

How Long Till Equality?

And yet. All the gain is on the near side of that first simple word, all the distance lies right beyond the second.

There are more women working now than ever before, more women in politics, more teaching, more learning. And yet.

Most of the women hold down-scale jobs and draw salaries smaller than a man's for the same work; many live below the poverty line. The majority of American college students now are women, and yet the faculties instructing them are still mostly male. There are, all together, more women in state legislatures, more in the House and Senate than at any time in history. And yet. Neither these increasing numbers "of women politicians, nor their male colleagues could manage to get women something that once looked elementary, something that should have been so simple: a constitutional guarantee of equal rights under the law.

There are also the numbers, statistics like measured mile markers, flashing along a dawn drive toward a still distant reckoning. There were 301 women state legislators in 1969, 908 in 1981; 5,765 female elected officials in 1975, 14,225 just four years later. And yet, those 908 legislators are only 12% of the members of state legislative bodies. Only 19 of the 435 members of the U.S. House of Representatives are women, only two of the 100 Senators.

The numbers mark distance traveled and distance yet to go. Eighty percent of all women who work hold down "pink-collar jobs" and get paid about 660 of a man's dollar. Seventy percent of all classroom teachers are women, yet for the same job, they make an average of \$3,000 a year less than their male colleagues. More than a third of all candidates for M.B.A. degrees are women: the numbers encourage. Only 5% of the executives in the top 50 American companies are women: the numbers numb. Where once, even recently, there was nothing, all those statistics and all their corollaries now show there has been something: some progress forged for women over the past decade of challenge and confusion. Perhaps those numbers are really a crude scale for a new geography, exploring the wide gulf between something and satisfaction.

But when I began to consider the subject. . . I soon saw that it had one fatal drawback. I should never be able to . . . come to a conclusion. I should never be able to . . . hand you after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantelpiece for ever. All I could do was to offer you

an opinion upon one minor point—a woman must have money and a room of her own.

Virginia Woolf published *A Room of One's Own* in 1929. It remains the best book about the situation of women, which says much for the perpetual pertinence of art, and little for the mutability of men and social politics. "There is no mark on the wall," she wrote, "to measure the precise height of women," and, in the absolute sense, she is still right. The deepest impact of the women's movement is intangible. Some of feminism's greatest advances are revealed in the everyday auguries of family, home and job; some of its greatest power has come in altering the cadences and the promises of a woman's daily life. In 1972 women wondered hard about the possibility of having a family and a career,

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and being able to manage both. In 1982 more women—including some of the daughters of the past generation—take all this as a birthright.

Realistically, now, it will have to stand as a birthright deferred. Feminists of both genders attached a strong symbolic importance to the passing of the ERA and find in its final and formal defeat last week intimations of national malaise (see following story). "It is an appalling obscenity not to pass the ERA, when everyone knows women have to work and society wants them to work," says Novelist-Critic Elizabeth Hardwick. "There is an illiberal and I think tyrannical minority imposing its will on obvious needs for social change," remarks Novelist John Irving, who wrestled questions of feminism and family into contemporary myth, *The World According to Garp*. "Feminism is simply one of many human rights. The whole thing is very depressing."

Feminists took things somewhat less hard than the writers.

Eleanor Smeal, president of the National Organization for Women, and other leaders vowed to concentrate women's new consciousness and resources (NOW has reported recent monthly political contributions of \$1 million) on building legislative strength to win eventual passage of a resubmitted ERA. *My* magazine Co-Founder Gloria Steinem has already drafted marching orders for the '80s (reproductive freedom, democratization of families, more respect for work done in the home and comparable pay for the work done outside it).

"I'm very disappointed that the ERA didn't pass," admits Donna Shalala, 40, president

of New York City's Hunter College, who does not hesitate to add that "most of the critical breaks in my career would not have happened if it wasn't for the women's movement." Says Shalala: "It's going to be tough. The problems of the future are going to be more sophisticated. But I rarely meet a young woman who isn't more militant about control over her own future, as well as her own body. I'm just very positive about the future, and I think we all ought to be positive too."

The possibility—and, perhaps, the urgency—of positive feeling is in itself a product of progress. For a time, at the beginning, there seemed to be only occasions of rage.

: MAKING ROOM I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in.

Feminism was the last focus of the civil rights movement and the more general social activism of the late 1960s. Its potential constituency was the broadest and the deepest, but so were the problems it addressed: too wide, too varied, rooted too deep in sexuality and self-image, even in language. Ms.? An abbreviation for manuscript; an affectation otherwise, a pretense. Abortion? A moral question, never a biological one. Right to work? Something the unions settled during the Depression.

