



A Woman's place is...

BY JULIE TRAVES

We are half the world's population, we are daughters, girlfriends, wives and mothers, yet the question of how we define ourselves remains. Are we to define ourselves by the work we do in the community? In the workforce? In the home?

As young girls, we are confronted with a myriad of images of the 'ideal' woman. She is strong and soft, beautiful and smart, a mother and a worker. How then, within this vast and seemingly contradictory description, can we identify ourselves?

For some women, the struggle to attain this ideal identity can have catastrophic results: anorexia, depression and abuse to name a few. For the majority of other women the problem with self-identity has led to dilemmas of role choice. Housewives feel they are not making financial contributions to their families, businesswomen can hear their biological clock ticking in their ears and superwomen, that exceptional breed of working mothers, feel torn between the two roles they must play.

What then can women offer as the answer to this dilemma? Perhaps the only true answer to this question can be found within the individual. Face to face with the beginning of a new century this struggle for identity must inevitably find its culmination in compromise.

In Canada, the democratic haven of free choice that it is touted to be, women must look for new options incorporating not just one, but all aspects of femininity. Women must break through the dogmatic feminine ideal; no longer can they cling to unattainable goals.

As a group, women can offer each other support and understanding. We can provide empathy into what the physical and social side of being a woman has come to mean. Although we may hold high positions in government, play on a hockey team, or write great literature, we must also recognize the parts of ourselves, both mental and physical that are uniquely feminine.

For each woman, the feminine identity will inevitably differ. As every man does not choose the same path in life, neither should women.

On International Women's Day, while it is important to acknowledge the more serious concerns associated with being a woman, we should also remember to celebrate: for our similarities, for our differences and for the joy of choice.

Dalhousie Women's Centre — Our vision

The Women's Centre is a well-established organizational form, not only in the United States, Western Europe and many other countries, but in Canada too: the University of Victoria, University of Toronto, McGill University and Acadia University, among others, all have Women's centres on campus.

PURPOSE:

Women's centres are formed in recognition of women's common social, cultural, cognitive, and psychological needs in encouraging positive gender relations. Increasing reports of sexism, including violence against women in the community and on the Dalhousie campus, have convinced a group of women that there is a need for education, action, and a safe place for women. A Women's Centre would provide a place for women and men to explore ways to deal with these issues. As well as offering a communal space, the Women's Centre will have a safe space for women only. In this space women can share their experiences and support each other, free from intimidation and harassment. This space will give women an opportunity to develop a positive self-image and support network, amongst other women.

OBJECTIVES:

The following is a selection of the objectives for the Dalhousie Women's Centre:

| | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Short term: | Long term: |
| Resource centre | Counselling |
| Referral service | Crisis line |
| Educational activities | Women's health products |
| Safe place for women | |

FUNDING:

There will be a number of start-up and on-going costs for the Women's Centre, including administration, resource materials, and a staff person. We will be seeking funding from a number of different sources:

| | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Short term: | Long term: |
| Government agencies | Annual fundraising events |
| Fundraising events | Student levy |

PHYSICAL DESIGN:

It is imperative that the Women's Centre is located in a safe, well lit, and physically accessible facility. A space that divides into two parts allows for both the resource area, accessible to all members of the community, and the space reserved for women.

This outline is the first draft of a much more detailed proposal that we hope will include your comments and ideas. Please submit any suggestions or concerns to the Women's Centre Committee, c/o Council

