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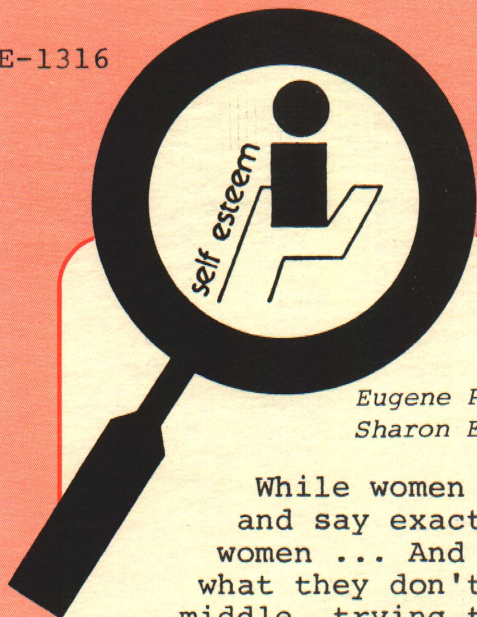
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Self-Esteem & You – Women Today and Self-Esteem
Michigan State University Extension Service
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Self-Esteem & You



II. WOMEN TODAY AND SELF-ESTEEM

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While women at national conventions may be able to get up and say exactly what they want in terms of equal rights for women ... And while still other women can march and declare what they don't want ... there are many women somewhere in the middle, trying to find out where they stand.

These are women, perhaps like yourself, who can appreciate the issues involved, but who first have to deal with a houseful of kids and how to support them. Or maybe they have to deal with a house without kids and the loneliness and lack of purpose they feel.

This may be an exciting time for women, but it is also a frightening one. Women are facing situations and opportunities they have never before encountered. It is a time which demands that women take action in their lives.

Women Keeping Up With Themselves

Although expanding opportunities have resulted in more alternatives for women, they have also produced some dilemmas. Women must now make more conscious career decisions. Home-making, motherhood and volunteer work are no longer preordained roles for them.

Women must also come to terms with the ideas behind the alternatives. On one side, women are told that their lives should extend beyond their families and homes and that they should contribute to the society at large.

On the other hand, tradition and those fearing its loss are telling women that their families, especially young children, need them to provide what no one else



can. And so, seeing truth in both, women may feel caught in a no-win situation. In choosing a career, they may feel they are forfeiting the quality of family life. In choosing their families, they may feel they are denying their potentials in the larger society. Trying to sidestep this dilemma, women may attempt to do it all -- exhausting themselves and failing their tasks.

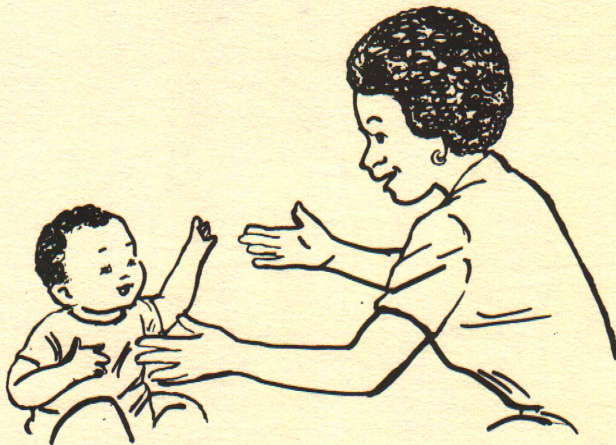
The solution, of course, is to find yourself -- what you really

want -- your priorities amid all the alternatives. Once you know yourself and act on that knowledge, then you can like yourself and what you do. All of this takes some doing, however.

The Need for a Plan

Women must consider the span of their entire lives in making career choices today. The cycles in a woman's life span include situations for which they should be prepared. The facts of some of these situations may surprise you:

- Women are living longer, with an average life span of 75 years, compared to 55 in 1929.
- The average wife outlives her husband by 5-15 years.
- Half of the average woman's life remains once her youngest child has gone to school.



What these facts indicate is that a woman's self-worth and purpose in life should not be centered entirely on her family. As time passes, her role in caring for her family diminishes as her children grow up. Chances are that she will be without her husband in her later years. She needs to realize her value outside the home.

