

# Quadrille

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Bennington College  
Bennington, Vermont



## A Coeducational Bennington: Is Now the Time?

In the wake of *Quadrille's* February issue featuring a discussion of the possibility and desirability of coeducation at Bennington, the whole question has been reopened. President Bloustein has appointed a Special Committee on the Admission of Male Students, composed of faculty, students and administration, which is charged with the responsibility of studying the question and making a recommendation to the constituencies of the community during the Spring semester. We hope that this special issue of *Quadrille*, in which we present the correspondence we have received in response to the interview, will be useful in stimulating the discussion.

The question of making Bennington College a coeducational institution is not a new one. It was brought before the Board of Trustees in 1947 after personal interviews with the faculty revealed that two-thirds were in favor of it. The Board finally decided to turn down the recommendation of the special committee (see Dr. Chassell's letter). Although the question was discussed during the next fifteen years, no formal proposal was brought before the community until 1964. At that time, a student referendum was held in conjunction with a Faculty EPC consideration of the question. The student referendum was inconclusive, with only about half of the students responding: 70% were against the proposal (with and without reservations), 28% were in favor, and 2% were neutral. A survey of the faculty, however, again showed a majority in favor of the change. The main common argument in favor of coeducation was that the intellectual life of the community would be more stimulating. Offered against the proposal were the arguments that men

would be distracting and inhibiting, and that Bennington is unique, that other places should fill the need for coeducation. Also, some concern was expressed that Bennington would not attract first-rate men.

On the strength of the referendum results and their own deliberations, the Faculty EPC recommended at that time that Bennington should remain a women's college, but that the question of coeducation should be actively and systematically investigated. They also voted to include in the catalogue the statement that "on occasion, well-qualified men" might be accepted to the College, this in accordance with established practice.

Since then, the question has come up in a number of ways. The Admissions Office conducted a survey of girls accepted to Bennington, but who chose other colleges, as to the reasons for their choice. The results of the survey (see Rebecca Stickney's letter) show that there is increasing pressure from applicants for a coeducational environment.

The Alumnae Office, in compiling the replies to their recent questionnaire, discovered that quite frequently the reason some women never completed their education at Bennington was their desire to be at a less isolated and/or coeducational college. In response to the question, "Would you, in the light of your post-college experience, choose to come to Bennington again?" a number of alumnae volunteered that they "believed that coeducation is a better principle than that of separating the sexes," that they "would hesitate about Bennington only because it is not coeducational," that "a coeducational college would have offered a more well-balanced atmosphere." Many

alumnae felt being in an "educational incubator" (see Sarah Magee's letter) for two years was wonderful, but that it became stifling for any longer.

The 1964 referendum was held on the question of whether Bennington should become coeducational on an immediate 50-50 ratio of men and women. The present discussion does not limit itself in this manner and the following letters put forth a variety of options. President Bloustein, in establishing the committee to discuss the question, suggested that it "examine the possibility of admitting only male transfers in their junior or senior year" and the possibility of "admitting males enrolled in

other colleges for one-year programs at Bennington with the thought that they will ultimately graduate from the colleges from which they came."

President Bloustein also made the point that "there is an urgency to the discussion now which was not evident when the issue was last discussed on campus. We are in the middle of our modest expansion and building program and we must soon reach a decision on building more new student houses. If we are ever to admit a substantial number of males, we must make that decision very soon so that it can be reflected in our planning."

## Response from Admissions

To the Editor:

The Admissions Office has some figures which might contribute to this discussion of education.

We sent a questionnaire to those applicants invited to come to Bennington last September and who turned us down. There was a 66% response. From the various questions asked 18% specified lack of coeducation as "... Bennington's chief drawback" (of course, we have no idea how many did not apply because we were not co-educational); 67% specified isolation/location.

Those of us who talk with hundreds of 11th and 12th graders every year and visit with almost as many guidance counselors in schools across the country know that most of that 67% are not bothered by the location of Bennington *per se*, but are troubled by the isolation imposed on it by its exclusion of men. There is no question in my mind that if we began to seek out and admit a group of male students (ideally transfers), of intellectual capacity and drive equal to our present student population, the number of those refusing our admission offer would drop significantly.

Bennington is still news, and it is this fact that allows us to attract so many able women students. But it seems to me that this is no argument for maintaining the current stance. Our present position deprives us of a certain group of women students, as well as male students, for whom this program would be valuable.

—Rebecca Stickney '43  
Director of Admissions  
Bennington College

## The 1947 Referendum

Dear President Bloustein:

Recently I have heard that along with the extensive expansion of the college there will gradually be an increase in the number of men students; perhaps it should be de-

scribed as "infiltration"? Anyhow, I liked the idea, and was reminded of the discussions we had just twenty-one years ago this fall.

After affirmative action by a majority of the faculty, we met with a Trustee committee on March 13, 1947. Our suggestions were vetoed with the following considerations being raised:

1. It is all right to take a few non-resident veterans, as now. But it would be too dangerous now to open a house on the campus for them. Mrs. Franklin: the parents are jittery enough as it is about sending their girls to such a wild place!

2. Different colleges have different functions and strengths. Bennington has its own. At the educational organization meetings in the beginning, educators who believed in coeducation in principle agreed that Bennington should not be coed because of the experimentation, because of its location and clientele, and other reasons. Any change would have to be carefully considered, with alumnae also involved. However, no permanent decision should now be assumed; conditions might change.

3. The Trustees—very much like the faculty—favor coeducation in principle. They would be ready to entertain any "good case"; but those who favor coeducation must present a good case as to why it is necessary for the educational situation at Bennington—not in general—and what concretely it would add that is important and how, practically, it could be done.

The idea of merely admitting men who apply and meet the standards would not work, Mr. Kelley felt. It would not really be coeducational; the men would be the exceptions. Hence, if it were to be planned it should include such provisions as pre-professional training for men, scholarships and other features to attract enough qualified men to constitute 51% of the student body.

I tried to counteract with the argument that, with modern mobility of students, the idea of a coeducational col-

lege as a self-contained community was anachronistic, and we would not need a football coach or other paraphernalia to attract the men who wanted this particular kind of education. The argument about mobility, and that the campus need be no island or enclave to itself, could be, and I suspect was, used equally in favor of maintaining the status quo. At that time I believe the statistics were that on the average week night there were 75 men (mostly from Williams) on campus, with 150 on weekends. The counterargument to this was that they were there for fun and games and were met predominantly by the girls with social interest and know-how. It was not the same kind of experience as working along with even only a sprinkling of boys in class and lab or studio.

Mrs. Franklin's sympathies were with "late bloomers" like herself. Those who would feel out of the running had probably not yet fully matured, and might be hurt by "losing out" in the competition as freshmen, whereas by the time they were through college they would be ready to meet boys. It would not help to force the issue on them earlier. She also emphasized that families with enough money for Bennington will experiment with their daughters' education, but not with their sons'.

An additional item from Trustees who had been around: girls dressed about the same at Swarthmore, Antioch, and Bennington.

With best regards,  
Joseph O. Chassell, M.D.  
Stockbridge, Mass.

