

# Freedom for women means making choices



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Stephanie Sisson

try to stay away from women's issues.

There are too many female journalists who can't seem to forget they're women long enough to take a stand on anything else.

However, this year is supposed to be the "Year of the Woman." So, just out of curiosity, I asked some of my friends to define the role of women in today's society.

In the 1990s, what does it mean to be a woman?

It means that if a man makes unwanted sexual advances toward you, you can accuse this man of sexual harassment and be believed, even if this man is a U.S. senator.

It also means a hypersensitive woman in the 1990s often confuses respect with chauvinism. Women are encouraged to be outraged by "negative" treatment by males, such as having doors held open for them or being called "ladies."

If you are a woman in the 1990s, you can choose the career you wish to pursue, and you have a good chance of getting a job based on your ability rather than your gender.

It also means you will probably be paid less than a male in your position. Although you've come a long way, baby, you still have a longer way to go on the pay scale.

In the pursuit of your career, as a woman in the 1990s, you have the option of waiting to settle down and begin a family until it's convenient to do so.

It also means that you, as a young woman in the 1990s, hear society telling you to put

your career before everything else, including marriage and children.

Thirty years ago, women were encouraged to put their families first and discard goals that did not include their husbands. Today the pendulum has swung the other way. As men are beginning to take on domestic responsibilities, you, as a woman, are being pressured to strive for promotion and put dreams of a family on the back burner.

As a woman in the 1970s and 1980s, you could run for public office. As a woman in the 1990s, you can win. You can do this now because sometimes you are the best candidate for the position.

It also means that a woman in the 1990s can be elected governor. She can do an average job of running the state, but she will be criticized more than a man because there are still voters who believe that women are less intelligent than men.

Being a woman in 1990s means that you, unlike women 30 years ago, aren't looking for Mr. Right, but if you think you've found him, you don't have to wait for him to call you. You can call him.

It also means you have more sexual freedom. Sex outside of marriage, society says, isn't as wrong now as it was 30 years ago.

However, there is still a double standard. Men who engage in sex with many partners partners are called studs. Women who do the same are called sluts.

Being a woman in the 1990s also means if you are a victim of a violent act such as rape, you can refuse to feel guilty about the assault, and you can demand justice.

This does not mean you'll get justice. But it is true women receive more encouragement now

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to report rapes. The shame attached to rape victims has decreased from what it was 30 years ago.

Being a woman in the 1990s means you have the legal right to make choices about your own body. You now have the option of terminating a pregnancy in a hospital by a qualified doctor. Dangerous, illegal abortions are becoming a horror of the past.

It also means that you, as a woman, now bear the awesome responsibility of deciding whether to terminate your child's life.

As a woman in the 1990s, you have a voice. You, as a woman today, can choose to take a stand against pornography on the grounds that pornography exploits women. You can fight against advertising that uses images of women to sell products. You can use your growing strength and influence as a woman to oppose topless bars like Jiggles and Lollipops.

You can also defend your right to earn a living with your body in a topless bar. Society used to look down on women who danced in bars even if these women were single and had no one to rely on for finan-

cial support. Women were taught to "get a husband" in order to be secure.

Now you, as a woman in the 1990s, are dependent upon yourself for finances. You don't believe in the knight on the white horse any more. You are expected to earn your own living, and if that means dancing in a bar, you are willing to speak out for the right to do so.

Being a woman in the 1990s means you have opportunities now that women in the past have not had.

It also means if you are to fulfill society's definition of today's woman, you are forced to try to make up for the last million years of oppression by becoming the opposite of the generation of women before you.

Much of feminism today is a lie. The feminist movement has lost its original purpose of providing women with a choice; whereas women 30 years ago were told to play a domesticated role in society, women today are expected to play an independent, aggressive role.

As women striving for equality, we've backed ourselves into a corner. If we choose not to pursue a career, and if we choose to put our families before ourselves, we are accused of hindering progress.

My point is that even though women today have more choices, we are still pressured by society to follow one path.

As women in the 1990s, we can be doctors, politicians, lawyers and construction workers if we want.

And as women in the 1990s who aren't afraid to think for ourselves, we can choose to be wives and mothers first, if that is what we really want.

*Stephanie Sisson writes a monthly column for the Emerald.*

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