After the batterings of Selma and Viet Nam, several assassinations and summers of psychedelic overload, the country needed a warm bath and a bit of soothing. What it got instead was a fresh, hard needlepoint shower from the ranks—indeed, from the home. It was a little too much. Doors slammed, windows rattled shut. The national circuits had temporarily shorted out, and, in the prevailing gloom, the feminist torches looked less like beacons than

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sputtering pilot lights from the stoves the women were threatening to abandon.

Women's lib it was called then, short for liberation, of course, but unconsciously, closer to women's lip, with all attendant condescending connotations ("Ah shut up, I've had enough of your ..."). It was tough to be called a libber, even if you took pride in the politics, and those at first were mean. They were the politics of long frustration and new anger, and it was men who took the heat: as repressive husbands, lackadaisical fathers, selfish sex partners, exclusionary businessmen, blind-sided artists and perpetrators of a patriarchy that had to be overthrown. Even Shakespeare was a sexist for a little while. The press cut in on the dark carnival atmosphere, and in some measure contributed to it. On the occasion of a Miss America pageant, a marginal

faction of young women threw their underwear into an Atlantic City, N.J., garbage can, attempting some clumsy metaphorical gesture, and grabbed headlines, air time and a disproportionate share of posterity. If "libbers" were the dreary drones of the movement, "bra burners" were the lacy lunatic fringe. (A note: no bras were actually burned that day. Not a single flame was lighted, not in any sense.) "Bra burners" was a convenient, slightly comic way of dismissing demands and resisting confrontations that had been deferred too long. Those women were a curiosity and thus a comfort to the opposition.

Unfortunately, part of the opposition belonged in the feminist constituency. The fierce, early rhetoric of the women's movement boggled many of the same women it should have enlightened. Instead of challenging women who had made lives of substance and happiness with husbands and children, it put them on the defensive, made them think they had betrayed not only their womanhood but their selfhood as well. There was a self-righteousness among feminists that kept all kinds of potential recruits away. Emily Anne Smith, the second female designer-builder in Atlanta's history, recalls, "When the women's movement came along, I was involved in what I wanted for me. Then, when I did meet with NOW, I was put down. They told me I was selfish." Her friend Flo Bruns, who helped found Atlanta's high-powered Women Business Owners club (because "I didn't want to talk business to a man. My experience is he is going to patronize me") had a similar experience. "I walked into a NOW meeting wearing a business suit and ready to volunteer. I was treated like an outcast by all these young women in jeans. Power comes from money, honey, but they didn't recognize that." They did not recognize Raquel Welch either, who reasoned, "Maybe it might help the movement to be associated with someone less abrasive, more feminine. They weren't interested."

Maybe Welch should reapply. There has been much talk lately among feminists about community and consensus, and building a broader base, just as, outside the movement, there is a growing awareness of how much feminism and the battle for the ERA has meant to most American women.

Bruns says, "Our acceptance in the general business community has a lot to do with what the ERA people started." Renae Scott, who got herself some college education and worked herself off welfare to an administrative job with

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the Haymarket People's Fund of Boston, says, "No one, and I mean no one, got here by herself. Women in the past have paid a heavy price for the women of today.

What affirmative action programs we have, what salaries—no matter how small—were made possible with help from another person."

Scott, who is black, is a solid refutation of the widely held notion that feminism is strictly a white, middle-class issue. That remains a common enough criticism, as if the whole movement could be bundled up in a Volvo station wagon and sent off for a spin into irrelevancy. In fact, minority women may still be more concerned with problems of employment and discrimination than with the comparatively rarefied legalities of a constitutional amendment. But even their priority issues, in the words of former NOW President Aileen Hernandez, "flow out of the ERA." Adds Ruth Mandel, director of the Center for the American Woman and Politics at Rutgers University: "I'd be willing to bet that there is only a small minority of families in the U.S. that has not had to deal over the past ten years with the fact, or the consequences, of the women's movement."

