

In mechanics, when two equal and parallel but opposite forces are applied to the two ends of a lever, they are said to form a couple - a dynamic system.

The basic forces in society obey similar laws. The two elements that compose society - men and women - form a couple - or system - of forces, even at the group level. When these forces are combined, their efforts are multiplied, and acquire new and previously unsuspected dimensions. Together but different, equal but distinct, men and women can discover each other, can have a mutually creative influence on each other, and can thenceforth discover and create an infinitely more exciting and fruitful world than they could acting independently.

Participation in human activity by women is, therefore, not only valuable but indispensable.

The participation will be based upon equality, not upon identity. Women are not men; they have not demanded that they be treated as if they were men. They ask only, and deserve, that we remove the remaining barriers to their full participation in the Canadian community. Barriers put in place by a society which purports to educate women on the same basis as men and then denies to those women the chance to do the tasks for which they have been trained. Barriers which, in many instances, have been maintained -- even though not raised -- by women.

Some of the barriers are of recent origin; others have beginnings shrouded in the mists of early history; some are the product of "male chauvinism"; still others are rooted in social patterns that have remained distinct and viable from century to century. Each category requires separate appraisal. The conception of the family unit, for example, has resisted change in almost every society in every country in every age of recorded history. Certain skills are required in the raising of children, certain functions demand to be performed. The nominee to supply these skills and perform these functions need not be determined by a sexual qualification, but equally these skills and these functions cannot be overlooked or rejected in our desire to overcome the shortcomings of the past. The role of the family and the place of children must be examined at the same time as we examine the role of adult persons.

This does not assume a "place" for women; it accepts distinctive contributions. The challenge should be to accept distinction through accommodation, not to petrify it through discrimination.

Are we right in assuming, for example, as so many persons now do, that employment, rather than occupation or contribution, is the primary criterion of usefulness; that motherhood and the education of children is not a task as important, as challenging and fulfilling as any in the world? I am sure we are not. Are we not remiss in our oft-repeated failure to recognize spontaneously and more enthusiastically the immense contribution to society made by women through their participation in volunteer activities? At the same time, are we confident that our society could not become more rewarding -- perhaps even more productive -- if it dropped its insistence on standard 40-hour work weeks and permitted variable work schedules to many women who have some time, much talent and considerable incentive? Are we even aware of