

## Chapter 7: Bucking the Tide: Personal Prescriptions for Sharing Childrearing Responsibility and Maximizing Careers

This chapter examines three quite distinct approaches to resisting the pressures to adopt conventional gender roles that lead women to marginalize themselves economically and give up on having demanding full time careers, one written in 1969 by Alix Kates Shulman (“A Marriage Contract”), and the other two contrasting contemporary approaches. Linda Hirshman adopts a prescriptive voice in a brief essay published in 2005 that attacks the “opt-out revolution” literature (see Belkin in chapter 4) and urges young women to obey several rules if they want to maximize their earnings and careers. Francine Deutsch’s study of parents who equally share parenting responsibilities suggests that it is neither so rare or difficult to work out shared parenting arrangements, though she is insightful about the barriers that make this aspiration a challenging one for many who aspire to egalitarian childrearing but find themselves sucked back into conventional gender roles at home and at work.

### 1. Alix Kates Shulman, “A Marriage Agreement”

When my husband and I were first married, a decade ago, keeping house was less a burden than a game. We both worked full-time in New York City, so our small apartment stayed empty most of the day and taking care of it was very little trouble. Twice a month we’d spend Saturday cleaning and doing our laundry at the laundromat. We shopped for food together after work, and though I usually did the cooking, my husband was happy to help. Since our meals were simple and casual, there were few dishes to wash. We occasionally had dinner out and usually ate breakfast at a diner near our offices. We spent most of our free time doing things we enjoyed together, such as taking long walks in the evenings and spending weekends in Central Park. Our domestic life was beautifully uncomplicated.

When our son was born, our domestic life suddenly became *quite* complicated; and two years later, when our daughter was born, it became impossible. We automatically accepted the traditional sex roles that society assigns. My husband worked all day in an office; I left my job and stayed at home, taking on almost all the burdens of housekeeping and child raising.

When I was working I had grown used to seeing people during the day, to having a life outside the home. But now I was restricted to the company of two demanding preschoolers and to the four walls of an apartment. It seemed unfair that while my husband’s life had changed little when the children were born, domestic life had become the only life I had.

I tried to cope with the demands of my new situation, assuming that other women were able to handle even larger families with ease and still find time for themselves. I couldn’t seem to do that.

We had to move to another apartment to accommodate our larger family, and because of the children, keeping it reasonably neat took several hours a day. I prepared half a dozen meals every day for from one to four people at a time-and everyone ate different food. Shopping for this brood-or even just running out for a quart of milk-meant putting on snowsuits, boots, and mittens; getting strollers or carriages up and down the stairs; and scheduling the trip so it would

not interfere with one of the children's feeding or nap or illness or some other domestic job. Laundry was now a daily chore. I seemed to be working every minute of the day-and still there were dishes in the sink; still there wasn't time enough to do everything.

Even more burdensome than the typical work of housekeeping was the relentless responsibility I had for my children. I loved them, but they seemed to be taking over my life. There was nothing I could do, or even contemplate, without first considering how they would be affected. As they grew older just answering their constant questions ruled out even a private mental life. I had once enjoyed reading, but now if there was a moment free, instead of reading for myself, I read to them. I wanted to work on my own writing, but there simply weren't enough hours in the day. I had no time for myself; the children were always *there*.

As my husband's job began keeping him at work later and later-and sometimes taking him out of town-I missed his help and companionship. I wished he would come home at six o'clock and spend time with the children so they could know him better. I continued to buy food with him in mind and dutifully set his place at the table. Yet sometimes whole weeks would go by without his having dinner with us. When he did get home the children were often asleep, and we both were too tired ourselves to do anything but sleep.

We accepted the demands of his work as unavoidable. Like most couples, we assumed that the wife must accommodate to the husband's schedule, since it is his work that brings in the money.

As the children grew older, I began free-lance editing at home. I felt I had to squeeze it into my "free" time and not allow it to interfere with my domestic duties or the time I owed my husband-just as he felt he had to squeeze in time for the children during weekends. We were both chronically dissatisfied, but we knew no solutions.

After I had been home with the children for six years I began to attend meetings of the newly formed Women's Liberation Movement in New York City. At these meetings I began to see that my situation was not uncommon; other women too felt drained and frustrated as housewives and mothers. When we started to talk about how we would have chosen to arrange our lives, most of us agreed that even though we might have preferred something different, we had never felt we had a choice in the matter. We realized that we had slipped into full domestic responsibility simply as a matter of course, and it seemed unfair.

When I added them up, the chores I was responsible for amounted to a hectic **6 A.M.-9 P.M.** (often later) job, without salary, breaks or vacation. No employer would be able to demand these hours legally, but most mothers take them for granted-as I did until I became a feminist.