Some families may have dealt with the consequences so extensively that for the younger members, the problem has just about blown away. "Equality is not as big an issue for us as it is for grownups," says Demetrius Toney, 17, of White Plains, N.Y. Maybe the reason is that, for Demetrius, it has long been a part of his second nature. His mother is a day worker, cleaning other people's houses, "so I do everything in our house. I sweep, I wash dishes. This week my brother is doing the laundry." At U.C.L.A., Director of the Women's Resource Center Tina Oakland says, "Most college women think the movement has worked. Girls don't think they need a women's movement. They think society is fair." Lori Harrington, 21, of Yonkers, N.Y., is not quite so sure. "I haven't lived long enough to know exactly what I'd be giving up for equality, but I do know what I'd be giving up if we went back to the '50s," she says. "I wouldn't be in school. There'd be no reason for me to be in school. I could forget becoming a journalist, unless I wanted to write a cooking column some place."

If Harrington is serious about a column, she might consider one about women and the law. Along with other benefits, it could shake up some of her peers. She might explain the immediate practical need for the ERA ("We are probably not going to see many more gains without some major legal change such as the ERA": Donna Lenhoff of Washington's Women's Legal Defense Fund. "I think we have gone as far as we can under the 14th Amendment": Gail Harmon, president of the fund). She might point out that the Supreme Court, lacking any clear standard for sex discrimination cases, has ruled both that the Martin Marietta Corp. was guilty of sex discrimination by not hiring women with children and that a California state disability plan was not

discriminatory, even though it excluded pregnancy as a disability. If Harrington wants to stir things up a little more, she might speculate on whether the country's first woman Justice, Sandra Day O'Connor, was more a jurist or a feminist. Her deciding vote in a case establishing

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that seniority systems are immune to suits under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act will probably not guarantee a Women's Legal Defense Fund testimonial. But her majority decision, handed down last Thursday, that an all-woman nursing school in Mississippi was guilty of sex discrimination is sure to rekindle a few low-burning fires in the feminist camp. O'Connor even added a kind of bonus in her written decision, when she pointed out that such segregation by sex only succeeds in reinforcing the stereotype of nursing as a woman's profession. For all the sense of debts owed and steps taken, there is a simultaneous impression of reluctance, on the part of many women, to be drawn even into the fringes of the movement. Some of this may be attributable to residual resentment of old rhetorical putdowns, and some of it may have to do with resistance to being commandeered as unenlisted political foot soldiers or being spoken for by proxy. "A lot of the failures of the movement are built into the people who are speaking for women," says Novelist Anne Tyler. "Basically I agree with everything they say, but I find myself wanting to disagree because of the way they say it. If people like me, who are pro-women, are put off by it, imagine other people." Or imagine a sympathetic parent, particularly a father, leafing through the beginning of a feminist guide to child rearing and banging a shin on the following parenthesis: "(See Chapter 24 for a full discussion of language as an exclusionary tool of male supremacy)." Imagine getting to Chapter 24; imagine turning the page.

It does not do, though, to be so easily put off. Movements all have their excesses. They come with the territory, even if they sometimes seem to cover it, like drifting snow over new paths. Indeed, should the father have persevered, he might have found some first-rate advice about children in that very same book. He would also have found a kind of zip-lock naivete that insulates Author Letty Cottin Pogrebin inside a cocoon of ideology. How else could a writer suggest, never mind believe, that children might be encouraged to forsake the music of the Rolling Stones (sexist, of course) for the uplifting ballads of Gay Feminist Holly Near. Ideology infringes on reality; one suspects it can also skew the sense of rhythm. It may not interfere with a woman's getting a job, however. And it may be able to show her why she cannot get a better one, or get paid in full for the very one she is doing now.

II: LEAVING ROOM / had made my living by cadging odd jobs from newspapers, by reporting a donkey show here or a wedding there; I had earned a few pounds by addressing envelopes, reading to old ladies, making artificial flowers, teaching the alphabet to small children in a kindergarten ... I need not, I am afraid, describe in any detail the hardness of the work, for you know perhaps women who have done it; nor the difficulty of living on the money when it was earned, for you may have tried. But what still remains with me as a worse infliction than either was the poison of fear and bitterness which those days bred in me.

When Woolf wrote those words, some women might work, and a woman alone had to work. Now, more and more, women must work. During the early 1970s, work was often a matter of finding pride and alternatives. There was much discussion of

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"self-realization" and "growth potential." The idea that a woman might also grow and realize herself through her children got short shrift; the notion that a man might experience the same satisfaction was either radical or sentimental and rated no attention. Fatherhood as fulfillment and as a responsibility, fulltime, is a concept that may be more popular in the '80s, when American families struggle to play catch-up with an inflationary economy and an increasingly competitive consumer society. For a woman, fulfillment may or may not remain a priority. Work has become a necessity.