Making the Decision

Taking the steps to create a purposeful and fulfilling life is a real challenge. You have to believe in yourself and in what you're doing. Many women may have to overcome unconscious attempts to remain dependent and immobilized. They may use such excuses as:

- "I've been 'out of it' for too long."
- "My family needs me and my husband wouldn't like it."
- "How do I do it? Who exactly do I call?"

Many women may also worry about the commitment they must make -- of time, money, a career, a life style -- in developing a plan for their lives. Yet, the decision must be made, for it will give women control over and freedom in their lives.

Focusing Your Desires

To help bring your desires and capabilities into focus, and eventually into alignment, you might try the following suggestions from Mary Search, an extension home economist in Michigan:

- List your strengths in one column and your limitations in another right next to it. Be honest about both (some women find it hard to even identify their strengths!), so you will have an accurate listing.
- On another sheet, list "Things I'd Like to Do with My Life." Once you have a good idea of what you can do and what you want to do, you can work to bring the two into alignment.

A Guide for Decision-Making

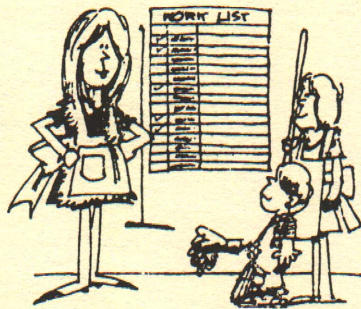
To help you make major decisions, you might consider using the following process:

1. Assess the Current Situation
What do you want and what are your resources? How much change is involved?

2. Explore Relevant Alternatives
Are there different ways of bringing about the desired change? What are the risks involved?

3. Consider the Decision
Is the decision yours or does it depend upon or affect someone else? If it is a partial or tentative decision, what is the larger, more important decision?

4. Strategies for Carrying Out the Decision
What do you do first? Next? What are your alternatives if the outcome of the decision is not satisfactory?



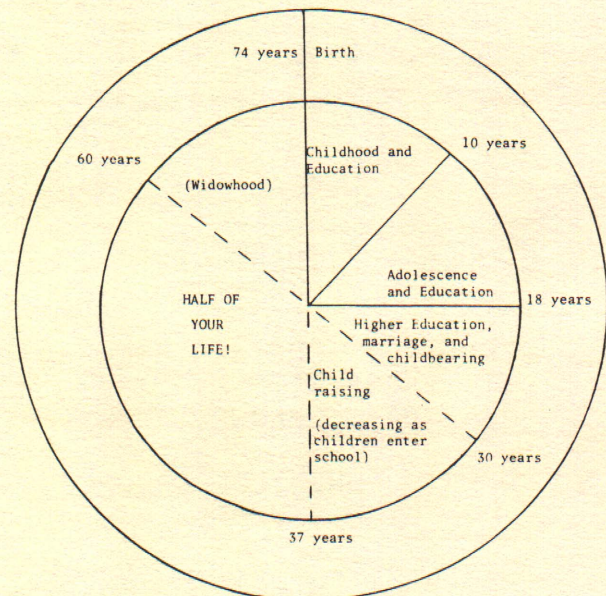
Effects of Role Changes

It is important to remember that while you're undergoing role changes, so are those close to you. When a wife and mother also becomes a financial provider, for instance, her husband and children must also adjust to that change. This experience

may result in role strain -- the stress caused when a person has trouble understanding or doing what the new roles require.

To reduce the effects of role strain, it is important for all family members to understand the reasons for the role change and the expected benefits from it.

The Life Cycle for Women



Once everyone comes to understand and appreciate the value of the change, it will be much easier for the woman to succeed. The support of her family, especially that of her husband, will make the woman's job much easier.

Nearly all studies of married women who have careers have found that the husband's attitude is strongly associated with whether the wife works outside the home.

Basic Human Rights

Amid all the change that you may be undergoing and that you may be causing others to experience, it may be helpful to consider these basic rights of all people -- even you!

★ Right to feel proud about what's good about myself.

★ Right to refuse requests and not feel guilty or selfish.

★ Right to have one's opinions given the same respect and consideration that other people's opinions are given.

★ Right to feel and express a healthy competitiveness and achievement drive.

★ Right to use one's judgment in deciding what needs are the most important for one to meet.

★ Right to have one's needs be as important as the needs of other people.

★ Right to strive for self-actualization through whatever channels one's talents and interests find natural.

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