For years mothers like me have acquiesced to the strain of the preschool years and endless household maintenance without any real choice. Why, I asked myself, should a couple's decision to have a family mean that the woman must immerse years of her life in their children? And why should men like my husband miss caring for and knowing their children?

Eventually, after an arduous examination of our situation, my husband and I decided that we no longer had to accept the sex roles that had turned us into a lame family. Out of equal parts of love for each other and desperation at our situation, we decided to re-examine the patterns we had been living by, and starting again from scratch, to define our roles for ourselves.

We began by agreeing to share completely all responsibility for raising our children (by then aged five and seven) and caring for our household. If this new arrangement meant that my husband would have to change his job or that I would have to do more free-lance work or that we would have to live on a different scale, then we would. It would be worth it if it could make us once again equal, independent and loving as we had been when we were first married.

Simply agreeing verbally to share domestic duties didn't work, despite our best intentions. And when we tried to divide them "spontaneously" we ended up following traditional patterns. Our old habits were too deeprooted. So we sat down and drew up a formal agreement, acceptable to both of us, that clearly defined the responsibilities we each had.

It may sound a bit formal, but it has worked for us. Here it is:

## **MARRIAGE AGREEMENT**

### **I. Principles**

We reject the notion that the work which brings in more money is more valuable. The ability to earn more money is a privilege which must not be compounded by enabling a larger earner to buy out of his/her duties and put the burden either on the partner who earns less or on another person hired from outside.

We believe that each partner has an equal right to his/her own time, work, value, choices. As long as all duties are performed, each of us may use his/her extra time any way he/she chooses. If he/she wants to use it making money, fine. If he/she wants to spend it with spouse, fine. If not, fine.

As parents we believe we must share all responsibility for taking care of our children and home-not only the work but also the responsibility. At least during the first year of this agreement, *sharing responsibility* shall mean dividing the *jobs* and dividing the *time*.

In principle, jobs should be shared equally, 50-50, but deals may be made by mutual agreement. If jobs and schedule are divided on any other than a 50-50 basis, then at any time either party may call for a re-examination and redistribution of jobs or a revision of the schedule. Any deviation from 50-50 must be for the convenience of both parties. If one party works overtime in any domestic job, he/she must be compensated by equal extra work by the other. The schedule may be flexible, but changes must be formally agreed upon. The terms of this agreement are rights and duties, not privileges and favors.

### **II. Job Breakdown and Schedule**

#### **A) Children**

**1. Mornings:** Waking children; getting their clothes out; making their lunches; seeing that they have notes, homework, money, bus passes, books; brushing their hair; giving them breakfast (making coffee for us). Every other week each parent does all.

**2. Transportation:** Getting children to and from lessons, doctors, dentists (including making appointments), friends' houses, park, parties, movies, libraries. Parts occurring between **3** and **6 P.M.** fall to wife. She must be compensated by extra work from husband (see 10 below). Husband does all weekend transportation and pickups after 6.

**3. Help:** Helping with homework, personal problems, projects like cooking, making gifts, experiments, planting; answering questions; explaining things. Parts occurring between **3** and **6 P.M.** fall to wife. After **6 P.M.** husband does Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday; wife does Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday. Friday is free for whoever has done extra work during the week.

**4. Nighttime (after 6 P.M.):** Getting children to take baths, brush their teeth, put away their toys and clothes, go to bed; reading with them; tucking them in and having nighttime talks; handling if they wake or call in the night. Husband does Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday. Wife does

Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday. Friday is split according to who has done extra work during the week.

**5. *Baby sitters:*** Getting baby sitters (which sometimes takes an hour of phoning). Baby sitters must be called by the parent the sitter is to replace. If no sitter turns up, that parent must stay home.

**6. *Sick care:*** Calling doctors; checking symptoms; getting prescriptions filled; remembering to give medicine; taking days off to stay home with sick child; providing special activities. This must still be worked out equally, since now wife seems to do it all. (The same goes for the now frequently declared school closings for so-called political protest, whereby the mayor gets credit at the expense of the mothers of young children. The mayor closes only the schools, not the places of business or the government offices.) In any case, wife must be compensated (see 10 below).

**7. *Weekends:*** All usual child care, plus special activities (beach, park, zoo). Split equally. Husband is free all Saturday, wife is free all Sunday.

### ***B) Housework***

**8. *Cooking:*** Breakfast; dinner (children, parents, guests). Breakfasts during the week are divided equally; husband does all weekend breakfasts (including shopping for them and dishes). Wife does all dinners except Sunday nights. Husband does Sunday dinner and any other dinners on his nights of responsibility if wife isn't home. Whoever invites guests does shopping, cooking and dishes; if both invite them, split work.

**9. *Shopping.*** Food for all meals, housewares, clothing and supplies for children. Divide by convenience. Generally, wife does local daily food shopping; husband does special shopping for supplies and children's things.

