new expectations for women in the late twentieth century is the degree of convergence with expectations for men in the same period. Some might call this evidence of creeping androgyny. Certainly men of the nineteenth century were not supposed to be pious, pure, submissive and domestic. Neither were men of the mid-twentieth century expected to share the virtues of youth, appearance, acquiescence and domesticity. Now, however, the gap is much less. Men today want to be attractive; Grecian Formula 16 is a big seller on the male market. They are also supposed to be active, not just in youthful football as was the case twenty years ago, but through fitness programs involving even the middle aged. When Dr. Paul Dudley White began exercising in Boston in the 1950's, he was nearly alone. Now the paths along the Charles River are clogged with trim, gray-haired and balding men, as well as young ones, who are jogging to stay fit, keep their weight down, and lower their blood pressure. Not surprisingly, men still are ambitious, though the attention given to type A personalities has had the effect of modifying their stated goals slightly. The workaholic is not the universal stamp of approval that it once was. Finally, even men are becoming ambivalent. What ought the balance be in their lives between their jobs and their personal lives? In previous generations very little conscious thought was given to that equation, but today many men, either those who have the issue triggered by the newly popular mid-life crisis or those who became involved with one of the feminist, ambitious professional women or simply those who for whatever reasons are now able to express their intention for a close family life — all face the question of responsibility for personal lives and for family demands too. The company no longer can make unilateral assignments for men to move from Toledo to Texarkana. Promotions of that kind raise men's sense of ambivalence too.

Thus, to conclude, we find the women of today beneficiaries of much broader societally sanctioned options prescribing the ways in which they should spend their adult lives than was true for middle class American women of earlier generations. We, today, often feel ambivalent about these varied opportunities. For our ancestors the issue was one of conforming or breaking the mold into which society had put them. For us the issue is different: for us the issue is choice. We must decide within a

wide range of options what it is that we will do, to what we will give priority. Many of us are hesitant to make those choices, since we are never clear precisely what the consequences of the alternative we choose will be. Furthermore, in making such choices we are assuming responsibility for our own lives. By doing so we no longer can blame whatever difficulties we have upon circumstances that either kept us in a mold or forced us to take dramatic action to break out of it. Our excuses are gone,

and we are assuming full responsibilities for our adult lives. That may be uncomfortable occasionally, but it is decidedly preferable in my view to the alternative. Rejoice in your options for choice. Don't be paralyzed by them. Decide what you will do. Move ahead in your life, assuming responsibility for your decisions, knowing that unlike previous generations you have more opportunities to decide what you will do, whom you will be. That is a great gift.

# Communication and Information

## PRINCIPLES ARE IMPORTANT

By W. SCOTT THOMPSON, *Associate Director, U.S. Information Agency*

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FOR the past decade, trend-watchers have heralded the coming of a new era — an era they called the “information age.” Now we are told that the information age has arrived. Recently, I saw an advertisement that began: “Bit by bit, information systems are reshaping our world.”

Another advertisement reads:

“Information has become the fuel that drives the economy of America.”

And still another announces:

“The information age is calling.”

In the United States, the vendors of information products and services are spending large advertising budgets to make a point that is perhaps best summarized in an advertisement that says:

“There's a world of information just waiting for you.”

Yet to use that information — to enjoy it, to profit from it, to learn from it — one must have access to it. Access to information, and access to the technologies that communicate information, are hardly assured rights, at least not in many parts of the world.

For instance, until very recently, Soviet citizens had access to the West through direct-dial telephone. But the Kremlin decided to discard that technology because it was too efficient; the Kremlin had lost too much information control over its own people.

This Soviet decision deserves to be deplored, just as we deplore Soviet jamming of radio broadcasts from the West.

Government decisions such as these remind us that the benefits of the information age cannot be fully realized and shared when government policy dictates otherwise. Public policy will profoundly shape our lives in this new age, and such policies are founded in fundamental philosophical assumptions concerning political freedoms to communicate and receive information. The choice is essentially between efforts to control the flow of information or encourage it. In free societies, the presumption is in favor of free flow.

As the world moves into this new age of information, an age in which applied technology is providing more and more channels through which information can be communicated, that choice today takes on new importance. Now, governments find that if they are to operate effectively they must operate in an environment characterized by abundant communications channels. This is not always easy, even for free societies, but it is absolutely essential.

In the United States for example, the Freedom of Information Act could not have been so fully implemented without the technology to make possible the processing of an enormous volume of requests. However, the new technology has served the legislation so well, that many now question whether the architects of the Act intended it to be utilized so extensively. In the context of a communication technology revolution it is increasingly difficult to balance an individual's right to protect his or her personal privacy with the government's need to collect data, and the public's right to know what is kept on file in government data bases.

Examples such as these teach us the virtue of pragmatism when seeking solutions to difficult public policy problems. Abroad, as well as at home, the United States intends to act with a degree of pragmatism in negotiating the rules by which we live in this new age of information.

In the 1980s there will be a significant series of international negotiations on telecommunications, as well as on other aspects of communications. In the next few years, the International Telecommunications Union alone has scheduled important conferences on the subjects of direct broadcast satellites, international shortwave broadcasting, and communication through satellites orbiting in outer space.

For these and other negotiations to be successful, all parties must be motivated by the desire for mutual cooperation. The Reagan Administration is committed to seeking cooperative agreements that lend themselves to a stable order among nations in the dynamic context of an information and communications revolution.

Consequently, we do not intend to be rigid at the negotiating table, nor do we intend to be unrealistic. Progress, we believe, is not only possible but necessary, and we will conduct ourselves accordingly.

I do hasten to add, however, that progress must not come at the complete expense of principle. The risk of unfettered pragmatism, of course, is that fundamentals can be too easily forgotten.

For the Reagan Administration there are three principles that guide the Administration as we formulate, and then strive to implement, foreign policy with respect to communications and information.

The *first* principle is the basic human right of every individual to receive and impart information freely.

The *second* flows from the principles of free-market enter-