Says Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder: "The primary reason women are entering the labor force in such unprecedented numbers is to maintain their family's standard of living." Statistics are the arithmetic of social revolution: from 1960 to 1980, one-earner households have declined from 49.6% to 22.4%, a staggering change. The percentage of married women in the staggering change. The percentage of married women in the work force during the same period has risen from 32% to 51%. The number of children with mothers who work (31.8 million) has become, for the first time, larger than the number of children with mothers at home (26.3 million).

"Even though a woman's paycheck is less than a man's, it keeps many an American family alive," says Betty Friedan. "Given the realities of human, family and national survival, there can't be any serious consideration that women will go home again." Elizabeth Hardwick puts it this way: "I certainly don't think the clock will be turned back, not because of any kindness on the part of society, but because it does not suit society for women to be in the home. It is not economically possible, it is not convenient, and it's not practical. The wife economy is as obsolete as the slave economy." At the very least, Hardwick's "wife economy" has mutated—out of the

kitchen, into the office, onto the assembly line—even as the wages paid for the new-woman's work range significantly below the male median.

Traditionally, jobs are the tools of success. In America they have become something more. "We have learned that jobs do not simply earn money, they also create people," says Barry Stein,, president of Goodmeasure, a Cambridge, Mass., business consultancy. Jobs, we have on good authority from the forefathers, confer respect, status and community wellbeing. The foremothers were apparently not consulted on the subject. It is difficult for a woman to find status in a pay envelope that is substantively thinner than a male co-worker's.

Not only has the current Administration made little effort to redress the wage imbalance, in the eyes of many feminists it has set out to blunt the victories of the past ten years. Around the Women's Legal Defense Fund, President Reagan's popularity rating is about as high as the heels on a California rancher's boots. Among the grievances: Administration suspension of stronger affirmative-action regulations for businesses receiving Government contracts; withdrawal of wage-discrimination and sex-segregation guidelines for federal contractors; elimination of the \$500 million set aside for child care in the federal budget.

Whether intended to do so or not, this has sent a clear message to

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feminists and working women alike. When Republican Congresswoman Margaret Roukema of New Jersey spoke at a Cape Cod, Mass., conference of women state legislators to plead for recognition of "reality" according to Reaganomics, she faced considerable heat from the floor. "I have the feeling you people want to shoot the messenger," she objected. State Representative Arie Taylor from Denver shouted back: "We don't want to shoot, but we don't have any jobs in Colorado, and we can't take care of our children! You take that message back to him!"

The President has never been noticeably receptive to messages of that tone or type. It is even unclear whether he is all that keen on sending women out to work at all. Last April, at a luncheon with editors and broadcasters, he said that part of the reason for high unemployment "is not as much recession as it is the great increase in the people going into the job market, and ladies, I'm not picking on anyone, but [it is] because of the increase in women who are working today and two-worker families." Rosalind Barnett, a psychologist at Wellesley College's Center for Research on Women, has little patience with such an analysis. "Once you see work as crucial to both men's and

women's sense of who they are," she says, "that kind of statement is abhorrent." Barnett and a colleague, Grace Baruch, completed a study demonstrating that, for women between the ages of 35 and 55, a paying job is the overriding factor that enhances a sense of worth.

Kinds of jobs, however, and ranges of salary remain a significant stumbling block—indeed, in some cases, a barrier. "Pay for full-time women clerical workers is extremely low," says Karen Nussbaum, executive director of 9 to 5, the National Association of Working Women. "It averages just over \$11,000 a year for women, as compared with male clericals, who earn over \$17,000. We feel if we could just get equal pay within our job classification we would be doing well." To date, 9 to 5 has initiated legal action that won over \$3 million in back pay for women in publishing and banking, in addition to major pay raises for female employees in banking, insurance and engineering, including a sizable \$1.34 million settlement from Bechtel.

Nonetheless, equal pay lies beyond the grasp of many women workers. Pamela Yore, 28, earns just over \$10,000 a year in a small Boston hospital. (Males performing similar or the same duties get more.) She has to take care of a five-year-old son and an ailing husband and would certainly be helped by more equitable pay. However, she says, "You learn not to make too many waves in the workplace.

If you do, there will be ten people there waiting for your job, and probably half of them have more education than you. You see women and men sitting side by side in the same office, doing the same job and making different salaries, and you have to tell yourself it is more a social attitude than a personal one directed at you.

But it is hard when you are not making as much as you could or should."

