

Feminists Support Marriage, Oppose Submission

By BONITA BALDWIN

"Feminists don't ruin marriages!" exclaimed Lyn Somers, president of the Rochester chapter of St. Joan's International Alliance. "We want to better the marriage relationship. Within marriage there ought to be intimacy, satisfaction, fulfillment, and the opportunity for each to develop his or her potential fully, she continued. "Any smothering of that potential is not marriage."

Ms. Somers contended that St. Joan members don't seek change so much as improvement. They have no desire to change women who are completely satisfied as wife and mother, but they do wish to broaden attitudes.

Sharon Mills, an active member of the Catholic feminist group, said that she sees most of her middle class friends quite happy in their homes. She related that she is troubled because they have never stopped to think about their roles or their options and tend to react negatively to feminist questions. Alliance members would like to eliminate the blinders that prevent these women from analyzing and choosing their life roles. Sharon said, "We must learn to be human beings first, then men and women, then husbands and wives."

Lyn and Sharon are both what is commonly termed "housewives." Lyn objected to the expression, "I don't know anyone who is married to a house." She classed housework as the lowest female profession. "I think it's lower than prostitution!" She called herself a "human development coordinator."

Lyn's lifestyle has not changed since she became involved in the feminist movement a few years ago. "I've changed — not my lifestyle." Role change does not have to mean role swapping, she explained. "Wife as helpmeet and husband as provider is not a working relationship," Sharon added, but outward reform is not always the remedy.

It can be, however. Lyn said studies prove that women at home who would prefer to work and instead have their creativity all bottled up inside of them do the poorest job of mothering. Lyn and Sharon both plan to return to work when their children go to school.

The women pointed out that men also are trapped in prescribed roles. The sexes are

socialized to complement each other from birth. "In marriage," Ms. Mills elaborated, "the two complementary sexes are expected to form a whole. Wouldn't two complete individuals form a more complete union than 1/2 plus 1/2?"

Lyn explained her perception that sexes are reared so differently that when they come together in marriage, they have very little shared experience.

"Where there is no shared experience, there is no empathy. Where there is no empathy, there is no intimacy. Where there is no intimacy, there is no marriage."

The Catholic feminists said that they are interested in changes in liturgy and what they see as traditional Catholic views on the role of women. "Marriage is more than the right to procreate legally," Lyn said. The Christian idea of "bearing your cross" has

tended to keep women in submission. "Submission cannot create partnership."

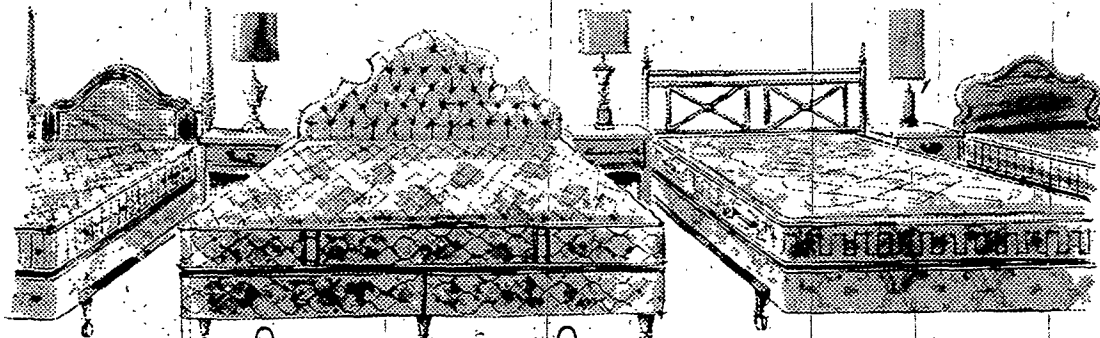
Lyn commented on the pedestal conception of woman. "I don't want to be on a pedestal. A statue is cold, lonely, not human, and above all passive." She quoted Jesus' words, "Love your neighbor as yourself," and added, "Love for others necessitates self-love and self-respect."

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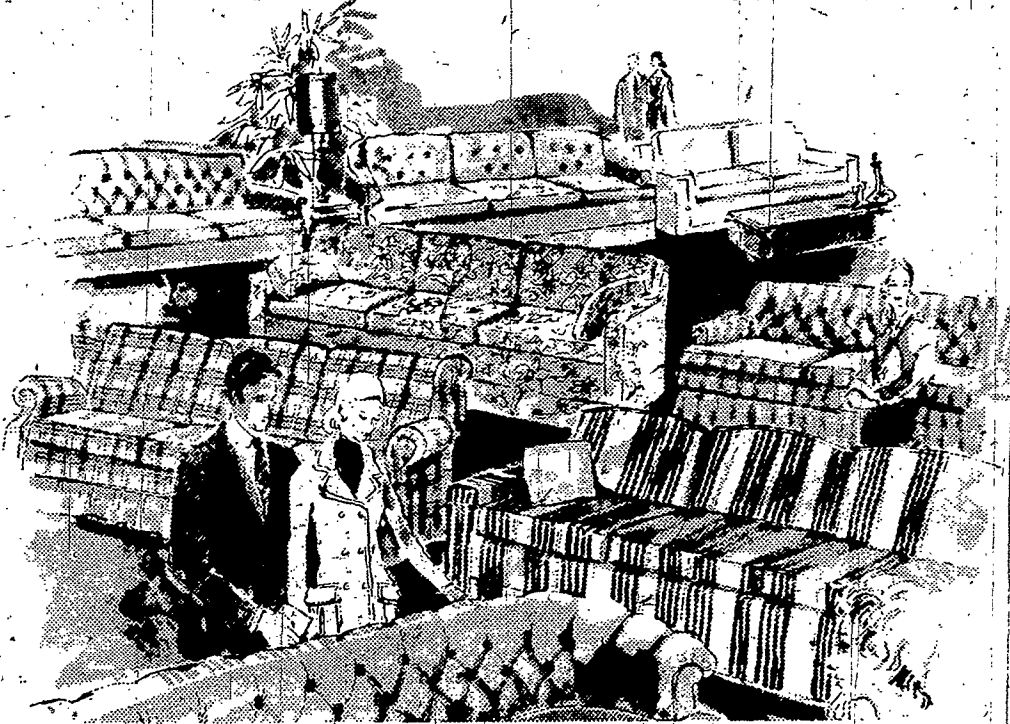
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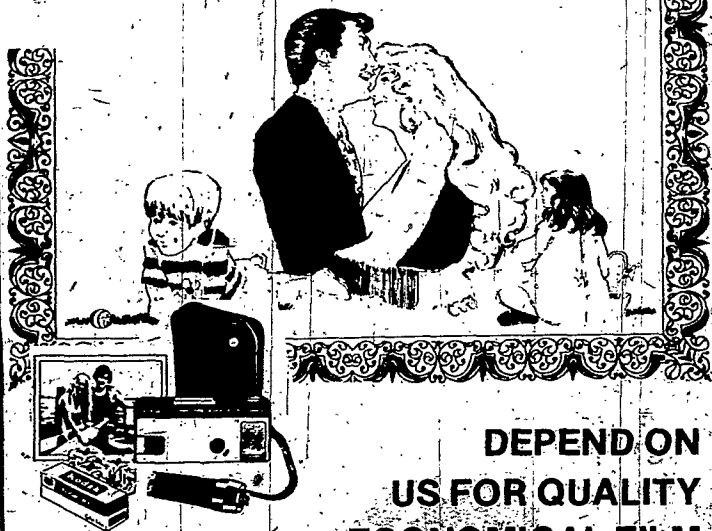
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