

At times, the activist must walk a tight rope. I often find myself placed in the position of "token" francophone. Organizations claim they serve the francophone community simply because, they "have one on the board." This statement provides little sense of support or process. You wait, you continue to do the work, but eventually you feel as though you're going to implode. Eventually you hear, "we don't know why francophone women don't come." Inclusiveness, acceptance, and regard for diversity are absent in the discussion. No one person represents or stands for an entire community, nor should they. As feminists we must struggle against the model of exclusive, single-minded, and limited access which has been long-established in the patriarchal system.

Feminism remains an anomaly for many francophone women. We recognize our subordinate and often marginal position within the patriarchal order but at the same time we support, defend, and maintain this construct. While attending a meeting of a francophone women's group, I heard responses to a rape victim's story that startled me. The film strip we had just watched described the rape of a woman by her best friend's fiancé. "She shouldn't have been there anyway!" was echoed in three different ways. In the end, it was the victim who was to blame. Trapped within a strict patriarchal society, as a francophone woman, you find little escape for restructuring the mold. Our direction, training, and education have been closely related to the church and the home. It is within these confines that we must try and seek out our own presence. Our experiences, like those of many women in Canada, include the disabling and paralyzing results of violence.

As francophone women, we continue to work at educating ourselves about our realities. Though the Panel on Violence lacked process and did little to reach an understanding about inclusiveness, the statistics did bring to light what women in this country had known, that violence was part of our everyday lives (10). Yet, little or no services are available to women here. And although there exist over a dozen 1-800 crisis lines in Ontario, not one is designated French. Transition houses and shelters may or may not have a bilingual person on staff. Documentation is difficult to find in French and little material has been written by francophone women for francophone women. The expression "it loses something in translation" is very close to our hearts since most of what we receive is not reflective of our culture or experience.

And yet there is hope. Francophone women are coming to terms with their double isolation and converging on the issues that direct our lives. Le Comité de femmes francophones du nord-ouest de l'Ontario recently completed a survey entitled *S'informer, c'est prévenir* in May 1994 concerning violence against francophone women in Northwestern Ontario. Francophone women made their voices heard by providing this survey with a 20 per cent response rate! Distributed to 1,200 francophone women in Northwestern Ontario, this high response rate reflects a desire and commitment to contribute to positive social

change. Comments made overwhelmingly identified the need for access for women in the North to services such as a 1-800 crisis line. Women identified feelings of isolation and concerns about the great distances that must be travelled to centres where services are available. Though many such reports have been carried out, few have reached the francophone community with such success. The fight is one that must be won for all of us.

In closing, I would say that language does not stop with the spoken and written word. Language is part of culture, it defines and recreates you as you use it throughout your life. It wasn't until I reached my forties that I discovered a need for francophone linguistic and cultural influences in my life. Like many francophone women, I have returned to embrace that which I had lost, a sense of identity and connectedness with a culture that remains strong and vibrant. It is this commitment and drive that will bring together our experiences and help us make the changes needed to celebrate diversity, widen our understanding, and build strong, safe, vibrant communities.

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