*Dr. Chassell taught psychology and psychiatry at Bennington from 1939 to 1948.*

## Some student views

*To the Editor:*

It is no longer pertinent to discuss whether or not a man's mind is different from a woman's. Men are as desirable in the classroom as they are in any other situation; the judgment as to how desirable they are varies from person to person.

For Bennington the question is answerable only in terms of the purpose of the college. The girls for whom the Bennington classroom was designed now find many larger institutions which have adopted Bennington's liberal educational policies, and they have the added advantage of a wide range of people and resources.

Perhaps the concept of an *avant garde* school is no longer relevant. Certainly, with other schools readily adopting its policies, Bennington itself is becoming an anachronism. No longer unique, Bennington is left an institution with a central nervous system and no body; it suffers from its isolation and a claustrophobic inability to extend itself.

Bennington needs a widely expanded program offering a broader and more stimulating life for its students. With it, there must be men.

—Ruth Bluestein '68

*To the Editor:*

Although *Quadrille's* article on coeducation at Bennington had very little to do with coeducation at Bennington, the initial question posed merits serious attention.

At what point should a college admit to itself that it is no longer, in 1968, a particularly "experimental" college and that the education it offers is not uniquely its own? I think that if Bennington continues to create its own introverted momentum on the assumption that God's Chosen People are 400 somewhat self-indulged females the effects can only be severely detrimental to what it originally hoped to accomplish. The world is coeducational, and there are excellent schools from here to the West Coast which testify to that fact. If Bennington is to survive the progress of the rest of the world, then it must become a reflection, however dim, of the world as it is, rather than remain an ultimately inappropriate academic playground for girls.

—Penelope Hargrove '70

*To the Editor:*

My own thoughts on coeducation produce a mixed bag. What I can offer is some subjective evaluation of my own Bennington education as seen in the light of the question of whether coeducation should be established there.

In retrospect, I do not think my first two years at Bennington would have had nearly the same value for me that they did have if there had been many men students present. In those first two years at Bennington, I began to explore possibilities which had been unheard of before I came there. Suddenly at Bennington I discovered that education could be a source of joy and excitement. In the first few months, I could literally feel my mind begin to function in a way that it had never before been asked to perform. That experience was personal, selfish, and self-centered, and it was largely aided by the lack of men at the school. Looking back on it, I realize that it was as if I were in a kind of educational incubator—an unnatural and impossible environment in which to grow very greatly, but the optimum place to get a firm start in one's intellectual life.

Like K. K. Holabird and Mr. Blake, I think the girls at Bennington are rude to one another and are terribly destructive, yet very close at the same time. The physical situation of Bennington is such that cerebral and emotional isolation seem the only alternatives. And yet we do

## Editorial Note

*Quadrille* is published at Bennington College six times a year during term. It is designed to reflect the views and opinions of students, faculty, administration, alumnae, trustees, parents of students, and friends of the College. It is distributed to all the constituencies, and is intended primarily as a monthly paper in which members of the Greater College Community may expound, publicly, on topical issues.

The editors of *Quadrille* invite articles, statements, opinion and comment, letters to the editors, photographs and graphics, and reviews from members of all the constituencies.

This is a special issue, devoted entirely to the question of coeducation at Bennington. For that reason no Alumnae news, articles or letters to the Editors have been included, but will appear in the May issue of *Quadrille*.

Due to the large response and space limitations, the Editors were forced to edit and shorten some letters published here. They hope they have done so without distorting the original intent of the authors.

### STAFF

Editor—Laurence J. Hyman

Managing Editor—Faith Westburg

—Drawings by Marion Breeze Williams

not live in a "community" in the Quaker sense of concern which that word can imply (which perhaps helps to explain the problems with which *Judicial* is presented). On the contrary, for at least a part of our time at Bennington, each of us is fighting desperately to grow up—to become strong as individuals in mind and in personality and in our expression of ourselves.

I came to resent the very presence of men on campus. I was glad enough to go away and see male friends at other schools, but I did not even want them, my friends, to come to Bennington. What I was struggling through was a private mental and emotional growth which seemed so fragile that it could be jeopardized by the intrusion of others, especially the distraction of men. Perhaps this also helps to explain why we are often so unkind to one another. I was too insecure of my own way, too protective of my precious "self" to have had the time or strength to assert that growth against men of equal or better capabilities. I use "against" purposely, for the growth process is sometimes and of necessity a violent one. I fear that I and others of my friends would have given in to the kind of passivity which made high school bearable by willingly

adopting a passive and benign role with men of equal ability.

Now I feel quite differently on the question of coeducation at Bennington. For the first time this past term, I think that the further progress of my education is genuinely hampered by the fact that there are no men in my classes. It has become increasingly apparent that the feminine mode of thinking, while in no way less valuable than that of the male, is often quite *different*. It is a difference I would not want to erase. In spite of the increasing discussion of the disappearance of distinct male-female dichotomies, those distinctions have not become that blurred yet.

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In my philosophy class I felt most especially deprived. After a term's attempt, I found an attempt to gain an adequate insight into the methodology of Descartes, Hume, and Kant almost absurd when only female minds dealt with their writings. In my literature classes, in economics class, outside of class—I know that the presence of men with equal and better minds would have immeasurably enriched discussion. There is something about the relationship of girls together which seems to preclude the kind of interchange that is routine for a comparable group of men.

One of the things that has always impressed me about Harvard (in contrast to the many things that do not impress me about it) is the calibre of everyday conversations outside the classroom. There is a kind of *objective* discussion of issues and problems, which one seldom encounters among groups of girls at Bennington unless they are with a faculty member or in class (sometimes not even then!). I am sick of remarks preceded either in actuality or tone by "I feel." I am sick of encountering almost exclusively what I can best describe as "soft" minds. It is not that I disavow the validity of the personal or subjective (that is often missing in those discussions I value at Harvard), but I think that for a complete education, the subjective and objective approaches should be more evenly counterbalanced.

The faculty members, neither male nor female, can hope to make up this lack. I would even venture that certain aspects of their own thinking are not sufficiently challenged, thus eventually dulled, by an endless procession of females only.

In the full truth of this account, I add that were it not for the financial difficulties and the extra time involved, I might much more seriously consider transferring as a practical educational alternative. I am urging a sophomore friend who feels much as I do to transfer. It is unnatural and unnecessary for most of us to spend four years in an environment with so few men. The lack of men and the stimulation that their minds could offer in the education-

al process at Bennington is perhaps one of the factors which contribute to the high rate of those who do not go on to graduate.

Although I've become quite attached to Bennington just as it is, I don't think that attachment should stand in the way, for me or anyone, of a serious consideration of possibilities of coeducation with the absolute stipulation that the standards for male students remain very high.

As I said initially, these reactions are subjective, are reactions *now*—between the terms of my junior year. I think it is necessary to remember that if I had been asked about coeducation only a year ago, especially two years ago, I would have said emphatically, "No." Finally, a decision in favor of complete coeducation will be to the disadvantage of some, but to the distinct advantage of others. In both cases, the previous educational background of the student and her degree of intellectual and emotional maturity will determine which form of education is best. At this moment, I emphatically would like to be going to a coeducational Bennington. Whether coeducation at Bennington would be "the greatest good for the greatest number," I really do not know.

