

Gender & Multicultural Issues

There are several issues that must be considered when looking at Maria Agnesi. We must look at the historical context in which she lived and accomplished. Some of these issues deal with gender; that is was she denied anything because of the fact that she was a female. Another issue that should be looked at is who actually contributed to her education as well as supported her. These topics are discussed below.

Maria Agnesi lived in the eighteenth-century during the time that many women in the world were oppressed and denied certain privileges such as the right to a decent education. During the Middle Ages, under Christendom, many countries in Europe opposed to females with an education past the basic skills needed to maintain a household, claiming that it was a source of temptation and sin. Most education was at nunneries. Many scholars immigrated to Rome bringing education, knowledge, and critical thinking. Everywhere but here the status of women changed very slowly. This gave rise to the Renaissance where women made their mark on academia. Different from elsewhere in the world, women in Italy were admired for their intellect and it was attractive for a female to be interested in the arts, medicine, literature, and mathematics. Agnesi was an important contributor to the world of mathematics in the eighteenth-century. We can infer that Agnesi really never had to deal with any kind of discrimination because she was a white woman.

Maria Agnesi was lucky in another way, as well, in that she had the privilege of a private education. Besides the fact that Agnesi's father, Pietro, was a mathematics professor at the University of Bologna, she was graced with her father's friend, Monk Ramiero Rampinelli. Rampinelli was a professor at both Rome and Bologna and

frequented the home of Agnesi. In fact, Agnesi devoted the preface to her book, *Analytical Institutions*, to thanking Rampinelli for all of his help and devotion. Agnesi was lucky to have such a support group in her education.

It is an interesting fact that Maria Agnesi never married. In a historical context, most women mathematicians are married to mathematicians. For instance, in earlier years, fewer women are married and more recently, women mathematicians are mostly married to other mathematicians. This makes sense though because most people are married to someone that they have a common social interest with. However, it should be noted that even though Agnesi is known for her mathematics, she did not continue her pursuit in the field after the death of her father. This could be the result of several issues, but my personal opinion is that she felt that she would rather dedicate her life to taking care of her family and the less fortunate. As a matter of fact, she died without a dime to her name and was buried in a cemetery for the poor.

In conclusion, Maria Agnesi did not really have to conquer any major obstacles because of the time in which she lived it was attractive for women to be educated. Agnesi also had an advantage in that she was blessed with a great education because of the fact that she was wealthy and had family members and friends that were willing to help her.