The situation is not a lot brighter on the management level. In 1980 the median salary for women managers and administrators was \$12,936, vs. \$23,558 for their male counterparts. A 1981 study by Wellesley researchers demonstrates that once she

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reaches middle management, a woman is likely to be marooned there. As Management Consultant Carol Weiss, who collaborated on the Wellesley study, points out: "If these women have got this far, you know they've had to be crackerjacks to get there. Men look around and they feel threatened."

Some of the greatest progress has been made in admissions to law and medical

schools. A third of the graduating class of Harvard Medical is made up of women. Law has had to practice what it has preached and legislated. When Justice O'Connor graduated from law school in 1952, the only job she was offered by major West Coast law firms was that of legal secretary. Now, if a firm wants the top of the law school class, it has to skim women along with men in the cream of the crop; 30.2% of 1981's graduates were women.

Over the past ten years, women have made significant progress in professional education. Women who left the campus with engineering degrees, for example, rose from .8% in 1971 to 10.4% last year.

But lawyers, doctors and women in what might be called high-profile jobs (journalism, publishing, broadcasting, fashion) take an outsize portion of public attention, partly because they are attractive exemplars of what is possible. But it is at the nether end of the economic scale that the hardest battles are being fought, and it is there that the statistics begin to take on the proportions of a body count.

Poverty is a longstanding social problem that hits American women with particular force. "Female heads of households are the disproportionate group of people in poverty," says Columbia University Economist Eli Ginzberg. "The feminization of poverty" is Sociologist Diana Pearce's blunt phrase for it. A Census Bureau report covering 1980 just goes by the numbers: "About one-half of all families below the poverty level in 1980 were maintained by women with no husband present. The poverty rate for such families was 32.7%, compared with 6.2% for married-couple families, and 11% for families with a male householder, no wife present." The report indicates that 50.8% of the female-headed families with related children under age 18 were poor. Seventy-five percent of absent fathers contribute no child support at all. The Aid to Families with Dependent Children program, which spent \$6.8 billion in fiscal 1981, will be spending only \$5.4 billion in fiscal '83.

Work must be done, but work cannot always be had.

When government services are curtailed, it is not only a small, fixed income that is lost, but jobs as well. The people dealing out federal funds are often one step away from poverty themselves, and as Cornell University's Barbara Wertheimer points out, "when you cut out services to the poor, you're also cutting the jobs that are held by women—child-care attendants, home health aides and the like. It's a double whammy." The disproportionate share of the reduction in federal programs is inexorably borne by the black working woman, "For me," adds M.I.T.'s Phyllis Wallace, "the shocking thing is that most families with black women as heads are

impoverished, and nearly half of all black children are in these families. The problem is how to improve the chance for these women to get jobs in the private sector." Women in black families almost always had to work;

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the need may be more acute now, but the situation is not new. "Even the most highly educated black women had no choice," says Wallace. "If they wanted their children educated, or if they wanted to buy a home, or just have a middle-class standard of living, they had to work! Young black women had working mothers, and they knew that would be their fate. This is new for white families."

Federal programs that would train women of any color for jobs have been cut back. Recession has hit the heavy industries, and experienced male workers are competing for jobs with women just entering the field. "It is not only that women and men doing the same work don't get paid the same," says Barbara Wertheimer. "It's that women are segregated into certain jobs where they are paid less. What we have to do is look at the value of the work to the society and determine pay based on that." What once was a cry for "equal pay for equal work" will, accordingly, become a demand for "equal pay for comparable work." How this will be measured and worked out is still a mystery—how does an hour at the computer keyboard prorate against the same time spent in the typing pool?

If the work equations are ever resolved, they may even help answer a question some men now ask only with amusement: "Have women's rights done anything for me?" It may have seemed funny and a little silly when feminists started talking about men sharing housework and wives began insisting to husbands that homemaking was a tough job all its own. But the joke may seem strained indeed to whoever is left in the kitchen. And, guaranteed, there will be more diapers and dishes in Dad's future .

III: LIVING ROOM

First there are nine months before the baby is born. Then the baby is born. Then there are three or four months spent in feeding the baby. After the baby is fed there are certainly five years spent in playing with the baby. You cannot, it seems, let children run about the streets. People who have seen them running wild in Russia say the sight is not a pleasant one.