—Sarah Magee '69

#### *To the Editor:*

Apparently, not enough well-qualified girls are applying to Bennington, and many of those who do and are accepted do not complete their education at Bennington. In order to proceed with the plans to enlarge, coeducation seems the only alternative to accepting less qualified women.

Although some girls come to Bennington precisely because it is a women's college, many come in spite of it and leave subsequently because of it. Infrequent contact with men other than teachers often makes dealing with men awkward. The exodus on weekends to men's colleges or the complete avoiding of any social life is evidence of the need for more casual, natural association with males.

Practicality rather than philosophy will resolve the issue. In order to accept the impending change, therefore, Bennington must be seen in a wider perspective than that of its particular traditions or that of a few outspoken members of the community. Of course coeducation will alter the school, but surely Bennington is a different place from what it was at its founding. Unfortunately, those in the midst of change rarely see beyond their own limited insight. Bennington has not sought to graduate the "well-rounded" female but one intellectually independent, capable of educating herself. In what better atmosphere could coeducation thrive? This does not seem inconsistent with the broad aims of the College. In no better place than a school in which a woman's mind is

valued can men and women learn from each other.

The success of coeducation depends on the quality of men that apply and are accepted. If they are genuinely interested in a Bennington education, men can strengthen the College in a way more women cannot. The present plan—to accept some qualified males—seems to be the best policy. Evolution insures the preservation of the necessary structure and allows the present student body to absorb the men rather than the men absorb the present student body.

Herein lies the threat: coeducation may drastically shift the focal point of interest, thus undermining that which makes Bennington unique.

So much of the demand for freedom is really a demand for the release from responsibility. Bennington could easily provide a haven for the irresponsible and sometimes already has. Bennington needs those who wish to take an active part in their education, men or women. Bennington can become a school which, whatever differences exist between the sexes, can serve to better educate, to complement both of them. The College could easily lose its standards and structure and turn into a school similar to its imitators. To avoid this disintegration, change must be effected gradually in order to insure a continuity of purpose between the old and new Bennington.

—Anne M. Cunningham '71

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To the Editor:

The assumption that celibacy and isolation are the proper backdrop for educational pursuits is false. This College has too long taken pride in its "separateness"—the uniqueness of its invention and the ivory tower mythology that has surrounded Bennington since its inception.

We cannot nor should we ignore the fact that the world exists and that we must exist within it. This is not a plea for the *quotidienne* nor is it a cry for the "synthesis" of reality. We come here as whole individuals having to deal with our particular and varied perceptions. To build a crystal palace in the quiet hills of Vermont barred from the harshness of the "outside" is not a service to the process of enlightenment. It is, in fact, a compromise with necessity and an eloquently verbalized tribute to half vision.

Co-education, here, is in my mind a cry for the re-establishment of just proportion. The world is composed of men and women. They play out their lives in many arenas of shared experience. Thus co-education is neither solely a matter of sexuality or of intellectuality. It is the attempt to bring Bennington and the world into proper juxtaposition. To allow the entire gamut of human experience to run its course.

—Jane Becker '68

To the Editor:

The fact that Bennington is a women's college has not driven me to the Dean's Office for transfer forms yet, since I came to Bennington in spite of it. I am impressed with the academic possibilities Bennington offers, and I am willing to put up with the monotony of a female society in order to take advantage of the college's facilities.

However, I am among those students who find it necessary to look elsewhere for companionship, inspiration, and relaxation. The women who go to Bennington are among the most fascinating and diverse I have ever met, and it is not to imply that I am bored with them that I join the evacuating masses on weekends. It is a fact that constant female companionship tends to block channels of thought. Discussion among women frequently circles around themselves, and, particularly at Bennington, a discussion can go on for hours getting nowhere because each participant applies the discussion to her personal sphere of interest, and hesitates to aim for conclusions or to allow her own thoughts to be compromised by those of her peers. This is perhaps a pursuit of independence, but I find it frustrating.

It seems that discussions which include men tend to cause a woman to consider merging her ideas with those of the other participants, if only to nurture her image of eventually working as a team with a man, thus making

use of the abilities of both in their separate fields.

Although many of our faculty members are male, it would stimulate class discussion and participation if more men were involved in seminars and other classes. Although there are numerous men on the campus at all times, it is often difficult to find a man who can have a simple discussion without showing signs of strain after six sentences, or one who will not guide the discussion into a hot debate just to prove himself. It would be less phenomenal to find a man with whom one could talk freely on an equal basis about subjects of mutual interest if there were men around who were neither guests nor date hunters, but fellow students taking a mutual course, who, being Bennington students, were not interested in finding out if the rumors were true, or if the average man could put down the average Bennington girl. Few men who are unfamiliar with the campus ever really feel at ease while they are here.

Coeducation would not solve the isolation problem, but if that is the problem, then transfer forms are in order. Being out in the woods can be a valuable experience if one's purpose in being there is to be best achieved by being, in fact, in the woods. Our purpose in being there is defeated by the absence of those with whom we are trying to communicate. Coeducation would round out the community and give it much needed direction.

Coeducation, in theory, would be beneficial to Bennington, but I am still intrigued by the question raised during the fall term: "What kind of man would come to Bennington?" There is so much controversy already over the Bennington stereotype of the girl in the black tights, ad nauseum, that I am torn between feelings of horror in the possibilities, and relief and delight in the assurance that we have already seen nearly everything anyway.

I am willing to risk competition setting in, new restrictions becoming necessary, considerable loss of the freedom to be a woman among women, and the possibility that coeducation would turn Bennington into something it was not designed to be. In return, I would like to be given the chance to have my ideas tested before I leave the testing ground, and the opportunity to become familiar with the other half of the world.

—Deborah Thomas '70



## Response from faculty

To the Editor:

Here is a word of support for the cause of coeducation at Bennington.

I have never liked the restriction of the Bennington educational program to women. It has seemed to me associated with an eastern seaboard cultural lag that was completely inappropriate to educational innovation. My thinking is not based upon the assumption that there are no differences in the mentality of men and women, but upon the assumption that the differences were either irrelevant to our educational objectives or actually enriching.

Until a few years ago coeducation at Bennington was questionable because it appeared unlikely that we could attract young men of the quality of the women students that we have. Within the last five years the attitudes of large numbers of young men have changed so radically that I don't think that we can afford to miss this generation in our classrooms and in community affairs, although I question their presence at all hours in student houses. Among other changes, it seems to me that the very concept of masculinity that stood in the way of men students' free participation in the arts and social service professions, provinces of American women and of Bennington, has been abandoned for a new idea of the male role. The search for commitments that include vocational choices but are broad and socially oriented is important to men as well as to women. Concern for finding a college situation in which the fullest opportunity for personal development is provided is one that men share with women these days.