**10. *Cleaning:*** Dishes daily; apartment weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly. Husband does dishes Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. Wife does Monday, Wednesday and Saturday. Friday is split according to who has done extra work during week. Husband does all the house cleaning in exchange for wife's extra child care (3 to 6 daily) and sick care.

**11. *Laundry:*** Home laundry; making beds; dry cleaning (take and pick up). Wife does home laundry. Husband does dry cleaning delivery and pickup. Wife strips beds. Husband remakes them.

\* \* \*

Our agreement changed our lives. Surprisingly, once we had written it down, we had to refer to it only two or three times. But we still had to work to keep the old habits from intruding. If it was my husband's night to take care of the children, I had to be careful not to check up on how he was managing. And if the baby sitter didn't show up for him, I would have to remember it was *his* problem.

Eventually, the agreement entered our heads, and now, after two successful years of following it, we find that our new roles come to us as readily as the old ones had. I willingly help my husband clean the apartment (knowing it is his responsibility) and he often helps me with the laundry or the meals. We work together and trade off duties with ease now that the responsibilities are truly shared. We each have less work, more hours together and less resentment.

Before we made our agreement I had never been able to find the time to finish even one book. Over the past two years I've written three children's books, a biography and a novel and

edited a collection of writings (all will have been published by spring of 1972). Without our agreement I would never have been able to do this.

At present my husband works a regular 40-hour week, and I write at home during the six hours the children are in school. He earns more money now than I do, so his salary covers more of our expenses than the money I make with my free-lance work. But if either of us should change jobs, working hours or income, we would probably adjust our agreement.

Perhaps the best testimonial of all to our marriage is the change that has taken place in our family life. One day after it had been in effect for only four months our daughter said to my husband, "You know, Daddy, I used to love Mommy more than you, but now I love you both the same."

*This essay was first written in 1969 and subsequently published in mainstream magazines such as Redbook in 1971 and Life in 1972. It has been anthologized in feminist, sociological, and even legal anthologies and textbooks, including one by Harvard Law School Professor Lon Fuller, in Basic Contract Law. "A Marriage Contract" preceded the publication in 1972 of Shulman's well-known novel, Memoirs of a Prom Queen.*

#### Questions.

1. What do you make of the agreement that Shulman and her husband worked out? Could you imagine coming up with such a document? Why or why not?
2. Why is it easy to slide back into "default mode" with respect to unpaid household work?

2. **Linda Hirshman, "America's Stay-at-Home Feminists," *The American Prospect*, November 24, 2005**

#### **The Truth About Elite Women**

Half of the wealthiest, most-privileged, best-educated females in the country stay home with their babies rather than work in the market economy. When in September the *New York Times* featured an article exploring a piece of this story, "Many Women at Elite Colleges Set Career Path to Motherhood," the blogosphere went ballistic, countering with anecdotes and sarcasm.

*Slate's* Jack Shafer accused the *Times* of "weasel-words" and of publishing the same story -- essentially, "The Opt-Out Revolution" -- every few years, and, recently, every few weeks. (A month after the flap, the *Times's* only female columnist, Maureen Dowd, invoked the elite-college article in her contribution to the *Times's* running soap, "What's A Modern Girl To Do?\_about how women must forgo feminism even to get laid.)

The colleges article provoked such fury that the *Times* had to post an explanation of the then-student journalist's methodology on its Web site. There's only one problem: There is important truth in the dropout story. Even *though* it appeared in *The New York Times*.

I stumbled across the news three years ago when researching a book on marriage after feminism. I found that among the educated elite, who are the logical heirs of the agenda of empowering women, feminism has largely failed in its goals. There are few women in the corridors of power, and marriage is essentially unchanged. The number of women at universities exceeds the number of men. But, more than a generation after feminism, the number of women in elite jobs doesn't come close.

Why did this happen? The answer I discovered -- an answer neither feminist leaders nor women themselves want to face -- is that while the public world has changed, albeit imperfectly, to accommodate women among the elite, private lives have hardly budged. The real glass ceiling is at home.

Looking back, it seems obvious that the unreconstructed family was destined to re-emerge after the passage of feminism's storm of social change. Following the original impulse to address everything in the lives of women, feminism turned its focus to cracking open the doors of the public power structure.

This was no small task. At the beginning, there were male juries and male Ivy League schools, sex-segregated want ads, discriminatory employers, harassing colleagues. As a result of feminist efforts -- and larger economic trends -- the percentage of women, even of mothers in full- or part-time employment, rose robustly through the 1980s and early '90s.

But then the pace slowed. The census numbers for all working mothers leveled off around 1990 and have fallen modestly since 1998. In interviews, women with enough money to quit work say they are "choosing" to opt out. Their words conceal a crucial reality: the belief that women are responsible for child-rearing and homemaking was largely untouched by decades of workplace feminism. Add to this the good evidence that the upper-class workplace has become more demanding and then mix in the successful conservative cultural campaign to reinforce traditional gender roles and you've got a perfect recipe for feminism's stall.

