

Faculty comment

'Dismissing the obvious piffle'

The musty and (one hoped) played-out issue of coeducation is upon us again, worse luck—that decades-old hobbyhorse of restless and itchy faculty tinkerers whose persistence, even obsession, about the matter illustrates the devotion of intellectual demigods and law-givers to their own ideas fixes. But really the rest of us do grow weary of this particular moth-eaten crusade; how much better if the powers that be had decreed, after the last time the question was considered, that it mustn't be raised again till the school's tercentenary in 2049. Think of the fun our posterity could have with it, gnashing teeth and tearing hair just like their harassed ancestors in the late twentieth century.

There are many aspects of the controversy that deserve attention, but little space here in which to deal with them. Dismissing the obvious piffle (for example, the need dreamed up by some to juxtapose a female viewpoint, whatever that might be, to a male outlook in classrooms), let us look quickly at two details we can dispose of easily and then at two that may require longer comment.

A demographic argument has been raised and pressed with

regard to the university's purported need to expand its pool of potential applicants in the approaching years of the baby bust just before, but not beyond, the turn of the century. It seems safe to suppose, however, that if VMI could and did survive the far more troubling recruitment problems that arose in the anti-war era when Jane Fonda's ascendancy among the young de-

be eager applicants to W&L and who, all unwittingly, will enable us to come through whatever difficulties the baby bust era may present.

Another aspect of the discussion about coeducation which has led to ill-tempered remarks on occasion touches the Honor System. To the prediction that admitting women to W&L will weaken the Honor System,

and women—sometimes in the midst of a hot affaire, sometimes hoping that delight lies just around the corner—can and will be tempted to bend school rules and to offer assistance to a belle or a beau in ways not helpful to the learning process and in ways not remotely imagined by the august creator of the Honor System over a century ago.

embrace coeducation because the world is coed (imagine that) and that the atmosphere here is "unreal" and our campus life illegitimate as matters stand now. How fortunate we are that the purveyors of these subtle insights are willing to lead us to the light. Perhaps, though, some things have been overlooked by our would-be guides to modern living. It is true, we might all agree, that the graduates of W&L have been going out into a coed world since the

"... phallocrat and male-binding and ... patriarchal have their places in this new vocabulary of denigration."

veloped, W&L can very likely manage in the decade now before us. Both schools are fortunate enough to enjoy the loyalty of a great many families whose forebears have come to Lexington for over a century. We don't start in the recruitment race from a dead standstill. There are in the world at this moment many little sons, grandsons and nephews of alumni families who five and ten and 15 years from now will

some advocates of coeducation have retorted angrily, "are you saying, sir, that my wife (daughter) (sister) is less honorable than you or I?" The speaker, in this case, sets up a straw man and indignantly knocks him down. The point is not, assuredly, that women's personal integrity is inferior to men's. The point is, rather, that in any coed school, where inevitably the demon of sex rears its interesting head, both men

A larger problem than these two comes to mind when one backs off to look at the whole hubbub over coeducation and to think about the philosophical tone which the controversy at times takes on. It is hard to dismiss the suspicion that even if the demographic argument were not a part of the current debate the proponents of coeducation would still be working furiously to force the change—in the name of egalitarianism and liberation. The liberal opinion-dictators of the past thirty or forty years have become constantly more dedicated to, and alarmingly successful in, dividing society among the (supposed) oppressed and oppressors. Countless categories sexual, economic, ethnic and racial have been defined in these terms. And everyone knows that "male" has become a derogatory term. Along with "suburban," "middle-class" and "affluent." Nouns like "phallocrat" and "male-binding" and adjectives like "patriarchal" have their places in this new vocabulary of denigration and social-group warfare. It is, most unhappily,

middle of the eighteenth century—either that or the innumerable sons and remoter descendants of those early grads who have become our students for generations were brought by storks or turned up in cabbage patches. The complications of life in a coed world seem not to have defeated an appreciable number of the men who have graduated here for two centuries and we may have some reason to hope that our current and future students will continue to get by, even despite the roars and shrieks of the Friedans and Greers and Steinems who grace these latter days.

