

The Feminine MYSTIQUE:

The Gateway sent Myrna Kostash, arts 3, gently out into the campus to find out how significant the Feminine Mystique concept is of the co-eds. The Mystique traces its way back to Betty Friedan, author of "The Feminine Mystique" who argues fiercely against it. Its essence: "The root of women's troubles in the past is that women envied men, tried to be like them, instead of accepting their own nature, which can find fulfillment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing material love." Gateway's agent came up with the following comments and quotes.

by Myrna Kostash

Constance Co-ed walked down the hallway in her discotheque dress and Italian shoes. She smiled vividly at some guy. She pushed her hair around in front of a window. Then she turned into the physics lab and split an atom.

Let me warn you about the women on this campus. They're not as simple as they might look. Maybe they aren't smoking cigars, running the World Bank or even the History Club, but they aren't brainless baby machines either.



MYRNA KOSTASH

Behind the reassuring exteriors of pretty faces and more-or-less curvaceous bodies rest active minds. These are minds that have strong opinions, that range from the expectedly traditional to the unsettling unorthodox. Talking to these girls I was often shocked, angered, frustrated, amused. I was never bored.

I was talking to these girls because I was interested in finding out how the celebrated Feminine Mystique operated on this campus. It doesn't. I tried industriously to find the ideal

Mystiquette, but no one girl conformed flawlessly to the philosophy expressed by a co-ed that Betty Friedan found:

"I don't want to be interested in world affairs. I don't want to be interested in anything besides my home and being a wonderful wife and mother. Maybe education is a liability."

COMES CLOSE

One girl, pinned and active in a fraternity, came perilously close to this image: "I do think that a wife should be at home to serve her husband. Not because he demands it, but because she wants to do it. I've looked forward all my life to cooking and sewing and running a home."

But she quickly added: "I like being feminine, soft and sweet and loving, but not to the point of being stupid about it. You can be feminine and intelligent."

This was the theme that ran through all the opinions expressed. Whether engaged or dateless, vivacious or timid, smug or rebellious, every girl I talked to had the same concept—with variations—about herself.

Through the pot-pourri of ideas they sometimes incoherently expressed emerges a definition that most university women have found for themselves. It is a definition that integrates the dichotomous function of a female being: what goes on above the neck and what goes on below it. Every girl accepted her biological womanliness without rancor—some even enjoyed it. But not one denied that important things are happening in her head too.

"It isn't fair to give a woman a different intellectual role simply because of her different biological one. From the neck up a woman is the same as a man."

And, "Being a woman is more than being a housewife or sexual instrument. That's boring. I want to do something different, something exciting. I want to learn."

WHY THEY'RE HERE

And that's why they are at university. It's impossible to know to what extent these girls were being dishonest to me or to themselves. If they were completely sincere, there is no reason to believe that most co-eds are on campus to "catch a man." They're

here because "my parents wanted me to go to college" or because "it never occurred to me to do anything else." More reassuring, but less typical is the answer of a third-year arts co-ed:

"I'm here because it's important that I think things I've never thought before. I knew all the answers in high school. Now I have a lot of questions."

Several girls also spoke of university as "a means to an end—a way of getting into the business world," or as a preparation for a career, an independent life.

Did they think they were losing their femininity by going to university and competing with men? A quartet of home ec girls replied indignantly:

"We're not losing femininity—we're gaining respect for our work and education."

A third-year arts student answered me with a snort: "I don't think I've lost any femininity. The men who think women are too stupid to talk to are too stupid for me to talk to."

WEAK, NOT MEEK

If they felt they were still in control of their femininity, they must have had a definition for it: "the ability to be loved and return love," "being winsome and charming," "it means having someone open a door or put on my coat for me. It means complementing masculinity with gentleness and sympathy. It means recognizing in myself a certain weakness, but not meekness."

One girl, recently a science student, didn't like the word: "Men and women are educated by society into demonstrating certain 'masculine' or 'feminine' traits. A woman is physically different from a man—perhaps a bit more emotional—but there is nothing else in me that makes me innately a woman."

Yet, even she admitted that if she were going to be happy, she would have to adopt some of these feminine artifices society has dreamed up: "I must look as aesthetic as possible, acting graceful and pleasant, behaving with reasonable decorum. I don't want people to think I'm a zombie. It's a social disadvantage to be a zombie."

She concluded with a clever look in her eyes: "I want to look at the Mystique as objectively as possible so as to extract from it what I want to apply to myself. I want others to think me feminine, without my thinking I am."

VARIOUS NOTIONS

Now that I knew each girl had accepted a feminine role for herself, I wanted to discover just what that role entailed for her. Each girl admitted that she would very likely get married eventually. But that's as far as they agreed with each other. Their notions of what marriage should be varied from that of the first-year co-ed who confessed "I guess I'd like to be dominated after all" to that of a pre-medicine student who included marriage in her future because "it's easier to get along in society that way and be-

cause it would be nice to live with the man you love. But that doesn't mean my marriage will be a life-long career of adoration."

Or as one girl put it: "If he hates purple, then I won't wear it, but I'm not going to pick up his socks either. Self-abasement is absurd because you're no longer being true to yourself as a person. 'To thine own self be true' applies to women as well as to men, you know."

Another girl glared at me and said, rather nastily, "I hate that word—male domination. Marriage is a partnership—no one can dominate. It takes two to tango."

Her friend disagreed: "I favor male domination to a degree. A wife has to respect her husband; major decisions belong to him. It makes me feel superior to myself if I can make him feel better by thinking he's superior to me. How many of us want complete equality anyway?"

A political science student answered that question rather marvelously: "I will accept passivity with a man only in the sex act. I wouldn't want to completely initiate and direct our sexual relations, although there are moments in the sex act when I would want to take the aggressive role."

I noticed she said "man" instead of "husband." Didn't she anticipate marriage in her future?

SOMETHING RICHER

"I will not seek marriage for its own sake. It was to be some-



"IT'S A SOCIAL DISADVANTAGE TO BE A ZOMBIE"