People who don't like the message attack the data. True, the *Times* based its college story on a survey of questionable reliability and a bunch of interviews. ... What evidence *is* good enough? Let's start with you. Educated and affluent reader, if you are a 30- or 40-something woman with children, what are you doing? Husbands, what are your wives doing? Older readers, what are your married daughters with children doing? I have asked this question of scores of women and men. Among the affluent-educated-married population, women are letting their careers slide to tend the home fires. If my interviewees are working, they work largely part time, and their part-time careers are not putting them in the executive suite.

Here's some more evidence: During the '90s, I taught a course in sexual bargaining at a very good college. Each year, after the class reviewed the low rewards for child-care work, I asked how the students anticipated combining work with child-rearing. At least half the female students described lives of part-time or home-based work. Guys expected their female partners to care for the children. When I asked the young men how they reconciled that prospect with the manifest low regard the market has for child care, they were mystified. Turning to the women who had spoken before, they said, uniformly, "But she chose it." ...

I stumbled across the story when, while planning a book, I happened to watch *Sex and the City's* Charlotte agonize about getting her wedding announcement in the "Sunday Styles" section of *The New York Times*. What better sample, I thought, than the brilliantly educated and accomplished brides of the "Sunday Styles," circa 1996?

At marriage, they included a vice president of client communication, a gastroenterologist, a lawyer, an editor, and a marketing executive. In 2003 and 2004, I tracked them down and called them. I interviewed about 80 percent of the 41 women who announced their weddings over three Sundays in 1996. Around 40 years old, college graduates with careers: Who was more likely than they to be reaping feminism's promise of opportunity? Imagine my shock when I found almost all the brides from the first Sunday at home with their children. Statistical anomaly? Nope. Same result for the next Sunday. And the one after that.

Ninety percent of the brides I found had had babies. Of the 30 with babies, five were still working full time. Twenty-five, or 85 percent, were not working full time. Of those not working full time, 10 were working part time but often a long way from their prior career paths. And half the married women with children were not working at all.

And there is more. In 2000, Harvard Business School professor Myra Hart surveyed the women of the classes of 1981, 1986, and 1991 and found that only 38 percent of female Harvard MBAs were working full time. A 2004 survey by the Center for Work-Life Policy of 2,443 women with a graduate degree or very prestigious bachelor's degree revealed that 43 percent of those women with children had taken a time out, primarily for family reasons.

Richard Posner, federal appeals-court judge and occasional University of Chicago adjunct professor, reports that "the [*Times*] article confirms -- what everyone associated with such institutions [elite law schools] has long known: that a vastly higher percentage of female than of male students will drop out of the workforce to take care of their children."

How many anecdotes to become data? The 2000 census showed a decline in the percentage of mothers of infants working full time, part time, or seeking employment. Starting at 31 percent in 1976, the percentage had gone up almost every year to 1992, hit a high of 58.7 percent in 1998, and then began to drop -- to 55.2 percent in 2000, to 54.6 percent in 2002, to 53.7 percent in 2003. Statistics just released showed further decline to 52.9 percent in 2004. Even the percentage of working mothers with children who were not infants declined between 2000 and 2003, from 62.8 percent to 59.8 percent.

Although college-educated women work more than others, the 2002 census shows that graduate or professional degrees do not increase work-force participation much more than even one year of college. When their children are infants (under a year), 54 percent of females with graduate or professional degrees are not working full time (18 percent are working part time and 36 percent are not working at all). Even among those who have children who are not infants, 41 percent are not working full time (18 percent are working part time and 23 percent are not working at all). ...

The arguments still do not explain the absence of women in elite workplaces. If these women were sticking it out in the business, law, and academic worlds, now, 30 years after feminism started filling the selective schools with women, the elite workplaces should be proportionately female.

They are not. Law schools have been graduating classes around 40-percent female for decades -- decades during which both schools and firms experienced enormous growth. And, although the legal population will not be 40-percent female until 2010, in 2003, the major law firms had only 16-percent female partners, according to the American Bar Association.

It's important to note that elite workplaces like law firms grew in size during the very years that the percentage of female graduates was growing, leading you to expect a higher female employment than the pure graduation rate would indicate. The Harvard Business School has produced classes around 30-percent female. Yet only 10.6 percent of Wall Street's corporate officers are women, and a mere nine are Fortune 500 CEOs. Harvard Business School's dean, who extolled the virtues of interrupted careers on *60 Minutes*, has a 20-percent female academic faculty.

It is possible that the workplace is discriminatory and hostile to family life. If firms had hired every childless woman lawyer available, that alone would have been enough to raise the percentage of female law partners above 16 percent in 30 years. It is also possible that women are voluntarily taking themselves out of the elite job competition for lower status and lower-

paying jobs. Women must take responsibility for the consequences of their decisions. It defies reason to claim that the falloff from 40 percent of the class at law school to 16 percent of the partners at all the big law firms is unrelated to half the mothers with graduate and professional degrees leaving full-time work at childbirth and staying away for several years after that, or possibly bidding down.