With this point granted, though, there is a serious aspect of male-female relationships in that coed world out there which demands our attention. Both men and women feel the need, if we may judge by the long history of voluntary associations they form, to be apart

from one another at times; it is tempting to conclude that constant contact might well be frazzling to the nerves of each sex. What is the old saying about too much of a good thing? It is obviously no quirk of fate that institutions and groupings that range from armies and monasteries and leather-armchair clubs to nunneries and sewing-circles and garden clubs have persisted for years (and centuries) and with the happy

approval of most people in our civilization. It remains to be seen how, and whether, the unisex aberration in the armed forces succeeds. No doubt it remains to be seen also whether the Supreme will require coed monasteries and convents five or ten years hence. (Forecast: yes.) But let's not rush things here. The 21st century will afford ample occasion for topsy-turvy change if that's what is eventually desired. For the moment let us be grateful that Washington and Lee, along with far too few other schools, offers young men the opportunity to cultivate the virtues and experience the pleasures of comradeship and brotherhood without the trials which the battle of the sexes will bring through conjugal (pardon, coed) living soon enough.

Name Withheld

To grow or not to grow

By STEPHEN J. MATRAZZO

I'm finally breaking down and writing on coeducation. I had wanted to put it off, to avoid jumping on the bandwagon. Now, however, the amount of time and discussion so many are giving to the issue forces me to put my two cents in as well, especially because I think that most of those who have so far written on the issue for the Phi have missed the point. Those favoring coeducation point up demographic projections that forecast impending doom, decry the "injustice" the university shows toward women, or argue that single-sex education does not prepare one for a two-sex world. Their opponents cite tradition, uniqueness, and freedom of choice as arguments in favor of the status quo. The means for refuting claims made by each side exist. (an institution like Washington and Lee can survive demographic downturn; "injustice" and "tradition" are meaningless subjective terms; if single-sex education is all that makes this university unique, what good is the university; if you want freedom of choice, you're free to go to Hampden-Sydney; etc., etc.) We've already heard the standard arguments and the standard refutations. And everyone has missed the point.

Some have touched the real issue, tangentially at best, but no one has yet addressed the radical issue: does the traditional university philosophy, as expressed through, among other things, the composition of its student body, provide for the best possible atmosphere for intellectual stimulation?

This is a university geared to a certain constituency, a constituency that is disturbingly uniform in background, political beliefs, ethnic origin, tastes, etc. Such uniformity has bred

My View

complacency, closed-mindedness, self-interest and conformism; in a word, one-dimensionality. Although there are always exceptions, one-dimensionality pervades this university at all levels. In the classroom, rote memorization and submission to the professorial will are valued over pursuit of creative thought and assertive exercise of the mind. We are graded not on what we learn but what we produce. Outside the classroom, social standing precedes excellence as a qualification for position, and social standing is based on con-

formity. The free interplay of ideas and the ideals of moral and intellectual growth are stifled. Don't believe it? Try really disagreeing with a professor in class. Try putting yourself in my shoes after this article is published. See what reactions you get.

Okay, so I've identified the problem. What of the solution? How can this university achieve the greatness that is its as yet unfulfilled potential? Those who advocate coeducation are headed in the right direction. Coeducation, in conjunction with an overall broadening of the student body's demographics, can go a long way toward changing those conditions that hold this university back. The one-dimensional student body engenders a one-dimensional university. A more diverse student body would, as part of a broader scheme of change, aid in the creation of the stimulating atmosphere that is now so sorely lacked.

We are now at the crossroads. This university can open itself and grow, or it can remain a post-preparatory enclave. There is no question in my mind as to the direction we should take. My only question is this: if coeducation passes in May, will those declaring "Better Dead than Coed" bless us with voluntary euthanasia?

against the background of this sort of armchair-revolutionary furor that the question of coeducation has been approached in most of the all-male and some of the all-female schools of the eastern United States in the past decade and a half. No one is more terrified of seeming conservative in such an overheated atmosphere than

teachers are, and so college after college, university after university, fell obediently into line when the Robespierres of overnight utopian bliss issued their demands for coeducation in the name of rights, equality and justice. One must hope that Washington and Lee will not follow the herd for the sake of what was trendy among the mindless a dozen years ago.

Finally, we are told—too many times!—that we must