So many of the issues of the women's movement, from housework to abortion, were so basic to so much received wisdom that they seemed, by prospect or in perspective,

either trivial or threatening. "Attention was finally being paid," Joan Didion wrote in a 1972 essay, "yet that attention was mired in the trivial. Even the brightest movement women found themselves engaged in sullen public colloquies about the inequities of dishwashing and the intolerable humiliations of being observed by construction workers on Sixth Avenue. ... It was a long way from Simone de Beauvoir's grave and awesome recognition of woman's role as 'the Other.' " Those examples can be trivial issues only to women who, in suburban snugness, no longer have to endure them. Their metaphorical weight—as symbols of the wife economy, and of victimization—should have been difficult to miss. Difficult, apparently, but by no means impossible. "Well, I wrote that in 1972 and I haven't really thought about it since then," Didion remarked recently. "I'm sorry. I've been thinking about other things."

For many other women, without Didion's intellectual range and without her literary privilege, it is still hard to think

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about much else. Assaultive language masquerading as sidewalk compliments can remind any woman of her vulnerability. Rape is still a waking nightmare, but at least a little daylight has been let in. The physical wounding and emotional trauma are now discussed openly. America is being educated; more stringent laws and penalties are now in effect and reflect a greater understanding of the crime. But feminism, in its widest application, is still a home-front revolution, and it is in the apartment, the tract house and the split-level that its greatest impact has been felt.

This is a fact that was more quickly grasped and used by Phyllis Schlafly and her resistance camp than by the feminist insurgents, who were, at first, so busy recruiting for the barricades that they left the main base vulnerable. Schlafly, however, was a good deal more cunning than anyone first thought. She has potentially a strong feminist background: a daughter of the Depression, she worked in a munitions plant to put herself through Washington University in St. Louis. Feminists might initially have mistaken her for a kind of grandstanding Betty Crocker, but Schlafly and her supporters marshaled all the fear and uncertainty that trails every social revolution, trimmed it and turned it against the opposition. ERA would encourage everything from rampant homosexuality to unisex bathrooms, from women draftees in combat to women victims of some squalid unisex millennium. Cheap and scary, sure, but as they say about such quibbles in Hollywood, "Hey, it worked."

No one took much notice that Schlafly's insistence upon strength through inequality could have been based on a fear and contempt for men at least as deep as, say, Radical

Feminist Ti-Grace Atkinson's. What emerged instead was the image of Phyllis Schlafly as defender of the traditional values, defender of the home. No matter that all the sociologists and all the statisticians and all the activists said Ozzie and Harriet were gone for good, that the conventional nuclear family, with Dad bringing home the bacon and Mom cooking it for him and the kids, survived in only 28% of American homes. The divorce rate almost doubled in the past decade, and the percentage of people living alone rose from 5.3% to 8.3%. Still, that family with the bacon is for many Americans not just the ideal family, but the American dream itself. Schlafly not only defended the home, she defended the dream, and her constituency has triumphed, for the moment, because dreams die hard.

But the lasting strength of families is not in tradition, it is in the capacity for change. Few novelists in years have written as well about the ferocious fragility of family love and family life as John Irving. *The World According to Garp* has a protagonist—no, a hero—who breaks conventional roles as if they were a halfhearted hammer lock, who not only tends the kids while his wife works and keeps the house in order, but actually takes joy in his tasks. Pride. Fulfillment. The book was more than a smash. It was a true literary phenomenon, and there are surely very few admirers of Garp who think, as the boys in the barroom still say, that he got his balls busted.

Nitpickers will be quick to raise a point: T.S. Garp was a writer, and writers work at home. What of the millions of other men who have to work away? What happens to the children with both mother and

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father off on the job? They cannot, as Virginia Woolf observed, "run about the streets." The options are limited, and so far imperfect. These days, what Woolf called "that deepseated [male role] desire, not so much that she shall be inferior as that he shall be superior" may have moderated into an awareness that a different equation is wanted. Finding and holding the balance, however, requires some acrobatic skill. It also demands flexibility and a good deal of resilience.

ABC Newsman Ted Koppel took a year off from a steady job so his wife Grace Anne could finish school. He sustained no visible career damage—indeed his boss gave him a daily three-minute radio program to keep the bills paid—and after his wife graduated, he went on to his greatest success as host of ABC News Nightline. On the other hand, Don Demers, an industrial engineer in Dayton, took the kids while his wife finished med school, then found, after more than two years away, that he could

not find another job. Commented Charles Arons, president of a Los Angeles employment firm: "There isn't a male I know of in an executive position who would accept raising kids as a legitimate excuse for not working for three years." Note the "not working": to Mr. Arons, a one-way ticket to the T.S. Garp Hit-the-Mat Seminar and Backyard Barbecue, held yearly on the grounds of the Hotel New Hampshire.