This isn't only about day care. Half my *Times* brides quit *before* the first baby came. In interviews, at least half of them expressed a hope never to work again. None had realistic plans to work. More importantly, when they quit, they were already alienated from their work or at least not committed to a life of work. One, a female MBA, said she could never figure out why the men at her workplace, which fired her, were so excited about making deals. "It's only money," she mused. Not surprisingly, even where employers offered them part-time work, they were not interested in taking it.

### **The Failure of Choice Feminism**

What is going on? Most women hope to marry and have babies. If they resist the traditional female responsibilities of child-rearing and householding, what Arlie Hochschild called "The Second Shift," they are fixing for a fight. But elite women aren't resisting tradition. None of the stay-at-home brides I interviewed saw the second shift as unjust; they agree that the household is women's work.

As one lawyer-bride put it in explaining her decision to quit practicing law after four years, "I had a wedding to plan." Another, an Ivy Leaguer with a master's degree, described it in management terms: "He's the CEO and I'm the CFO. He sees to it that the money rolls in and I decide how to spend it." It's their work, and they must do it perfectly. "We're all in here making fresh apple pie," said one, explaining her reluctance to leave her daughters in order to be interviewed. The family CFO described her activities at home: "I take my [3-year-old] daughter to all the major museums. We go to little movement classes."

Conservatives contend that the dropouts prove that feminism "failed" because it was too radical, because women didn't want what feminism had to offer. In fact, if half or more of feminism's heirs (85 percent of the women in my *Times* sample), are not working seriously, it's because feminism wasn't radical enough: It changed the workplace but it didn't change men, and, more importantly, it didn't fundamentally change how women related to men.

The movement did start out radical. Betty Friedan's original call to arms compared housework to animal life. In *The Feminine Mystique* she wrote, "[V]acuuming the living room floor -- with or without makeup -- is not work that takes enough thought or energy to challenge any woman's full capacity. ... Down through the ages man has known that he was set apart from other animals by his mind's power to have an idea, a vision, and shape the future to it ... when he discovers and creates and shapes a future different from his past, he is a man, a human being."

Thereafter, however, liberal feminists abandoned the judgmental starting point of the movement in favor of offering women "choices." The choice talk spilled over from people trying to avoid saying "abortion," and it provided an irresistible solution to feminists trying to duck the mommy wars. A woman could work, stay home, have 10 children or one, marry or stay single. It all counted as "feminist" as long as she *chose* it. (So dominant has the concept of choice become that when Charlotte, with a push from her insufferable first husband, quits her job, the writers at *Sex and the City* have her screaming, "I choose my choice! I choose my choice!")

Only the most radical fringes of feminism took on the issue of gender relations at home, and they put forth fruitless solutions like socialism and separatism. ... As feminist historian Alice

Echols put it, "Rather than challenging their subordination in domestic life, the [moderate] feminists of NOW committed themselves to fighting for women's integration into public life."

Great as liberal feminism was, once it retreated to choice the movement had no language to use on the gendered ideology of the family. Feminists could not say, "Housekeeping and child-rearing in the nuclear family is not interesting and not socially validated. Justice requires that it not be assigned to women on the basis of their gender and at the sacrifice of their access to money, power, and honor."

The 50 percent of census answerers and the 62 percent of Harvard MBAs and the 85 percent of my brides of the *Times* all think they are "choosing" their gendered lives. They don't know that feminism, in collusion with traditional society, just passed the gendered family on to them to choose. Even with all the day care in the world, the personal is still political. Much of the rest is the opt-out revolution.

### **What Is to Be Done?**

Here's the feminist moral analysis that choice avoided: The family -- with its repetitious, socially invisible, physical tasks -- is a necessary part of life, but it allows fewer opportunities for full human flourishing than public spheres like the market or the government. This less-flourishing sphere is not the natural or moral responsibility only of women. Therefore, assigning it to women is unjust. Women assigning it to themselves is equally unjust. To paraphrase, as Mark Twain said, "A man who chooses not to read is just as ignorant as a man who cannot read."

The critics are right about one thing: Dopey *New York Times* stories do nothing to change the situation. ... Lefties keep hoping the Republicans will enact child-care legislation, which probably puts us well beyond 2030. In either case, we can't wait that long. If women's flourishing does matter, feminists must acknowledge that the family is to 2005 what the workplace was to 1964 and the vote to 1920. Like the right to work and the right to vote, the right to have a flourishing life that includes but is not limited to family cannot be addressed with [the] language of choice.