In our recent search for an instructor, we were swamped by over one hundred applications of young philosophers, mostly men, who see in Bennington a fascinating opportunity for teaching. Although the applicants were prospective teachers rather than students, the impression persists that the Bennington situation is one that is challenging to the masculine mentality and that it can attract able male students not only in the arts and letters but also in the natural and social sciences.

As for the effect upon women students, I can only anticipate a liberalizing impact. We do have some timorous students who find participation in class discussion difficult, but they don't expect their timidity to be indulged and most of them learn to participate in some form or other. Bennington students don't conceal the fact that they have minds in their social relations. Why should they in a classroom? I think that most of them would delight in the opportunity of becoming better acquainted with masculine minds. We might be able to overcome the current tendency to think of young men as household pets to be

sheltered and provided for within the framework of this matriarchal society. The present situation distorts the roles of both sexes. Full membership of men in this academic community would bring a needed balance.

In the February *Quadrille* Jane Hanks reports on the credulous, humorless, and helpless reaction to the hoax of November 9. I would venture a modest wager that a coeducational Bennington would not have responded in the same way.

I don't mean to imply a disparagement of women. I am proud of their spiritual vitality, their independence of petty vanities, and their maturity in personal matters. I also delight in the incisiveness, rigor, and rationality as well as the sensitivity that characterizes their work in philosophy. I would only argue that we have room and need for the talents that men seem to develop in our culture: the flair for argument, the speculative power, the capacity for friendship, and the enjoyment and recognition of the nonsense that saves sanity in this strident age.

—Anne Schlabach  
Social Science Division  
Bennington College

To the Editor:

I find myself in general agreement with Ricky Blake's position on coeducation at Bennington. I am not aware of any coeducational college that has been able to develop the unique education that Bennington provides. I think that it is because women are culturally deprived—men handle their money, men maintain the positions of power, etc.—that Bennington has been free to give a true liberal arts education which is precluded elsewhere by the career needs of the men in this culture. Who is to say that coeducation would not gradually destroy our uniqueness and make us like all the rest?

One facet of the discussion, however, needs to be clarified: the conformity underlying the notion that coeducation is desirable at Bennington. The majority of colleges in this country are coeducational and that is as it should be. Why should Bennington join the majority? (In anything?) When there are girls who desire to attend a women's college, but do not want the kind of education purveyed by the seven sisters (and some others), it becomes especially important for Bennington to eschew coeducation. Now that Sarah Lawrence has succumbed, we are the only choice remaining for such girls. If we become coeducational we will in effect be forcing all such girls to conform to the cultural norms. And isn't that a horrible outlook?

—Louis Carini  
Social Science Division  
Bennington College

To the Editor:

In discussing coeducation at Bennington, many aspects of the issue have obviously to be taken into account: the social, or "community" aspect; the classroom aspect; the administrative aspect. Were coeducation to come to Bennington, each of these features of the college would be changed more or less drastically. Some of the changes, when considered in themselves, would doubtless be to the good. The real difficulty as I see it lies in concerting the positive aspects of such a change and at the same time keeping certain drawbacks, which are equally obvious, to a minimum.

Leaving aside the financial and recruitment aspects, on which I can state no authoritative view, I want to address myself to what changes are likely to occur in the classroom and in the community in such an event.

Classroom operations would doubtless be enlivened by the presence of male students owing to the greater combativeness and, perhaps, self-confidence of the latter. Being more frequently challenged in their assumptions, teachers would have a rougher time of it. Quite probably, this tougher tone would have the effect of creating sharper responses in the members of the class, both male and female. Covert, intra-feminine competition as it is now would be replaced by a more overt type of competition. In a sense, the Bennington girls would lose some of their privileged status. This, as far as I am concerned, would be all to the good, though, whether the girls would readily accede to such a change is apparently doubtful. (I have taught many classes at Bennington which included small numbers of males: in each of these instances the class seemed to benefit markedly. But there is no assurance that a larger ratio of men would increase those benefits, except in the case of Dance and Drama.) Teachers would be compelled to adopt a somewhat different style of presentation. Some of us, apparently, contemplate such a change of rhetoric with equanimity or even pleasure; others do not. I myself would feel no hesitation in gearing my discourse to a mixed group.

The situation in the community at large would, I feel, be greatly less ambiguous. Also, I would personally feel far less ambivalent toward that aspect of the change. Certainly many of the habitual doldrums which attend the "monosexual" dispensation would be overcome, provided the college were in a position to select its resident males by the same standards by which it selects its present students. Over the years, our girls have, I think, proved rather uninventive or unenterprising concerning all extra-curricular and recreational possibilities. Men tend to be more enterprising and energetic in that domain.

If I could feel assured that the channels exist for bringing suitable men to the college in sufficient num-

bers, I would gladly put up with the problems that are bound to arise, both in the classroom and in the community as the result of coeducation. And I feel reasonably sure that our girls, too, would make a glad and successful readjustment to the new situation, if they, in turn, could feel assured that the men are their peers, both intellectually and as human beings.

—Francis Golfing  
Literature Division  
Bennington College

To the Editor:

8 It seems to me that discussion of the issue of coeducation at Bennington College was badly served by the recent exchange reported in *Quadrille*. The problem is a serious one, requiring protracted thought and a nice calculation of the alternatives, but (except for occasional remarks by Harry Pearson and K. K. Holabird) the debate was only that—a tendentious airing of prejudices rather than an open-minded exploration of the alternatives the College faces. In effect, Barbara Smith served notice that purely female education could be nothing but inferior/unequal/artificial/destructive, and Ricky Blake maintained that the only important values in a Bennington education are those that make it unique. At best, these are anomalous attitudes in a college that has laid some claim to be both experimental and influential in American higher education.

I would like to offer some observations that seem to me to lie closer to our actual situation. First, I suggest that when the College was founded it derived great strength from the fact that it was open only to women, who were free to experiment with their education as well as free to take the arts seriously. I would be interested to know whether the women who attended it in the early days consider that (in Mrs. Smith's words) they have had to "pay" too much for their freedom then, or whether they share Mr. Blake's belief that the main virtue of the education they received was that it bore no relationship to the roles they expected to play when they had ceased being students. My own best guess is that the freedom was worth a good deal, especially to students who might otherwise not have attended college, but that the last thing they had on their minds was that they were *just* students.

Still, if we suppose that the original College was wholly appropriate to the needs of its students and its times, this is no good reason to assume that it should not change. Mr. Blake makes much of the assertion it has changed for the worse—not because of coeducation, or even because of the threat of coeducation, but because it is increasingly devoted to fields of study rather than individuals. In the

last analysis his argument is anti-intellectual and warrants the charge he would prefer education for women to be inferior to that for men, but if we put aside its ultimate implications we must still recognize that he has posed false alternatives. It would be much wiser to say (as I think Mrs. Smith may have intended to say) that only an intellectually respectable education is a service to individuals, and in the contemporary world there is far more need than there once was for these individuals to know what they are talking about or doing. In short, such slight shift of emphasis as has occurred from "ideas" to scholarship has been not only desirable but indispensable to maintaining the quality of Bennington's education.