Aron's point, however, has a goodly amount of immediate, and unfortunate, practicality. There are not many executives who can appreciate or allow that the skill, say, of time management at home might be applied to office management, just as there are still very few corporations with personnel departments set up to accommodate the needs of the new work force and the flexible family. Other than enlisting the aid of family members, day care remains the most common way to manage the children during work hours.

Centers all over the country have been damaged by budget cuts and by some strong conceptual questions. Edward Zigler, director of the Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy at Yale University, estimates that 40% of the children of working mothers may be in "home day care" (that is, they are cared for either in their own home or in the sitter's), while fully another 40% are in "family day care," where a sitter outside the home cares for four to six children. "It is an open issue for children of every age," he says. Says Psychologist Michael Meyerhoff, who spent 13 years in the Harvard Pre-School Project: "If there is any element of choice, we've been trying to get people to be aware that the job they would be doing with their child is more important than any job outside the home. And you don't have to be a woman to be a good mother."

These doubts about day care can put a crimp in the family future, and a dent in the budget, but they do not, as Schlafly might have us believe, atomize the American nuclear family. The quality of the day care and its basing near the job may come a little closer to a workable solution. In Massachusetts both Wang Laboratories, Inc., and Stride Rite Corp. have inaugurated model projects with long waiting lists of applicants. Stride Rite's program also includes the options of dental care and psychotherapy. Adjustments made to work schedules, so-called

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flextime, are another component of the solution, as are extended maternity leaves for both parents.

There is still a long road to travel before such leaves become common in the U.S., and

probably even a more tortuous route before men as well as women will want to press hard for them. Author Maxine Hong Kingston is right when she says that "in the feminist movement, there are advantages for both sexes. It's like liberation for both, and not one at the expense of the other." Getting the majority of men to see those advantages, never mind seize them, may take a while. Down in the juke joints, the boys are listening to Merle Haggard sing a tune called *Are the Good Times Really Over*, a litany of wistful memories from "back when the country was strong." The song yearns for a time "when a girl could still cook and still would." Those boys may not be able to get a hot meal on the table themselves, but they won't abandon without a fight their inalienable right to have it rustled up by the little woman.

It will be a losing fight, ultimately, and it will not take place exclusively in the roadhouses. There have already been skirmishes up in the loftier precincts, where a well-turned antique compliment (Dr. Johnson to Boswell: "Men know that women are an overmatch for them") now sounds more like a neat way of undercutting a woman with awe. James Thurber, invited to talk to the graduating class of Mount Holyoke College in 1949 ("The idea of addressing the flower of American womanhood would terrify me even if I could see"), declined by invoking a story about a World War I soldier who, peering down into a bottomless enemy trench, allowed that "I wouldn't go down there even if they was Fig Newtons down there." The cookie does not crumble that way any more. The cookies, in fact, do not crumble at all. This does not mean charm is passé, or compliments are sexist, any more than it means that, contrary to all those shoofly Schlaflyisms, men and women will be less distinctive, or less sexual, if they work at the same jobs or compete at the same sports.

Biology is immutable. Basic physical differences will not change, but the law will. Absolute equality between men and women may be impossible—absolutes are—but it is approachable at least, and now just a little closer.

Equality does not eradicate differences in gender, it exalts them, which should be some comfort to cowering sexists still clinging to every advantage they have ever wangled or wrung out of women. Equality is only a threat if reality is. In the rubble of busted pedestals and shredded stereotypes are the pieces of a new perception: of the real, working, workable way of equality, of self-awareness, of mutual respect.

The women usually picked to symbolize change and re-evaluation are those like Gloria Steinem and Jane Fonda, who have achieved a popular success that has turned them into celebrities. Steinem therefore becomes an articulate and snazzy figurehead, Fonda a role model whose movie trajectory (from bimbo to feminist beacon) mirrors

very neatly the way in which women are supposed to see themselves. Watching and listening to them, though, is not as striking by half as tuning in on a single studio audience of the Phil Donahue Show. Fifteen years ago, these same women might have been sitting in the same seats, whooping it

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up when the host gave them a pair of nylons, a month's supply of Palmolive and dinner for two at Casa Claude. Now, encouraged by a host who is a professed feminist, women wrangle with each other over issues like abortion and disarmament, and ask tough questions of guests ranging from Alan Alda and James Watson to transsexual twins and Henry Kissinger, who might have an easier time of it on Meet the Press. The Donahue show is one striking illustration of women, five times a week, finding a voice.

