PS for 11/16/89

Facing the Future of Families

Anyone who reads the print media closely can find a few items now and then that run contrary to the prevailing liberal and feminist ideologies. For example, despite our being harangued for the last 15 years about how degrading it is to call a woman a "girl," I noted a cartoon in *The New Yorker* that showed a modern young woman standing at a cocktail party and coyly saying to a male companion, "It's all right, now, to call me a girl."

The post-feminist generation is also heralded by occasional articles even in metropolitan newspapers. Sometimes they are written by women who have discovered that feminists led them down a marriageless trail, and sometimes by women who are so surprised to discover that motherhood is a demanding and even fulfilling career.

A recent Op-Ed piece in the *New York Times* titled "Motherhood's Better Before 30" carried the subhead "Voices of the New Generation." The young female author felt the urge to make a statement that she and her contemporaries are NOT going to follow in the footsteps of '70s feminists who postponed motherhood in favor of careers and now find they are plagued by problems of infertility, amniocentesis, and lack of energy when a 45-year-old mom tries to keep up with her toddler.

Newsweek just devoted an entire issue of 100 pages (less ads) to "The 21st Century Family," starting with the lead sentence that "The American family does not exist." In case you are a member of this time-honored institution which *Newsweek* has relegated to the age of the '50s (in the eyes of the authors, just as remote as the age of the dinosaur), perhaps you should do your own "hard thinking about what a family is for" instead of relying on the thinking of writers whose family status and sexual/marital preferences are undisclosed.

Newsweek pontificates that it was "inevitable" that "we" would "reinvent" the family. "We" apparently means the dozen or so writers who contributed to this issue.

This redefinition of the family, according to *Newsweek,* includes families of divorced parents and stepchildren, unmarried couples living together, single women deliberately having babies by donor insemination, gay and lesbian couples with or without children, grandparents raising children, and genetically made-to-

order babies. Proclaiming that “most scholars now consider the ‘breadwinner-homemaker’ model unusual, applicable in limited circumstances for a limited time,” *Newsweek* doesn’t include that traditional pattern among the current family “varieties.”

Newsweek seems to think that so-called Ozzie and Harriet lifestyle was simply created and validated by television, and that therefore the media can now play God and design a more modern version.

But is the new family described in *Newsweek* a improvement? Does it serve our goals of providing a base from which to face life’s challenges, a safe haven to care for our young, a nest where love and companionship can grow, and an encouragement to nurture each other through life’s many stages of aging? One searches the pages in vain to find positive answers to these questions.

Last month, Janet Lynn Salomon, the champion figure skater of the 1970s, spoke at a banquet where she received a Fulltime Homemaker of the Year Award. She said that the job of being a wife, mother and homemaker “has demanded of me as much, if not more, than being a world class athlete. The creativity in homemaking has as many possibilities as the finest art.”

When Janet Lynn signed her professional contract with the Ice Follies in 1973, it was for the largest sum ever earned by a woman athlete up to that time. A few years later, she gave up her skating career to become a fulltime mother to her three sons.

At the banquet this year, Mrs. Salomon said, “I’ve found that the really important things with our children don’t come up during planned, so-called quality times, but at the strangest times. I am so glad I am present for these times now.” But in *Newsweek’s* hundred pages, there is no room for the mother who raises her own children, with generous love and career sacrifice.

If you stick with this magazine’s tome to the bitter end, you will find that *Newsweek* actually reports the new evidence that infants in daycare for 20 or more hours a week are at risk, and that the high turnover rate among paid caregivers and the high disease rate of institutionalized children make daycare a very uncertain and unhappy place for children.

Back on page 92, *Newsweek* ruefully admits: “Despite the compelling evidence about the dark side of daycare, many experts say there’s a great reluctance to

discuss these problems publicly." Why? "Because they're afraid the right wing will use this to say that only mothers can care for babies, so women should stay home."

What the liberals and the feminists are really afraid of is not the right wing but the truth that the traditional family is still the best way to live, and that babies still need mothers in the home.