

Women demand

"What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing—the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others. It may be asserted without scruple that no other class of dependents have had their character so entirely distorted from its natural proportions by their relation with their masters . . ."

—John Stuart Mill

The following dialogue arose out of conversations between myself and some members of the women's liberation committee on campus. It deals with some very basic issues concerning women and their role in the world today. Its stimulating and provocative questioning of ideas which most of us take for granted should make people think. Wednesday is Women's Day: find out about it.

—Dennis Zomerschoe

Q. What is women's liberation?

A. That in itself is an irrelevant question, since every women's liberation group is organized around seen problems. Even though the problems cut across all groups, the method of approach is going to vary among groups, depending upon the most pressing problems in their area. For example, welfare women would be most interested in solving the degrading aspects of the welfare system, whereas a professional woman might press first for equal pay enforcement.

Problems of women

Q. What are some of the common problems of women?

A. One of the more important demands that women have today is to control their own bodies. Considering that three out of five children born in Canada are classified as unwanted (DBS statistics 1968), and that 100,000 illegal abortions are performed in Canada each year at an average cost of \$700, (DBS) the need for free birth control and free legalized abortions is apparent. It should be noted here that many

more women desiring abortions do not procure them because of societal pressures on them forcing them to feel guilt for not wanting the child. This society places more value on this unwanted child than on the irreparable damage done to this woman's life.

Family and career

Q. Does this same guilt prevent women from having a family with a career?

A. Yes, when a child is born into a family it is the woman who is expected to give up her work and assume full responsibility for the care of that child. If the woman is forced to work by economic deprivation in the family she is made to feel guilty for neglecting her children. Since this is the case for three out of four women working in Canada (DBS), the problem is pervasive and demands some immediate solution.

Q. What sort of solution could solve the problem?

A. Free day care centers for one. With a free day care center the woman is as free as her husband to pursue another line of endeavor, for instance, continue her job. To insure job continuity, both men and women should receive paid maternity leaves.

Q. Why do men require maternity leaves?

A. Since both parents are emotionally involved in the pregnancy, for their own emotional well being, they both should be available to each other in the final stages of that pregnancy.

Q. What kinds of opportunities does a woman pursuing a career in Alberta have?

A. Regardless of what career a woman chooses, her superiors will always be male, and those of her peers that are male will always be paid more than she will be for the same job. For example the average salary for the highest paid position in nursing is \$632 for men, and \$601 for women. There are many careers that for

all practical purposes are closed to women, regardless of interest and aptitude in the area. Women trained to be engineers are forced to take jobs as stenographers. This is why it is necessary to rewrite the Alberta Labor Act to make the "equal pay for equal job" clause enforceable. And further it is necessary, at least from a legal prosecution standpoint, to include a clause forbidding discrimination by sex in the labor market.

Q. If women realize that they will not be hired in a particular professional area, why do they undertake training in these fields?

A. Rather than be coerced into professions designated for women, these women decided to follow their own interests.

Q. What are the professions designated for women?

A. According to the statistics in the Registrar's Office at the U of A, percentage of women graduates in 1969 in each of the faculties is the following:

- Agriculture: 15.15%
- Arts: 49%
- Commerce: 6.43%
- Dentistry: 5.66%
- Education: 54.97%
- Engineering: 0.0%
- Household Economics: 98.9%
- Law: 10.7%
- Library Science: 76.2%
- Medical Lab Science: 100%
- Medicine: 9.8%
- Nursing: 100%
- Pharmacy: 62.5%
- Physical Ed: 32.62%
- Rehab. Med: 97%
- Science: 14.4%

Women's professions

One can see that Education, Household Economics, Library Science, Medical Lab Science, Nursing, Pharmacy, and Rehabilitation Medicine are "women's" professions, whereas Agriculture, Commerce, Dentistry, Engineering, Law, Medicine, Physical Education and Science are "men's" professions.

Q. Conclusively, what does this prove?

A. This proves that a "tracking System" that encourages girls into certain areas and not into others, does exist. This is further proved by the fact that when girls go into areas like Engineering, they are not hired.

The "role" of women

Q. It has been said that women are more naturally suited to those "women's" professions?

A. In order to reply to your statement adequately it would entail a thorough examination of the socialization system. For the sake of brevity we will only mention aspects here. Early in life the social system begins to condition children so that they will assume the "proper" roles later in life. Adult male/female behavior patterns are learned, not inborn. Girls are taught to "mother" through play with dolls. Their worlds are artificially narrowed by emphasizing skills based on homemaking, whereas boys are encouraged to be concerned with a wider world view. The effects of this early conditioning can be seen in the strong maternal element which characterizes the "women's" professions.

Q. Surely that is not sufficient reason for women not to be hired in professions for which they are adequately trained?

A. You are right. This same socialization process creates something called a "feminine mystique", and since this "mystique" is pervasive in society today, hiring policies are discriminatory.

Q. What is the "feminine mystique"?

A. That is difficult to answer, but we can give you examples. Part of the "mystique" is that women are irresponsible. This is the reason behind the fact that in Edmonton a married woman, even if she is economically inde-

pendent, cannot get a credit card without her husband's signature of approval. Another part of the "mystique" is that the "true" woman is a "feminine" woman. A woman not married and 30 is suspected of lesbianism; but a man, not married and 30 is just a playboy. The "true" woman is supposed to be content with her secondary role. If she is not content, there must be something wrong with her, "penis envy" perhaps, and the solution is always "a good lay." The last part of the "mystique" that we will go into here is the woman as "temptress". Men are taught to pursue, to initiate interaction with women. This necessitates women to assume a passive, waiting role. In order for women to participate in this selection process they must try to entice the ones they favor. To play by the rules of the game, a woman must never make overtures to men.

A human society?

Q. You have described some of the problems of women in this society and pointed towards partial solutions. If these solutions are actualized, what then would society be like?

A. We have summarized here the problems women have articulated as existant in society today. Any movement towards solution of these problems would have an immediate humanizing effect on this society. Even though any forecast of a future society is at best a guess, any guess in the direction of allowing men and women to be more human must be considered a positive step.

Women's
day
tomorrow

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