Nevertheless, it is ideas that students deal with, and the notion that college should somehow *duplicate* the real world (as opposed to *relate* to it) is preposterous. The real issues of coeducation are what specific additions it seems likely to bring to the curriculum and the general educational environment, what losses it seems likely to entail, and what present and prospective students make of the alternatives. (I suspect that faculty opinion on the subject is very largely governed by essentially patronizing notions of what is or would be good for the student body.) The advantages to be derived from coeducation might



include a greater sense of relevance in our classes, a student body that would not be satisfied with some of our easy victories (I speak as a male), and a more realistic appraisal (on their own parts as well as ours) of students' abilities. The disadvantages might include an insistent pressure for pre-professional training, a student body that no longer held intellectual excellence in high esteem, and an inhibiting effect on the creativity or the initiative of both students and faculty members. Although we can make some guesses about which way the balance might go and although we might retain some control over what happened (more certainly by controlling admissions than by enunciating pieties), we should concede from the start

that coeducation would make changes we can only dimly foresee. On the other hand, the College will undoubtedly change even if we bar coeducation, and the one thing we can be sure of is that it should not seek to be a refuge either for students or for their teachers.

—Rush Welter  
Social Science Division  
Bennington College

## Mrs. Smith's Reply

To the Editor:

Mr. Welter is certainly correct in observing that the question of coeducation at Bennington deserves a more considered review than that offered in the recent exchange. In an extemporaneous dialogue of that sort, the development of a coherent and reasoned point of view is made unlikely by the nature of the situation itself: the limitations of time, the obligation to deal with points as they are raised by other participants, one's reluctance to hog the stage with lengthy monologues, and especially the fact that spoken remarks cannot be retrospectively edited. (When I agreed to participate in the interview, I thought better of my improvisational style than I do now.) There are several points that came out with an edge and absoluteness that I did not intend, and others that lend themselves readily to misinterpretation. Rather than qualify or correct them as they stand, however, I should prefer to prepare (perhaps for a future issue of *Quadrille*) a more adequate statement of the case for coeducation at Bennington, and also to take up on that occasion some of the points and objections raised by Mr. Welter and others concerned with the general question.

—Barbara Herrnstein Smith  
Literature Division  
Bennington College

## Some Alumnae reaction

To the Editor:

I think it's great that the issue of coeducation at Bennington is to be aired again, for the College has apparently been on the verge of this decision for some time. The interview in the February *Quadrille* identified some of the factors, but I believe it comes down to a decision based not on what most women need or want from a college education, but on what Bennington can do for a minority of women who are frustrated by the splintering tendencies of a coeducational campus.

Most young people today seem to prefer a coeducational college and I see nothing wrong with this. Men and women on a coeducational campus—and I have lived on

several in the past few years—seem to take their personal relations, including the sexual, in stride, which is fine. They are free then to turn their attention and their abilities, if any, to books and teachers. Or such is my impression.

On the other hand, there also seem to be young women who feel a clear need for those last few years of privacy in a congenial environment before going on to marriage, job, or maybe both. They need the time to understand themselves, and explore the range of their intellectual and artistic interests. From a broader standpoint, these college years are also a time of concentration on something that might turn out to be creative and eventually of profound value to society.

There are plenty of colleges in the United States where the advantages of coeducation may be had; but mighty few where privacy and the environment conducive to concentration are available. My own preference, therefore, would be for Bennington to remain predominantly for what is probably, in Toynbee's phrase, the "creative minority" among American young women. If this limitation creates recruitment problems, surely they can be solved by making the special advantages of a woman's college the focal point of educational philosophy at Bennington and also of its public relations. If Bennington is to become merely a me-too institution, then it might as well quit the vanguard of educational development in this country.

—Gladys Ogden Dimock '36  
Bethel, Vermont

*To the Editor:*

Of course Bennington must go coeducational. But let's go one step further and think the unthinkable. Bennington must also get out of Bennington, away from the beautiful Vermont hills and into the ugly city. The monastic concept of education, combining segregation of sexes and isolation, is not only archaic but dangerous. A large segment of America's future leaders will grow up ignorant and probably terrified of the great challenge of our time—the urban revolution. They will be born and raised in the suburbs, attend colleges in the country, marry and settle once again in the suburbs, dependably insulated from "the actions and passions" of their time.

(I say this having loved my years at Bennington and particularly its single-sex aspect. From Monday to Friday, we were free to indulge in monasticism; Saturdays, we were Jean Harlow. It had drama, but was it life?)

For many years Bennington was an experiment. When the experiment became accepted as normal, Bennington lost some of its lustre. So why not try again? Let Bennington invite itself to New Haven and join hands with Yale. To-

gether let them experiment with a new kind of coeducation that combines the best of each and has feet firmly planted in the mainstream. Vassar has decided to choke on its daisy chain; let Bennington dart forth and take its place. Yale might even learn to love us.

The economics of this marriage should not be insurmountable—it might even reactivate foundation support. And surely the Bennington plant could be sold to provide an adequate dowry. I suggest that the fund-raising campaign we are now engaged in should come to a temporary halt and await developments. Perhaps those who have already donated will be pleased to transfer their generousities to the new haven. Bennington's admissions problems would sink without a trace.

I would be sorry to have this suggestion dismissed as capricious. I am too fond of Bennington to sit back and watch history pass it by.

—June Parker Wilson '37  
New York City

*To the Editor:*

It seems to me that Bennington had better take the dilemma by the horns and stop wrestling with it, but resolve it, and fast. Take in as large a group of men as the admissions office can find that are suitable material for such a dedicated, introverted, difficult kind of education.

I love the idea of cloistered atmospheres for study, meditation and concern, and letting women be themselves in at least a few out-of-the-way spots. But I personally do not feel that adding a large enough group of males to the Bennington campus will necessarily be the factor that reduces the chance for women to mature. Perhaps it will even help.

So few people are willing to face the knife-edge reality factor of present-day existence, but those who exist in this lonely spot feel that we need every strength there is to cross over into the world ahead. There is some feeling and some evidence that young men and women are coping, together, in a way that gives each of them inner strength; they are sharing in simple ways the chores and the challenges of contemporary existence. And there is every evidence that the increasing alienation of almost everyone else is reducing us to a standstill as a nation and as a creative people.

I do not mean that people must function as married couples either, or going steady, or in a free-love atmosphere. Certainly there is always going to be a sexual aspect to living . . . but a coeducational campus may not make this more complex. What I am talking about is that both points of view are necessary in a complete education: the male contributes and counterbalances with what the female contributes and vice versa. Separate but equal does

mean something to me that it rarely means to others, sharing the same house, college, community, equally in environment, in ideas, in effort to think through and resolve the terrible social problems we face, but maintaining one's separate, individual identity in doing this. No one can get along with anyone else so we have a marvelous overlap (not duplication) of organizations to accommodate the variety of opinions and absorb the available leadership. But as a culture we have not begun to work together as a team or to solve real problems.