Women who want to have sex and children with men as well as good work in interesting jobs where they may occasionally wield real social power need guidance, and they need it early. Step one is simply to begin talking about flourishing. In so doing, feminism will be returning to its early, judgmental roots. This may anger some, but it should sound the alarm before the next generation winds up in the same situation. Next, feminists will have to start offering young women not choices and not utopian dreams but *solutions* they can enact on their own. Prying women out of their traditional roles is not going to be easy. It will require rules -- rules like those in the widely derided book *The Rules*, which was never about dating but about behavior modification.

There are three rules: Prepare yourself to qualify for good work, treat work seriously, and don't put yourself in a position of unequal resources when you marry. The preparation stage begins with college. It is shocking to think that girls cut off their options for a public life of work as early as college. But they do. The first pitfall is the liberal-arts curriculum, which women are good at, graduating in higher numbers than men. Although many really successful people start out studying liberal arts, the purpose of a liberal education is not, with the exception of a miniscule number of academic positions, job preparation.

So the first rule is to use your college education with an eye to career goals. Feminist organizations should produce each year a survey of the most common job opportunities for people with college degrees, along with the average lifetime earnings from each job category and

the characteristics such jobs require. The point here is to help women see that yes, you can study art history, but only with the realistic understanding that one day soon you will need to use your arts education to support yourself and your family. The survey would ask young women to select what they are best suited for and give guidance on the appropriate course of study. Like the rule about accepting no dates for Saturday after Wednesday night, the survey would set realistic courses for women, helping would-be curators who are not artistic geniuses avoid career frustration and avoid solving their job problems with marriage.

After college comes on-the-job training or further education. Many of my *Times* brides -- and grooms -- did work when they finished their educations. Here's an anecdote about the difference: One couple, both lawyers, met at a firm. After a few years, the man moved from international business law into international business. The woman quit working altogether. "They told me law school could train you for anything," she told me. "But it doesn't prepare you to go into business. I should have gone to business school." Or rolled over and watched her husband the lawyer using his first few years of work to prepare to go into a related business.

Every *Times* groom assumed he had to succeed in business, and was really trying. By contrast, a common thread among the women I interviewed was a self-important idealism about the kinds of intellectual, prestigious, socially meaningful, politics-free jobs worth their incalculably valuable presence. So the second rule is that women must treat the first few years after college as an opportunity to lose their capitalism virginity and prepare for good work, which they will then treat seriously.

The best way to treat work seriously is to find the money. Money is the marker of success in a market economy; it usually accompanies power, and it enables the bearer to wield power, including within the family. Almost without exception, the brides who opted out graduated with roughly the same degrees as their husbands. Yet somewhere along the way the women made decisions in the direction of less money. Part of the problem was idealism; idealism on the career trail usually leads to volunteer work, or indentured servitude in social-service jobs, which is nice but doesn't get you to money. Another big mistake involved changing jobs excessively. Without exception, the brides who eventually went home had much more job turnover than the grooms did. There's no such thing as a perfect job. Condoleezza Rice actually wanted to be a pianist, and Gary Graffman didn't want to give concerts.

If you are good at work you are in a position to address the third undertaking: the reproductive household. The rule here is to avoid taking on more than a fair share of the second shift. If this seems coldhearted, consider the survey by the Center for Work-Life Policy. Fully 40 percent of highly qualified women with spouses felt that their husbands create more work around the house than they perform.

According to Phyllis Moen and Patricia Roehling's *Career Mystique*, "When couples marry, the amount of time that a woman spends doing housework increases by approximately 17 percent, while a man's decreases by 33 percent." Not a single *Times* groom was a stay-at-home dad. Several of them could hardly wait for Monday morning to come. None of my *Times* grooms took even brief paternity leave when his children were born.

How to avoid this kind of rut? You can either find a spouse with less social power than you or find one with an ideological commitment to gender equality. Taking the easier path first, marry down. Don't think of this as brutally strategic. If you are devoted to your career goals and would like a man who will support that, you're just doing what men throughout the ages have done: placing a safe bet.

In her 1995 book, *Kidding Ourselves: Babies, Breadwinning and Bargaining Power*, Rhona Mahoney recommended finding a sharing spouse by marrying younger or poorer, or someone in a dependent status, like a starving artist. Because money is such a marker of status and power, it's hard to persuade women to marry poorer. So here's an easier rule: Marry young or marry much older. Younger men are potential high-status companions. Much older men are sufficiently established so that they don't have to work so hard, and they often have enough money to provide unlimited household help.

By contrast, slightly older men with bigger incomes are the most dangerous, but even a pure counterpart is risky. If you both are going through the elite-job hazing rituals simultaneously while having children, someone is going to have to give. Even the most devoted lawyers with the hardest-working nannies are going to have weeks when no one can get home other than to sleep. The odds are that when this happens, the woman is going to give up her ambitions and professional potential. It is possible that marrying a liberal might be the better course. After all, conservatives justified the unequal family in two modes: "God ordained it" and "biology is destiny." Most men (and most women), including the liberals, think women are responsible for the home. But at least the liberal men should feel squeamish about it.

