

Feminism unable to bring about total equality

By Jessica Bennett, Jesse Ellison and Sarah Ball, Newsweek

They were an archetype: independent, determined young graduates of Seven Sisters colleges, fresh-faced, new to the big city, full of aspiration. Privately, they burned with the kind of ambition that New York encourages so well. Yet they were told in job interviews that women could never get to the top, or even the middle. They accepted positions anyway—sorting mail, collecting newspaper clippings, delivering coffee. Clad in short skirts and dark-rimmed glasses, they'd click around in heels, currying favor with the all-male management, smiling softly when the bosses called them "dollies." That's just the way the world worked then. Though each quietly believed she'd be the one to break through, ambition, in any real sense, wasn't something a woman could talk about out loud. But by 1969, as the women's movement gathered force around them, the dollies got restless. They began meeting in secret, whispering in the ladies' room or huddling around a colleague's desk. To talk freely they'd head to the Women's Exchange, a 19th-century relic where they could chat discreetly on their lunch break. At first there were just three, then nine, then ultimately 46—women who would become the first group of media professionals to sue for employment discrimination based on gender under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. Their employer was NEWSWEEK magazine.

Until six months ago, when sex- and gender-discrimination scandals hit ESPN, David Letterman's Late Show, and the New York Post, the three of us—all young NEWSWEEK writers—knew virtually nothing of these women's struggle. Over time, it seemed, their story had faded from the collective conversation. Eventually we got our hands on a worn copy of *In Our Time*, a memoir written by a former NEWSWEEK researcher,

Susan Brownmiller, which had a chapter on the uprising. With a crumpled Post-it marking the page, we passed it around, mesmerized by descriptions that showed just how much has changed, and how much hasn't.

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