Perhaps a Bennington that already cuts through much of the rif-raf can make a real contribution to the future. I argue for lots of boys, not the few we have always had, or the gradual increase that Sarah Lawrence feels is best for it, because I think Bennington could, with a little imagination, swing a big change. In the isolated location we currently enjoy it would make a fine experiment to add to the already growing number of change-overs being tried across the country.

Why not really think through the problem of taking many men, and start recruiting tomorrow for next fall?

The most troubling thing about the article was the inuendo that not enough applications are being received at Bennington as it is now constituted so what have we got to lose?

—Sarah Knapp Auchincloss '41  
Syracuse, New York

#### To the Editor:

To say the least, I was startled by the dialogue on co-education recorded in the February *Quadrille*. In true Bennington fashion, it raised more questions than it answered. Not that I was opposed to the idea. Naturally, I'd heard from time to time of various attempts to stretch some kind of tenuous thread between Williams and Bennington and felt this was probably a good thing. Even back in the Stone Age (the late 1930's) when I was a student, we had—you should excuse the expression—social intercourse with men at Williams. But intellectual? NEVER. After all, we were so much more *dedicated* and *smarter* than ANY mere man, so much farther out (we called it simply "sophisticated"), that sharing our educational experience with them would have been quite out of the question. We considered ourselves leaders, shock troops at the forefront of a tremendous educational experiment, and we carried a heavy burden in our determination to make it succeed. Dalliance with men would have created an obstacle, a by-pass to deter us from that goal.

But times change, thank goodness. Yesterday's challenge becomes today's commonplace, and I dare say that today's Bennington girl no longer considers herself a daring innovator. Many times during the 30 years since

those halcyon days, I've found myself tilting with imaginary windmills and perhaps the coeducation question will, in time, become just another one. I know of no evidence which proves conclusively whether a girl performs better or worse, intellectually or socially, when men are present on campus or in the classroom. I would venture to guess that, as in so many other things, it probably depends on the individual girl. So, since Bennington is oriented toward the individual, let us begin discussion of Bennington's future with the girl herself.

Who is the Bennington girl?

Where did she come from and where will she go from here? What kind of life is she preparing for, and why did she choose Bennington for that preparation?

Secondly, from the college's point of view, if there appears to be less demand today for the special kind of education that has made Bennington's reputation in the past, why is this so? Is the important thing to maintain an image—to preserve the dodo bird at whatever cost? Or is it more important that the college remain financially solvent by supplying whatever type of education girls of today seem to demand, whether or not that education fits the Bennington image?

Is the main purpose for the college's existence to keep the faculty busy and well-fed, or to turn out students who can make some kind of contribution to the world they live in? Are we working now toward the fulfillment of some goal or idea, or just to keep the physical plant in operation and occupied with people?

Hopefully, all of these various objectives can be realized, but before valid decisions for the college's future can be made, priorities must be established so that primary goals do not become lost somewhere at the bottom of the list.

These four years are a special time, a unique situation never again duplicated for the individual. Although it is not as protective of the girl as living at home in a day-to-day contact with parents, neither does it involve the staggering responsibilities of being married, working for a living, or raising a family. Barbara Smith put it accurately, "... a woman's education does not have the same sort of consequences for her as it would for a man. . . ." Except for a few rare cases, the woman's future life will not in any way resemble that of a man, and her education should be entirely different from his. This is one very cogent reason why Bennington should not have male students. If men were present, their educational needs would have to be met, and their vocational requirements would not dovetail with the needs of the women students.

This does not imply however, as Mrs. Smith says, any "devaluation of women." It is simply a fact of life. There is no reason why women's education cannot be equally

“stiff” in character or content; it just must be *different*.

Mr. Blake made an excellent point in his statement that a happy marriage entails getting along with only one man: her husband. The rest of her time is spent with women—narrow minded, self indulgent, back-biting, gruesome females that she must somehow manage to get along with. Even women working in full-time jobs encounter the same types, and the individual must not only suppress her own hostility enough to be pleasant in a social sense but often work directly with, or for, these people and perform usefully and productively.

If Mrs. Smith feels that the all-women's college provides an education inferior to that available to men, does she conversely think that an all-male college, by the same criteria, provides an education for the men inferior to that of the coeducational institution? If so, on what basis? She would like to see the girls think vocationally, but we raise the question: Did these girls choose Bennington because it was renowned for vocational training, or was it something very different they were looking for? In what role does the college see itself?

Until someone comes up with genuine proof that men and women in mixed groups learn faster and better than in segregated groups, with sociability reserved for weekends, I'll put my vote with the all-male and all-female college. For learning, that is.

What is Bennington's image right now?

Is it a place where wealthy, spoiled, arty-type girls can go and work toward a degree with a minimum of discomfort and interference with their self-determined way of life? Where the only thing lacking to complete the country club atmosphere is a number of good-looking, well-heeled young men to play around with?

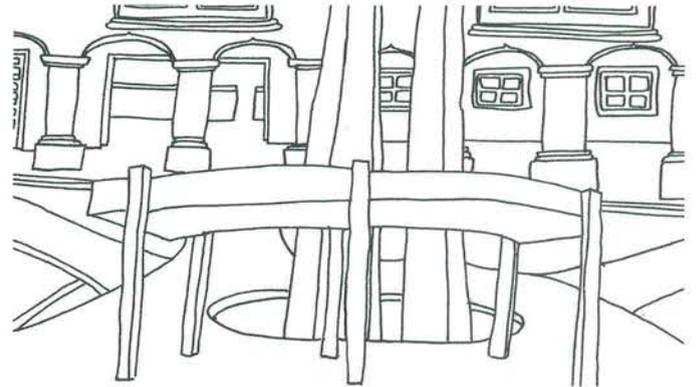
Do Bennington graduates as a whole outperform similar groups from Smith, Wellesley or Radcliffe in their later adjustment to life or the satisfaction they get from their role as women? Do they earn more money, produce more children, or more divorces? Are they harder or easier to get along with? Have they attained more individual renown or developed more emotional or psychological problems? By what criteria can we measure whether Bennington has succeeded, not in disseminating its educational philosophy to other institutions, but in producing happier, more successful women—whatever their role in life happens to be? It seems to me there is great need for some kind of study along these lines which could be used for comparison with other women's colleges, particularly those whose educational philosophies differ widely from Bennington's. This might give us a clue to the real value of the Bennington idea.

Of course, even if the results of such a study indicated past success, this would not necessarily guarantee future

progress with the same methods. I have spoken with one fairly recent alumna who stated that the atmosphere at Bennington was “so unreal that it took me two years to get over the effects of one year there.” One of the “unreal” factors, I submit, is the lack of competition. Consciously or unconsciously, a student wants to perform better than other students. Competition is a tremendous stimulus to learning and most schools try to capitalize on this natural drive. Bennington does not.

Intellectual competition is perfectly acceptable between members of the same sex, but between men and women rivalry sets a poor precedent for later life. Women tend to shrink from it, and in a coeducational situation, the

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girls might be reluctant to participate in a controversy that the men found stimulating.

