

# Women and the Brain Drain

In the early part of the twentieth century militant Suffragists fought for the equality of women. One of their demands was equal education for women. Many believed that from that would flow equal job opportunities and equal pay for equal work. But it didn't turn out that way. One of the reasons it didn't is that the basic role of women as defined by our society, was never challenged.

Women who are now entering university are still mainly concentrated in the arts and specifically in social work and teaching. These professions are socially acceptable for women because they are seen as extensions of their "natural" role i.e. women are compassionate, understanding, loving and patient; therefore women should be in careers that utilize these qualities. The fact is that women are also more than that. They have the qualities necessary to become doctors, lawyers and architects, but society has defined these professions as masculine and women are discouraged from entering into them.

During her high school years the roles of men and women as defined by our society, are clearly laid out for the female student. She will be channelled into home economics courses while her male friends take wood working. In certain schools women are forbidden to take physics or any other advanced courses. In addition, the roles of women in literature and history reinforce the roles of women which the female student sees around her



every day. Women in literature assume a limited number of roles: as a supportive character (often a wife or a daughter), as sexual object, again judged through her interaction with a man, or the occasional woman heroine, most often portrayed as scheming, cruel, greedy - questing for power that is not rightly hers.

On the pages of history, women are almost as scarce as blacks. Some who spring most quickly to mind are Florence Nightengale, a nurse, Madame Curie, member of a husband-wife team, Eleanor Roosevelt, who gained prominence through her husband and was known as a great humanitarian - as opposed to her husband, the great statesman, Cleopatra and

Mata Hari whose manipulatory powers were notably linked with their bodies as opposed to their minds.

The only women in history who seem to have "made it" are the Queens. Even so historians have tried to belittle these these women. For example, they have tried to discredit Elizabeth the First on the ground that she was frigid because she never married. Other women have

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been portrayed as the: "Wife behind the great man", never as independent-thinking women who have made a valuable contribution to history. History students are never taught about such women as Rosa Luxemburg, Charlotte Corday or the Suffragists.

In school, the girl student sees a predominance of women teachers and a male principal. At home, her mother, often with a university education herself, performs the daily chores of washing, cooking, caring for the children and being a companion to the bread-winner father. Most of the women she knows are married and those who are not earn the scorn and jeers of the "settled" women, regardless of the value of whatever they might be pursuing.

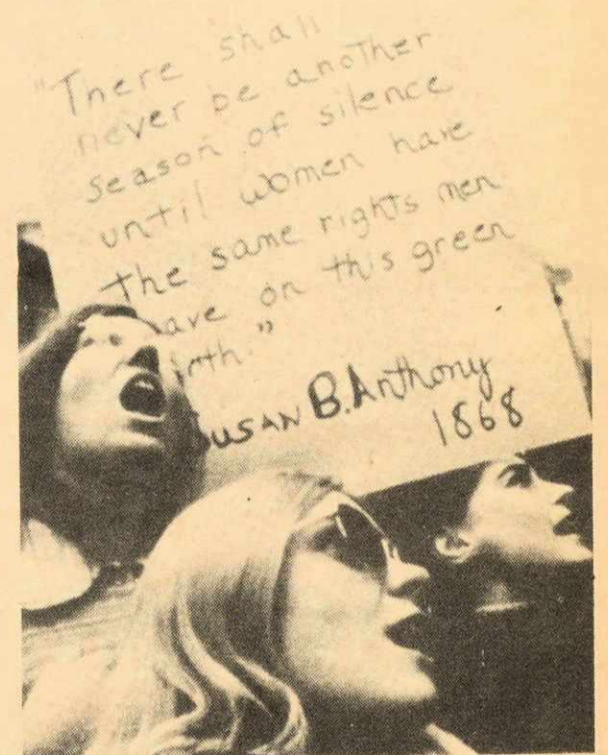
The student, then, confronted with a limited perspective of what a women's role can be, sees herself as an incomplete individual who needs a man to "bring out" her "dormant" qualities. Because she sees herself as inherently inferior, education, or the means of developing herself does not become a priority. The priority becomes getting married. And in marriage, her creativity, intellect and individuality change from forces valuable in themselves to things subordinate, existing to serve a greater force - her husband's.

For men, who see themselves as people in their own right, the need to get married is not as great. Because they are taught that they will fulfill their potential through their jobs, they see the need for self-development. Women, who are socialized to see themselves fulfilled through their men, do not find education as vital. This is one reason why there are fewer women than men at university.

When a woman enters university, she may assume that she is on an equal footing with a man taking the same course. They both have the same qualification, the same intellect. She has made it, so far, as his equal. However, as the years progress, the number of women in a course drops more quickly than the number of men. Even in a department like English, where many PhD students are women, not to mention an overwhelming proportion of undergraduates, there is only one woman professor of the 20 in the department.

Women in the university are still trapped in the roles to which they have been socialized since their grade school days. All around her she sees her alternative - marriage. Her actions, even in the university, must be consistent with this eventual, or inevitable end. "An educated woman is a valuable thing". The female university student must find the right blend of charm and intellect. She must be able to attract

a man, but to keep him she must adapt her intellect. She must be able to listen attentively, respond to his ideas, but never - especially in public - challenge them.



If a woman engages in vehement debate, her arguments are often dismissed as emotional. If she persists in arguing her point she may receive the ultimate punishment - to be declared unfeminine. It is no fun for a man to argue with a woman. When a man is with a woman he wants to relax - if he wanted stimulating conversation he would talk to a man.

Most of us have been so thoroughly brain-washed into believing that we are weak, submissive and dependent that we spend a great amount of time at university worrying about dating instead of trying to challenge our system of education in the areas where it does not serve our interests (boring, irrelevant lectures, exams, compulsory attendance, etc.) because we subconsciously feel that our real interest lies outside university education.

One reason we do not get together and work toward these goals is that we see each other as competitors for the "prize" - man. The saying that women cannot get along together is a myth. When we can stop viewing each other as rivals, we will be able to define for ourselves what our goals will be and we can start working together to open alternatives for ourselves and other women. Only together can we combat the pressures, in high school, university and the outside world, which serve to divide us and channel us into positions where we will be useful to a male-dominated society.

The goal in our life does not have to be marriage, we do not have to accept the roles that society defines for us. It is, only by working together that we will be able to create a world in which both women and men can relate to each other as human beings rather than as competitors.