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The Yea and Nay of Newspaper Work for Women

By HELEN EASTER

What to do after college is the problem that confronts many girls at graduation time. The question, “You’re going to teach?” usually accompanies the customary graduation congratulations. “It’s like prunes for breakfast,” one girl said. “We just want to have to teach because it’s the usual thing to do. We’re afraid to tackle the tempting plums just outside our reach.”

It is a mistake to think that a college education prepares girls for the teaching profession alone. There are many professions, just as congenial and just as remunerative, that women can enter and know that their chance of success is not lessened by their sex.

Until the war newspaper work for women was unusual. Men were preferred for nearly every department of newspaper work. However, since then it has been proved that there is a very definite place in this field for women who are willing to work to gain success and recognition. Women have successfully filled places held by men and not only does their work measure up to that of their male predecessors but their pay envelopes also.

Last year the Department of Agricultural Journalism at Iowa State College sent out questionnaires to one hundred of the typical newspapers over the country. Altho no sweeping statements as to the place of women are made in the journalistic field can be made from such a small number of questionnaires, the newspapers which responded were such typical ones that it is safe to draw some conclusions.

The opinions of the editors differed as to how broad the field is, but all agreed that women journalists are very valuable. The proportion of women engaged in these papers was about five to one, altho the number varied greatly.

Most of the editors said that they preferred women in certain types of work but they admitted that they are capable of handling stories in almost any department. One editor said he found women equal to men in any type of work and he preferred them in departmental work requiring attention to detail.

Some of the editors questioned whether or not women were broadly enough educated for newspaper work. However hundreds of newspaper folk have been successful who have had no training save experience. An education is an advantage, but there is no training that is useless in journalism. Some kinds of training prove very valuable in this work. A thorough course in English is recommended and a good journalistic course is a great advantage.

There is another side to women in newspaper work. That is their own personal attitude. Since the only way to get an idea of their feeling toward their work is thru the women themselves, a questionnaire was sent to about 75 women who have gone into this work seriously. The results were exceedingly interesting.

The average length of time spent by these women in newspaper work was six years, tho it varied from six months to twenty-eight years. The average number of working hours was eight or less a day. Most of them were called upon to do extra work outside of hours. Only one received extra pay for such work. Salaries on the whole were good. The lowest salary reported was $20 per week and some were over $75. Most of the replies indicated that the women felt that there was a future both in the position and salary.

It is often said that a woman is not successful in newspaper work because she works from day to day. Her job is to her a “bread and butter” job. She works just to earn money. However, not one woman admitted that she was in the game for the money’s sake. Instead the replies showed that the newspaper game has a real hold on the women who play it. They spoke of it as “great mental experience,” “the greatest game in the world.” “It means my ambition, my content, my chief source of happiness,” was the way one woman put it. “I’d rather do it than anything else, with four times the salary.”

There is no such word as ‘monotony’ in a newspaper dictionary. You are plunged into the great ocean of human emotions, your finger is on the pulse of the world. You meet on an equal basis the greatest people of the world. You know with a degree of intimacy men and women you would never meet in any other profession. If you are only interested in human nature you will love newspaper work.

“Newspaper work may be wearisome to the woman who is mentally lazy or who has not caught the thrill of the game. The woman who likes activity and hustle and bustle and romance of life finds that newspaper work is play—play with a constant thrill which play seldom has.”

And so when the question is put, there is an unanimous “aye.” It is a game worth playing. If there is the desire, the field is open, the game is fascinating and the laurels are there to be shared by both men and women.