

What Is A Liberated Woman?

Does She Live In Our Suburbs?

What has women's liberation meant in the life styles of suburban women?

"I have this new awareness of me as an individual rather than me as a wife," says a client of Plymouth Family Service.

And as she goes on, she pretty well sums up the difference in attitude that made its way across this area, affecting all manner of suburban women.

"Before the Women's Liberation Movement, I was programmed to be a maid. Now I know that women are equal to men."

WOMEN'S liberation, agreed homemakers Sue Rennels, Betty Wagner and Wilma Halliburton, puts new dimensions in living.

"It's seeing things with new eyes," said Mrs. Halliburton, folk art teacher at the Northwest Branch YWCA.

"I've enjoyed seeing so many younger women get involved in new interests. Some find new ways to express themselves artistically - others turn to things outside the home."

Which women are affected?

Definitely not all women are interested in liberation. It's the woman over 25 who feels its impact, rather than the 18-year-old, believes Barbara Geil of Schoolcraft College.

"The younger ones still have the 'Teddy Bear syndrome,'" she said. "They want to be hugged. They are almost playing out the role expectations their parents had for them."

"YOUNG GIRLS still are anxiously awaiting their own pads," added Emilie Norris. "But after girls get married and, from their picture windows, watch a couple of children go off to school, they become interested in the liberation movement," said Miss Geil.

Interest in liberation doesn't

"It seems to me," said Mrs. Rennels, "that the movement means human beings being able to express themselves fully. If they happen to be women, and their talent is not involved in the home, then they go outside."

"I have one friend who has taken up guitar playing and another painting. They plan their days with time for these things."

"I have another friend who went to work so her husband could go to school full time. When he finishes, he'll work near the college of her choice so she can get her degree. She's doing what she wants, and she's not going back to being a full time housewife."

MRS. WAGNER found in a human potential course at Schoolcraft College many insights into herself as community member as well as wife and mother.

"I think it's unfortunate," she said, "that many people think women's liberation means demeaning men and deserting families."

necessarily mean getting outside the home," she added.

"Women who prefer being housekeepers, homemakers, should be allowed to be individuals doing it," she said.

"I THINK there are some women who feel threatened by liberation," said Sue Rennels. "They are happy with life as it is and don't want to be bothered with things like developing potential."

Economics may enter the picture, added Emilie Norris. "Women with husbands making over \$10,000 a year don't need to think about changing attitudes," she said. "If they're looking for employment, they'll settle for conventional, part-time jobs. They'll have the need when their hubby drops them like a hot potato."

How does the change affect her marriage, her family, and the training she gives her children?

Marriages and families in the suburbs already are feeling strongly the impact of women's lib.

There's the feeling among men, reports Walter MacDonald of Plymouth Family Services, that they will no longer be taken care of as they have in the past.

"A man marries a woman thinking she's going to fill a certain role. But often household chores and taking care of children don't give a mother enough to do to keep her feeling good about herself."

"Then she becomes depressed and questions her role and problems arise."

MacDONALD predicted that "the woman's lib movement is going to grow, and the divorce rate is also going to grow. Women are getting out of emotionally dead marriages. This is beginning to hit women in their 40s."

"But the marriages influenced by women's lib are

going to be more equal and more stable," he added.

Emilie Norris put it succinctly another way:

"I tell my grandchildren 'never let your sex life interfere with your education.'"

IT'S THE role - assigning that can and should get the biggest jolt from women's lib, agreed those interviewed.

"I wish we could eliminate the ideas that 'men aren't supposed to do this' and 'women aren't supposed to do that,'" said Wilma Halliburton.

"I even heard that when I went out in my yard to barbecue," threw in Sue Rennels. "I think men will benefit as much as women from the movement," said Betty Wagner. Walter MacDonald agreed, saying:

"An OK woman, one who feels her worth as a person, is more apt to say to her husband 'you're OK, too.'"

Women's liberation in the last few years has become a fact of American life, with its manifestations ranging from the attention - getting bra-burner to the gal who quietly enrolls in an adult education course - just for her own fulfillment.

But how has it hit the suburban scene? Who is the liberator of areas like Observerland, and what makes her the way she is?

Does she see herself - and her husband and her family - in a different light? Does she act differently as the ideas of women's lib spread? Are her relationships changing?

ARE HER educational goals different? How about her employment, aims and the jobs she finds? Does she find that the ideas she passes on to her daughters - and sons - are different from those she inherited?

And what sort of help and advice is available as the world changes around her and she changes with it?



BARBARA GEIL
Schoolcraft College



WILMA HALLIBURTON



SUE RENNELS



BETTY WAGNER



EMILIE NORRIS
Employment Office



WALTER MACDONALD
Plymouth Family Service

Photos By
Observer Staff

These were the questions that Observer editors Margaret Miller and Betty Masson asked around the area as 1972 drew to a close.

INCLUDED in this most informal survey were Barbara Geil, director of admissions at Schoolcraft College, and one of those organizing a local chapter of the National Organization of Women (NOW); Walter MacDonald, counselor for Plymouth Family Services; and Emilie Norris, a Garden City resident who works in the Plymouth office of the Michigan Employment Security Commission.

We also talked to three wives and mothers who have been active in projects of the Northwest Branch YWCA.

Sue Rennels of Farmington also is a local chairman of Common Cause, a national organization known as the people's lobby. Betty Wagner of Livonia is on the board of the Northwest Interfaith Center for Racial Justice, and Wilma Halliburton is fascinated by folk art and teaches it in the northwest YWCA.



SUE RENNELS BETTY WAGNER

How about her educational opportunities and her job prospects?

The influence of lib on suburban women isn't great enough when they seek education and almost nil when they seek jobs.

That's the assessment of Barbara Geil of Schoolcraft College and Emilie Norris of the Michigan Employment Security Commission.

More women are attending school beyond the high school level, Miss Geil said, and this includes many returning to the classroom after being married and having children and staying home for a while. But then they limit themselves, careerwise, and the schools aren't helping, she believes.

"OUR PROGRAMS, at this stage, haven't been designed to include women," she said. "There are more than 1,000 women waiting for health careers training. We have to do something to get them into other occupational areas as well."

"They don't know what job opportunities are available in such things as electronics. It's ridiculous that we listen to transistors built by women in Japan, and few women think of it as a possible occupational field here."

Women also limit themselves in job mobility, insisting on working near home, she said. And the schools, in her opinion, should do more to that, is assigned to them wider horizons by coming up with programs for divorced

women who have no training, by retraining teachers and nurses whose occupational fields are frowned and helping publicize "role models" such as suburban women doctors and lawyers.

AND IN THIS respect, the education field could set an example, she concluded.

"Most school administrators are men, and at schoolcraft we don't have any full-time women in our social sciences department, which is a really vital spot for a woman's attitude."

Miss Geil recalled the variety of jobs women held during World War II.

"If we went back, we'd be way ahead of where we are now," she commented.

IN THE job market, Mrs. Norris is inclined to consider women their own worst enemies.

"Women are led by their emotions and not their intellect," she said. "Their emotions are being molded by the media - we are socialized to such a degree."

"Television is such a powerful force. I notice as the years go on, women are portrayed more and more as men pleasers."

"Many older women are dissatisfied," Mrs. Norris also said, "but they won't try something new. Women are fearful of not playing the role that is assigned to them because the end results might be disastrous."

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