Also, if what Barbara Smith says is true, that men and women react differently to identical subject matter, it would seem that a coeducational college would present a more difficult problem for the faculty, which to some would be a challenge and to others, a disaster. If the college expects to retain its present faculty under this new situation, the faculty should have a good deal to say about how the change should come about.

This is not to say that the Bennington idea, if valid for women, couldn't be applied to men. It could, and I'm sure already has been, often with good success. Acknowledged to be a very “different” kind of experience, it is a type of education particularly fitted to a special kind of person, and the female of the species has no corner on uniqueness. However, along with the students, I also would have doubts about the type of man who would be attracted by the opportunity to obtain even that special education if it necessitated attending an institution with a clearly established reputation as a girls' school. Perhaps the solution would be to establish an equivalent men's college, with a separate name and identity of its own, at a site close to the existing college. Certain facilities, such as the Library, Commons, and the new science and art buildings could be used for both, but the men could have

a community apart, with their own residences and dining rooms. This might accomplish the same purpose without carrying the same onus.

As to the social aspects, coeducation might help to solve the problem of the girls who feel the remoteness of their ivory tower in Vermont too keenly. Miss Holabird stated, however, that "girls have a rather negative relationship with each other." This is true, not only of Bennington, but of this whole generation of young people. They appear to live in separate, individual cells, apart from each other, rejecting every activity that might promote meaningful relationships with anyone else. For some reason, personal involvement has become a responsibility to avoid.

If this is true, having more men on campus would not solve their problem. A girl can be just as uninvolved with men as with other women.

Perhaps the answer of "yes" or "no" to coeducation will have to follow after another problem has first been solved: What kind of place do we want Bennington to be? Certainly we cannot maintain our image of it as a unique experiment in education if no more experimentation is going on, or if the women of today are no longer interested in committing themselves to experimenting with their own education. I think the alumnae, generally, would welcome any change that would regain for the college the preeminence it enjoyed as an innovation leader in the field of education. The small college is not dead, but it may need a reevaluation of its purposes and a shift in direction. We believe, with President Bloustein, that "the essential goal of education is the development of a humane style of life, which alone gives meaning to knowledge and skill." Bennington continues to fulfill that goal.

—Joan Thomson Day '41  
San Marino, California

*\* Ed. note: The Alumnae Office is preparing for publication this summer the results of a recent questionnaire which may help answer some of these questions about what happens to Bennington students after college.*

#### To the Editor:

The featured dialogue contained in the February *Quadrille* has intermittently precipitated some random thoughts on the subject of coeducation at Bennington:

First of all, if Bennington still generates the special kind of electricity I found there in 1938-40, I think coeducation would somehow tend to fragment these delicious charges and therefore dilute the potency of their impact. There would necessarily be a shift in emphasis, and if the men took over, how could even an exceptionally strong-minded girl remain indifferent to masculine censure just when she is seeking independent transportation into pur-

poseful self-discovery.

The distraction and "naturalness" of constant male company—both in class and out—could be very pleasant indeed, but enforced isolation is certainly the ideal culture where intense creative commitment can incubate, hatch, and thrive.

Just because the atmosphere is so rarefied, one has to leave the campus now and then. It's another way to keep yourself in perspective. With men around all the time, perhaps this need would be nullified. And I think change is a necessary "leveler." It makes you conscious of achieved horizons and refreshes you for growth beyond them.

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Men as art, drama, and dance students are fine. But the whole bit? Although a girl's ego might be lifted by attending classes at Harvard, I'm afraid Bennington would suffer an invasion of emasculated males if its doors were open to men in other fields.

How about housing? Financially and domestically, the whole idea seems quite impractical to me.

Certain shared courses could conceivably be harmless, and perhaps mutually beneficial up to a point. Still, I have reservations whether a Bennington undergraduate would experience the peculiar freedom to ask questions openly—or even the same *kinds* of questions *in depth*, that she is spontaneously driven to now—with a possible date sitting next to her. The individual inhabited by a consumingly acquisitive mind will be compulsive about eliciting the "male viewpoint" on issues and learnings of immediate concern to her when she is off-campus with contemporaries of the opposite sex.

Moreover, I feel many girls (but not all) between the ages of seventeen and twenty-two who are otherwise high-spirited and comfortably mature enough to dare making colossal blunders in order to gain definitive insights about their own limitations and possibilities are likely to be inhibited by the awareness of masculine witness—however much they may proclaim such disaffection.

As for the "artificial environment," sure, it exists. Without it, Bennington could never have enjoyed the unique flavor it has engendered. On the assumption that imaginatively productive and potentially flexible young women will always be the choicest admissions candidates, I do not see the emergence from cocoon to a larger, crueller reality as any great problem. Besides, I think the NRT prepares them somewhat for this transition, and those who cannot make it successfully might have had comparable difficulties had they attended a more conventional type of college. In any case, I think the advantages of the habitat far outweigh the disadvantages and should be geared to the majority. They perform *must* adapt to

strange expanded surroundings while relating discriminately to old and familiar patterns. Any other attitude strikes me as unrealistic because there will always be some failures anyway.

—Rebecca Lucas Ueland '42  
Mankato, Minnesota

*To the Editor:*

I read with extreme interest the discussion in the February 1968 issue of *Quadrille* on coeducation at Bennington. I think the arguments presented in favor of this change for Bennington especially by Mrs. Smith most intelligent and convincing and I am in complete agreement with everything she said.

What was particularly interesting to me were the arguments presented by Blake for not having coeducation at Bennington. He obviously prefers a protected environment where he doesn't have to compete with other men for the attention of women. There is a certain type of man who revels in the attentions of the students at a women's college where, for lack of male companionship, the students dote on the male faculty. His image of women and their roles is a poor one. Perhaps I am being too harsh, but this is the way it came through to me.

Furthermore, as a former student at Bennington I can remember the loneliness of an all-girl campus; if for sociability alone it is nice to have men around. The fact that Bennington is so liberal with hours, etc., does not solve the problem of the lack of male companionship.

Now, as the parent of a freshman at Bennington, I am convinced more than ever that Bennington needs coeducation. Why must there be an exodus every week-end because of the lack of suitable recreational opportunities (with men) on campus? I think most girls who have a sense of pride in themselves resent the "mixer" where the men come and look them over like cattle at an auction.

Sarah Lawrence is trying coeducation and so should Bennington. I know the College would be able to attract capable men who want what it has to offer.

—Pearl Friedman Staller '43  
Huntington, New York

*To the Editor:*

Bennington should remain an all-girl college. Before one can go out—into the world, into marriage, into a career—one must go in—into one's motivations, one's capabilities, one's potential for action.

Anything that impedes this inward searching—conducted so elegantly and so successfully by the college's predominately male faculty, wastes valuable, and expensive, time. Men on campus in large numbers throughout the week would impede this vital self-quest. A girl would hesitate

to ask the brilliant, cutting, aggressive question—or the stupid, meek, confused one. In either case, the important relationship between the "daddies," if you will, and the "daughters" would be reduced to a kind of offhand, patronizing, secondary connection.