Even the defeat of the ERA means just another redrafting, a further extension of the debate. There is one point on which feminists and most of their foes can now agree: there is no going back. The only question is how to define the future and how to cope with the challenges that the changing role of women will present.

In certain subtle ways, it might be argued that women may have succeeded too well. Their hopes have been so frequently dramatized and debated that they have turned into clichés of fiction before they have become matters of fact. The abundance of persuasive re-examination and the wealth of fine writing that have come from this woman's decade—Anne Tyler and Gail Godwin, Maxine Hong Kingston and Joyce Eliason, Ann Beattie and Elizabeth Hardwick and, yes, Joan Didion—have created a consciousness that is both more aware and a little restless, a little reckless, even, about mistaking gains for guarantees. Critic Janet Maslin summed up the plot of a movie this way: "[The heroine] confronts her new situation. She redefines her relationship with her children.

She re-enters the work force and examines her anxieties about men, sex and love. She learns that she is as much of a person without a partner as she was with one—perhaps even more of a person." That breeziness may just be emblematic of a generally renewed spirit, but somehow one prefers the rejoinder to a persistent cigarette ad printed boldly on a T shirt: I HAVEN'T COME A LONG WAY, AND I'M NOT A BABY.

IV: A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN

Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.

These things are not measurable by surveys or shows of hands or random samplings. If they are knowable at all, it is through some almost incidental combination of art and intuition, force of feeling and shock of knowledge. Finally it all comes to this: that women, after years—after centuries—are stepping through Virginia Woolf's looking glass. The measure of all the change and growth of the past decade is that women, finally, are coming out the other side of the mirror. The limit is that they have not shattered the glass. Not yet. And yet. —By Jay Cocks. Reported by Anne Constable/Atlanta, Ruth Mehrkens Calvin/Boston and Janice C. Simpson/New York

And yet. All the gain is on the near side of that first simple word, all the distance lies right beyond the second.

There are more women working now than ever before, more women in politics, more teaching, more learning. And yet.

Most of the women hold down-scale jobs and draw salaries smaller than a man's for the same work; many live below the poverty line. The majority of American college students now are women, and yet the faculties instructing them are still mostly male. There are, all together, more women in state legislatures, more in the House and Senate than at any time in history. And yet. Neither these increasing numbers "of women politicians, nor their male colleagues could manage to get women something that once looked elementary, something that should have been so simple: a constitutional guarantee of equal rights under the law.

There are also the numbers, statistics like measured mile markers, flashing along a dawn drive toward a still distant reckoning. There were 301 women state legislators in 1969, 908 in 1981; 5,765 female elected officials in 1975, 14,225 just four years later. And yet, those 908 legislators are only 12% of the members of state legislative bodies. Only 19 of the 435 members of the U.S. House of Representatives are women, only two of the 100 Senators.

The numbers mark distance traveled and distance yet to go. Eighty percent of all women who work hold down "pink-collar jobs" and get paid about 660 of a man's dollar. Seventy percent of all classroom teachers are women, yet for the same job, they make an average of \$3,000 a year less than their male colleagues. More than a third of all candidates for M.B.A. degrees are women: the numbers encourage. Only 5% of the executives in the top 50 American companies are women: the numbers numb. Where

once, even recently, there was nothing, all those statistics and all their corollaries now show there has been something: some progress forged for women over the past decade of challenge and confusion. Perhaps those numbers are really a crude scale for a new geography, exploring the wide gulf between something and satisfaction.

But when I began to consider the subject. . . I soon saw that it had one fatal drawback. I should never be able to . . . come to a conclusion. I should never be able to . . . hand you after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantelpiece for ever. All I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one minor point—a woman must have money and a room of her own.

Virginia Woolf published *A Room of One's Own* in 1929. It remains the best book about the situation of women, which says much for the perpetual pertinence of art, and little for the mutability of men and social politics. "There is no mark on the wall," she wrote, "to measure the precise height of women," and, in the absolute sense, she is still right. The deepest impact of the women's movement is intangible. Some of feminism's greatest advances are revealed in the everyday auguries of family, home and job; some of its greatest power has come in altering the cadences and the promises of a woman's daily life. In 1972 women wondered hard about the possibility of having a family and a career,