If you have carefully positioned yourself either by marrying down or finding someone untainted by gender ideology, you will be in a position to resist bearing an unfair share of the family. Even then you must be vigilant. Bad deals come in two forms: economics and home economics. The economic temptation is to assign the cost of child care to the woman's income. If a woman making \$50,000 per year whose husband makes \$100,000 decides to have a baby, and the cost of a full-time nanny is \$30,000, the couple reason that, after paying 40 percent in taxes, she makes \$30,000, just enough to pay the nanny.

So she might as well stay home. This totally ignores that both adults are in the enterprise together and the demonstrable future loss of income, power, and security for the woman who quits. Instead, calculate that all parents make a total of \$150,000 and take home \$90,000. After paying a full-time nanny, they have \$60,000 left to live on.

The home-economics trap involves superior female knowledge and superior female sanitation. The solutions are ignorance and dust. Never figure out where the butter is. "Where's the butter?" Nora Ephron's legendary riff on marriage begins. In it, a man asks the question when looking directly at the butter container in the refrigerator. "Where's the butter?" actually means butter my toast, buy the butter, remember when we're out of butter. Next thing you know you're quitting your job at the law firm because you're so busy managing the butter. If women never start playing the household-manager role, the house will be dirty, but the realities of the physical world will trump the pull of gender ideology. Either the other adult in the family will take a hand or the children will grow up with robust immune systems.

If these prescriptions sound less than family-friendly, here's the last rule: Have a baby. Just don't have two. Mothers' Movement Online's Judith Statdman Tucker reports that women who opt out for child-care reasons act only after the second child arrives. A second kid pressures the mother's organizational skills, doubles the demands for appointments, wildly raises the cost of education and housing, and drives the family to the suburbs. But cities, with their Chinese carryouts and all, are better for working mothers. It is true that if you follow this rule, your society will not reproduce itself. But if things get bad enough, who knows what social consequences will ensue? After all, the vaunted French child-care regime was actually only a response to the superior German birth rate.

## Why Do We Care?

The privileged brides of the *Times* -- and their husbands -- seem happy. Why do we care what they do? After all, most people aren't rich and white and heterosexual, and they couldn't quit working if they wanted to.

We care because what they do is bad for them, is certainly bad for society, and is widely imitated, even by people who never get their weddings in the *Times*. This last is called the "regime effect," and it means that even if women don't quit their jobs for their families, they think they should and feel guilty about not doing it. That regime effect created the mystique around *The Feminine Mystique*, too.

As for society, elites supply the labor for the decision-making classes -- the senators, the newspaper editors, the research scientists, the entrepreneurs, the policy-makers, and the policy wonks. If the ruling class is overwhelmingly male, the rulers will make mistakes that benefit males, whether from ignorance or from indifference.

Media surveys reveal that if only one member of a television show's creative staff is female, the percentage of women on-screen goes up from 36 percent to 42 percent. A world of 84-percent male lawyers and 84-percent female assistants is a different place than one with women in positions of social authority. Think of a big American city with an 86-percent white police force. If role models don't matter, why care about Sandra Day O'Connor? Even if the falloff from peak numbers is small, the leveling off of women in power is a loss of hope for more change. Will there never again be more than one woman on the Supreme Court?

Worse, the behavior tarnishes every female with the knowledge that she is almost never going to be a ruler. Princeton President Shirley Tilghman described the elite colleges' self-image perfectly when she told her freshmen last year that they would be the nation's leaders, and she clearly did not have trophy wives in mind. Why should society spend resources educating women with only a 50-percent return rate on their stated goals? The American Conservative Union carried a column in 2004 recommending that employers stay away from such women or risk going out of business. Good psychological data show that the more women are treated with respect, the more ambition they have. And vice versa. The opt-out revolution is really a downward spiral.

Finally, these choices are bad for women individually. A good life for humans includes the classical standard of using one's capacities for speech and reason in a prudent way, the liberal requirement of having enough autonomy to direct one's own life, and the utilitarian test of doing more good than harm in the world. Measured against these time-tested standards, the expensively educated upper-class moms will be leading lesser lives.

At feminism's dawning, two theorists compared gender ideology to a caste system. To borrow their insight, these daughters of the upper classes will be bearing most of the burden of the work always associated with the lowest caste: sweeping and cleaning bodily waste. Not two weeks after the Yalie flap, the *Times* ran a story of moms who were toilet training in infancy by vigilantly watching their babies for signs of excretion 24-7. They have voluntarily become untouchables.

