

Women's Lib:

Feminists Tell What 'Equality' Means To Them

Story By Paula Musto



Carol Schultz, National Organization of Women: "Women's liberation is not bra-burning and lesbians."

With her glittering motherhood brooch on one shoulder and an oversized safety pin (to symbolize babies) on the other, the middle-aged woman marched up to the long-haired feminist.

"Equal rights? You must be crazy... how would you like to work in the sewers?" Mrs. Married demanded of the young Ms. outside the crowded committee room where the war over the women's equal rights amendment was being waged for the umpteenth time in the Illinois General Assembly.

"All I want are my rights," retorted the young woman. "Yeh, well you can't do better than God," shouted the older lady.

Such scenes as this one were common occurrences in the spring session of the Illinois legislature where the equal rights amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which outlaws discrimination on the basis of sex, came up for a vote at least a dozen times. And each vote brought hordes of women — libbists and their not-so-liberated sisters — to the Capitol to argue over 51 per cent of the human race — women.

The dust has since settled. The feminists did not get their amendment. But women's liberation or non-lib is still one of the biggest conversation topics — and to some, still the biggest joke — everyone from the cocktail set to the brown baggers has going.

But too often the real women's issues seem clouded with the hee-haws: predictions of men and women cohabiting

Council of Catholic Women. All the women interviewed are speaking from their viewpoint and do not claim to speak for the entire organization.

Do You Feel Women Are Discriminated Against?

Carol Schultz, a member of NOW, an outspoken feminist group, prefers to say what women's lib is not about, notably "bra burning and lesbians."

"I get so sick of hearing this," said Mrs. Schultz. "I remember when I told a guy at work that I was going to my first NOW meeting and he said, 'Oh you're going to meet all those dikes there.'"

said Mrs. Schultz, who has been attending NOW meetings for five years. As for bra burning Mrs. Schultz laughs it off. "As far as I know no one has burned a bra. It's something the media pushed upon us," she said.

Darlene Logsdon, secretary of the Springfield NOW chapter, says "consciousness raising" is one of the main goals of the organization, which Betty Friedan, the mother of the women's liberation movement, founded in the early 1960's.

Consciousness raising, or change of attitude, says Mrs. Logsdon means getting rid of the traditional sexist stereotypes, e.g. the helpless, brainless female role vs. the he-man, all powerful male role.

"Change of attitude is the most important thing," said Mrs. Logsdon, "but the trouble is you can't legislate it."

Men, she says, must be able to do housework without considering it effeminate, and women must learn to see themselves as full human beings rather than hubby's helpmate.

Karen Gregg, a member of CIWL, also agrees change of attitude is an important issue, but she calls it a tricky problem.

"Men do not know what equal means... it does not mean women want to be exactly the same as men," said Mrs. Gregg.

The question of "equality vs. sameness" came up frequently in the debate over

the equal rights amendment, with many opponents arguing that passing the measure would mean the end to differences between the sexes.

"This is ridiculous," said Mrs. Gregg. "Female is still female. Women know we will never be able to do some of the things men do, and they do not want to," said Mrs. Gregg, noting the same is true for men.

The League of Women Voters is not a women's liberation group, but it often becomes involved with libbist issues.

"We really do not want to be identified with the women's liberation movement," said Jane Gair, president of LWV. "We want to look at political issues as people, not women," she said.

But women's liberation does become a factor in the group. For instance, the national LWV is now wrestling with a court suit filed by a male who is charging discrimination because the league only allows female members.

Despite the charges of sexism, Mrs. Gair says she is in favor of keeping the league all female. "There are plenty of mixed groups," said Mrs. Gair, "and until women achieve the status of men, I think they should use the

the women for their names — Mrs. Husband So-and-so, as the newspaper style dictated.

"It was then I realized we had been anonymous long enough," said Mrs. Evans, who asked the photographer that she be identified in the picture as Mrs. Ann Evans, rather than Mrs. Lawrence Evans.

Mrs. Schultz says the name

How Did You Get Involved In Women's Lib?

game irritates her, too, but she finds things like discrimination in employment even more trying.

She tells the story of her experiences with an employment agency in Springfield. "All they kept asking me is how fast I could type," said Mrs. Schultz.

"I told them I did not want



Karen Gregg, Central Illinois Women's Lobby: "Men do not know what equal means."

der way, the first question was who would take the notes. Even though I was the chairman, the men insisted I take the notes," said Mrs. Gair.

"Now why is that — what could I write down that any man couldn't just as easily write," she said. "And even worse, who has to always go out and make the coffee," asked the LWV president.

Ask any women who spouts the women's liberation philosophy and she'll probably tell you the story of how she couldn't stand being called "cutie" anymore... especially after she made Phi Beta Kappa; or how angry she got after applying for a

women in certain categories. When you find you don't fit into the mold, she said, you begin to wonder if there is something wrong with you.

"That's when I found the women's liberation movement," said Mrs. Schultz.

Mrs. Schultz said her involvement in women's liberation has not only had a good effect on her, but on her husband. "Now when he looks at a woman it is as a human being, rather just in a physical light. He's interested in what they have to say," she said.

Often women's liberation is depicted as a plot to destroy motherhood, femininity and the American family. Most of the women in the movement, however, reject this idea.

"One of the chief goals of women's liberation is upgrading the housewife. Despite what some say, I don't think she's on a pedestal, she's down in the mud," said Mrs. Gregg.

Mrs. Gair also argues that there must be "equal rights

for the housewife." "What really bothers me is many women are now working, but they are still expected to do all the housework," she said. But even if a woman does not work, Mrs. Gair says the housework should be shared.