The sublimation that accompanies Bennington life and learning is vital to a successful Bennington experience. Let us not turn those lonely, cold, unforgettable, straggle-haired mornings into cozy, trite, combed and polished promenading preludes of premarital prancing—all day long! I want my daughters to get their myth and ritual straight from the horse's mouth without being distracted by side issues. That, as all we mothers-of-four well know, comes soon enough!

—Joan Simons Constantikes '45  
Westport, Connecticut

*To the Editor:*

Some thoughts on Bennington: I think all the discussion of a coeducational Bennington is so much rubbish, and that Bennington should concentrate on its own small but vital role in higher education—that of providing a unique opportunity for growth. I am much more concerned with the letter to Dean Pearson which appeared in the last *Quadrille* on the relation between the arts and sciences, or humanities versus science. Too often lately, Bennington smells like Northampton, and this is exactly the kind of change in the atmosphere I worry about. However, if that is the kind of structured academic atmosphere which exists, then Bennington ceases to be Bennington for this alumna, and I don't give a damn what happens to the place. I felt strongly the value of integrated education at Bennington, the *esprit de corps* of faculty and students mutually engaged in the exploration of fundamental concepts. That specific discipline was demanded but that specialization to the exclusion of a great awareness of the whole was discouraged. Mr. Teare's letter should not have been necessary if Bennington's approach to learning had not changed.

Indeed, I think that many of Bennington's current problems start in admissions procedures. The kids who might best benefit from a real Bennington College experience are rarely advised by their idiotic guidance counselors even to read the catalogue, and only those students who have been playing the measuring game successfully ever apply to colleges with SAT's, Achievements, and Writing Sample, and they miss the point that there are other things to be considered in addition. However, Bennington is certainly regarded more highly by the other prestige colleges, and doesn't have to take anyone else's leftovers, not even Sarah Lawrence's. I will hunt for a women's college which turns out *over-achievers* from the leavings

of other colleges' admissions departments, which doesn't care what its candidates have in past achievement but bets heavily on future achievement (and I don't mean graduate school entrance) and makes incurable addicts to a style of life and learning impossible to throw off. I am looking for Bennington elementary education, and Bennington secondary education for my own children, and since progressive education is no longer a swear word—and a certain style is spreading—Bennington has only to maintain its integrity until kinds that *can't* be measured come beating at its doors. In the meantime there are plenty of schools operating with *style* who have gotten kids hooked—kids who don't necessarily demand coeducation—and who could be recruited, even at the risk of losing collegiate face.

—Ruth Ring Harvie '56  
Brunswick, Maine

*To the Editor:*

Recalling the educational interval I spent at Bennington it never occurred to me that I was underprivileged or impoverished because of the small number of men students. I spent four years in an atmosphere which absorbed my interest, formed my dreams and freed me to find out about myself. When I chose to be in male company, I chose the company.

Education, as I see it, is a personal and private possession. The pursuit of this kind of education must be a selfish and self-centered journey. It is a kind of rallying point where only the power and style must be discovered, and where the choices made reflect the potential power and style that earmark the best in a person.

Bennington College does not need men students to make it lively, invigorating or superior. It needs only a superb faculty which will draw in the students whose minds are open. It needs only the perpetuation of the idea that there are things to be discovered and that time has been provided in the space of four years which can extend the mind and the personality, allowing the student to perceive possibilities and develop style.

It's time to stop educating people for the good of society. The task should be to educate vision, to enlarge perception and finally to produce creative, free individuals whose contributions to society are powerfully meaningful.

Let Bennington continue to be the place where the female of the species can acquire the same luminescent feathers of the male. Four years of beauty can be a life forever.

—Jean Segal Fain '56  
Barrington, Rhode Island

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*To the Editor:*

Each issue I receive of yours has been increasingly interesting and enjoyable. That is, something's always been worth reading. This may be because the "image" of Bennington it presents is as pluralistic as the Bennington practice of constituencies itself, and it may be that my reaction is based on one of those cherished alumnae illusions of the good old days, but at least if Bennington has ceased being a place of intense disagreement and discussions your propaganda is more than I can penetrate, especially in the last issue's "interview/discussion," "Coeducation at Bennington."

Several thoughts on that: Bennington has made its students feminine, all right, almost professionally so, in the sense that it makes them almost professionally non-professional. Behind that, I'd argue, is an intensity, an often flexible but very felt conviction of personal involvement, focused on whatever is an individual's current area of concern—and that may not be in itself a bad thing. On the other hand, it is a legacy of Bennington's, and that has consequences. NRT notwithstanding, the College effectively removes its ladies from having to be involved in the "appropriate" concerns as society sees them, or did when I was there; it fostered, therefore, as well as self-reliance, an equal measure of personal, deep-grained isolationism. One's fundamental commitment was to self-exploration—in the broadest sense, true, but where was the world? The realm one explored was in Bennington, among hills, other females, books, walks, and teachers.

For me, the cultural shock of a large coeducational state university graduate school where there were actual dates

(you could go somewhere) and parties, and a lot of good, strong male professionalism running around, was enormous. It was freeing to find that no one there but I cared about how I did academically—that I could attend classes or not without embarrassment, that I was living in a nonsustaining environment which was neither for or against me, only cosmically indifferent. At the same time, I found my peers seriously committed to “a discipline,” not a purely private, glorious fight with their personal interests. They read the current books and wanted to publish—I reread Donne and Turgenev’s letters, writing a “serious” paper analyzing *Peter Pan*.

Bennington thus turns women into mavericks—which is all right with me! What I object to is that we’re not serious enough mavericks, perhaps, or that we aren’t something more. We fit the old caricature hideously easily,

I think, of the emotionally based female, innocent of the way of the world but able to be beautifully indignant, who can make lovely things, or think good thoughts, or understand Hard Ideas. This is what I mean by professionally feminine. The question then is—can such people be anything else? So while, à la Bennington, I’m not convinced that professionalism is the greatest good, I do feel strongly that professional femininity is a waste of education; it may make the world one iota more graceful, but I don’t think that’s worth Bennington, nor do I think that it’s what Bennington has tried to do.

Would coeducation change any (and what?) of this? I don’t know. But the problem might at least be worth considering along some of these lines for awhile.

—Katherine Spoerl Rose '64  
Knapp, Wisconsin

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## Questionnaire on coeducation at Bennington

Are you a present  former  student of Bennington?

If a present student, are you a freshman , sophomore , junior , senior  ?

Did you come to Bennington because it was a women’s college? yes , no . In spite of its being a women’s college? yes , no .

If you left Bennington before graduating, did you leave because it was not coeducational? yes , no . Because it was isolated? yes , no .

A combination of these factors? yes , no .

Are you in favor of admitting a substantially larger number of males to Bennington College? yes , no . In all divisions? yes , no . Only Performing Arts  ?

Visual Arts  ?

Do you favor an eventual equal enrollment of men and women? yes , no .

Do you think coeducation will change the Bennington education significantly? yes , no .

If yes, is this a necessary change? yes , no .

—Please mail this questionnaire to *Quadrille*, Bennington College, Bennington, Vermont / 05201.

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