About the question of femininity, Mrs. Gair says she is all for it, but that doesn't mean women can't do things like get drafted. "I can't see why women shouldn't have to serve in the armed forces and go to the battlefield like men. In all our wars nurses were on the battlefield," she said.

Mrs. Schultz feels the so-called "liberation" has strengthened her family. "My husband is much closer to the children now," said Mrs. Schultz, who has three children. "Too often men are treated more like visitors in the home," she said.

Several of the women said their involvement in the movement also has caused them to re-evaluate how they bring up their children. "My

I'm telling her to think about being a veterinarian," said Mrs. Schultz.

Mrs. Gregg also said she works at treating her children equally, including teaching her son that boys can show emotion without being considered effeminate. "I don't tell him that big boys don't cry," she said.

Certainly not all women share the women's liberation philosophy. There are no anti-women's liberation groups in Springfield as there are in some larger cities, but some of the women activists in Right To Life, an anti-abortion organization, take a dim view of many women liberation issues, especially the libbists' efforts to liberalize abortion laws.

"Abortion exploits women," said Barbara Donovan, the president of Right To Life. "It's the thing I don't understand about the women's liberation movement. Don't they know abortion is destroying women's bodies, that it is unfair to women?" asked Mrs. Donovan.

Other women in Right To Life had other quarrels with women's liberation. "I think there is a danger of women getting totally engrossed in doing things outside their home, and let their families suffer for it," said Sue Morris.

Mrs. Morris has run into problems at SSU because of their required work program. "It's sad, but I had to stop working on my degree, because I told them I did not want to do my work program until my youngest child is in school," said Mrs. Morris.

The school, she complained, would not let her defer the work program. "So I just won't go back for a while. The years I could spend with my preschooler are of more value than SSU credit," she said.

Carolyn Bodewes, also a Right to Life member, said she agrees with some aspects of women's liberation, but feels "they should spend more time working on the issues, and not spend their time knocking us (housewives who want to stay home)." "We don't feel frustrated. Gloria (Steimen) might think I'm stupid because I'm happy in my home; but I am," said Mrs. Bodewes. "Some people can find accomplishment through another person. I am willing to do anything I can to help my husband and I find enrichment in that," she said.

Mary Jones, president of the Springfield Diocese of Catholic Council of Catholic Women which opposed the equal rights amendment, said she is against most things women's liberation supports.

"I do not understand what the libbists are after," said Mrs. Jones. "We already have equal rights under the 14th amendment."

Mrs. Jones claims the equal rights amendment will destroy family life. "Look at the status of family life right now," she says. "All we need is the equal rights amendment to really destroy it."

Mrs. Jones, who says she will campaign against the amendment, when it comes up for a vote in the General Assembly the next time, said the amendment will force women to do things they do not want to do.

"I'll tell you one thing," she said, "I'm against women hauling garbage."

What Is Women's Lib All About?

the same washrooms and stories of the big mouthed buck sergeant on the front line.

To get a more serious picture of what woman activists — both those in the movement and those against it — are talking about, the Illinois State Journal talked with women representing several women's groups in Springfield, including the National Organization of Women (NOW), the Central Illinois Women's Lobby (CIWL), the League of Women Voters (LWV), Right to Life and



Jane Gair, president of League of Women Voters: "Women candidates aren't taken seriously."

league as a block," she said.

The league also is active in encouraging women to run for political office. Although Mrs. Gair says this year there will be more females on the ballot, there are still too few women in politics.

"The trouble is women candidates aren't taken seriously enough by men or political parties," complained Mrs. Gair. She maintains women, especially housewives, are often better suited for political office than men because the women have more time for the job. Also when it comes to non-salary posts, she said, it's a plus if the woman does not have to worry about money.

Ann Evans, a LWV board member, said she went through most her female life without giving a thought to discrimination. Then one day it hit her.

Six months ago the league was touring a prison and the photographer from the local newspaper was covering the event. After taking some pictures the photographer asked

to be a receptionist or a secretary, but those were the only jobs they would offer me. I told them I could do other things... anything... I could drive a truck," she said.

Mrs. Schultz admits she lost that round. She is now working as a secretary, but she is still fighting the "low-man-on-the-totem-pole image" she says many secretaries have to put up with.

Mrs. Logsdon also terms jobs as a number one problem for many women.

"First they tell you that you can't get a good job because you'll probably get married and leave; then once you're married, they say you'll get pregnant; and then by the time you've raised your family they use the excuse that you are menopausal," said Mrs. Logsdon.

Mrs. Gair said the discrimination she often finds most annoying is the more subtle form. The story she tells involves an all-male committee she chaired.

"When the meeting got un-

credit card when she was told she needed her husband's signature.

Mrs. Gregg can remember back several years when she was at home with two preschool children, and she picked up a copy of Betty Friedan's "Female Mystique," a sort of a Bible to the women's movement, which urges the ladies to get out and do more with their lives than wipe a toddler's nose and cook meals for her husband.

Mrs. Gregg, who now attends Sangamon State University, said it was after reading that book she decided to go back to school, and get involved in the women's movement.

Cleraine Camper, a social worker at Andrew McFarland Zone Center Hospital and a member of NOW, said her interest in the movement probably stems from her mother's attitude toward the traditional female role.

"She preached you have to go out, you have to date a lot, and if not, there was something wrong with you," said Mrs. Camper. "Marriage was held as the be all and end all," she said.

Mrs. Schultz also said she rejected the attempt to put



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