When she sounded the blast that revived the feminist movement 40 years after women received the vote, Betty Friedan spoke of lives of purpose and meaning, better lives and worse lives, and feminism went a long way toward shattering the glass ceilings that limited their prospects outside the home. Now the glass ceiling begins at home. Although it is harder to shatter a ceiling that is also the roof over your head, there is no other choice.

***This article appeared in the American Prospect, posted on November 24, 2005 at <http://www.alternet.org/story/28621/>***

*Linda R. Hirshman retired as the Allen/Berenson Distinguished Visiting Professor at Brandeis University. She is at work on a book about marriage after feminism. With almost no effort, she landed spot No. 77 on Bernard Goldberg's "100 People Who Are Screwing Up America."*

*Copyright 2005 by The American Prospect, Inc. Originally published as "Homeward Bound". This article may not be resold, reprinted, or redistributed for compensation of any kind without prior written permission from the author. Direct questions about permissions to [permissions@prospect.org](mailto:permissions@prospect.org).*

**© 2008 The American Prospect All rights reserved.**

### **Questions.**

1. When Hirshman writes that “among the educated elite, who are the logical heirs of the agenda of empowering women, feminism has largely failed in its goals,” is she laying blame at the right doorstep? Has *feminism* failed to demand change at home, or have these young women failed to live up to the critical potential of feminism? Or is the organization of the workplace itself--the difficulty working out flexible schedules and part time hours, the unwillingness of supervisors to take mothers seriously as contributing employees—the real culprit?
2. Hirshman reports that “None of the stay-at-home brides I interviewed saw the second shift as unjust; they agree that the household is women's work.” Does this sound plausible to you? Would you enter into marriage on the premise that the woman is responsible for most of the unpaid work of childrearing and keeping a household running?
3. Hirshman's critique of “choice” echoes the discussion of choice in chapter one, where we talked about the “Sue and Bob” scenario. What do you make of the argument that choice is already circumscribed by unquestioned and omnipresent gender roles?

### **3. Francine M. Deutsch, *Halving it All: How Equally Shared Parenting Works***

In a study of couples who equally shared parenting responsibilities (and of unequal sharing couples), Francine Deutsch examines the arguments about equality and entitlement that different couples used and responded to, and makes it clear that shared parenting is a strategy that couples can use if they are committed to both having satisfying professional or work-related lives, and both being engaged, involved parents. The following excerpts from chapter four of her book, *Halving it All*, which is entitled “Fighting over Practice and Principle,” give a flavor for her interview-based methodology and for the explanations she offers for what makes shared parenting more or less likely to work.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

The voices of equally sharing women sound different from those of unequally sharing women. They are more self-confident; they are surer of what they deserve. These

women were often clear from the start that they expected their husbands to be equal partners in parenting and in sharing the chores of the household:

I wasn't going to marry someone who wouldn't do it. I don't like domestic labor that much. The thought of having to do it was inconceivable.

I never thought that I would be 100 percent everything and he would be watching—never, never, nor would I stand for that.

I don't think my husband ever dreamed that if he married me I would do all the housework...or even that I'd appreciate him helping out with the dishes once in a while.

Equally sharing women feel entitled to equality. But sometimes they had to fight to convince their husbands. By embracing equality unambivalently, they were able to be steadfast in their demands.

Unequally sharing women also argue over domestic labor, but because of their different senses of entitlement, equal and unequal couples differ in what they argue about, and in how they argue. Equally sharing women, who feel entitled to equality and expect it, fight over principles. They fight straightforward and direct battles with husbands.

In contrast, unequal women who are ambivalent about what they are entitled to at home, ask for less and ask less directly. ...women in unequal households often tried to do as much as they possibly could at home, regardless of their husbands' contributions. They fought with their husbands when the demands became too much for them, but they fought over practice rather than principle. Or if there was a principle implicitly invoked, it was not equality but need. Wives thought their husbands should help them not because to do so was fair, but because they really needed their husbands' help....

In a third of the equally sharing families, women reported battles with their husbands over establishing the principles that underlie equality at home: both parents are equally responsible for family work; the demands of their paid jobs must be given equal consideration; and the work at home must be valued....

Consider Dorothy, a lively, animated woman who battled her shy, soft-spoken husband, Sam, over who was responsible for family work. She transformed her traditional marriage to one of the most equal arrangements I encountered. When I asked her how she had changed things at home, she attributed it to strikes, which she used to express her adamant refusal to be a traditional wife.

When we were first married, he was much more the chauvinist and expected me to clean, cook, and do every little thing and box his collars... I actually went on strike a couple of times. That's how it changed... There are times when, I remember, he used to come (home) for lunch and he would leave a mess. I'd come home at dinner and there's this mess from lunch... I just said, "This is ridiculous. I'm not doing this." So I stopped cleaning up after him. I said, "This is your mess; you clean it up..." I just kind of went on strike. And every now and then I'd go on strike. I didn't care how many times I'd walk past the mess, I refused to touch it... He couldn't stand it after a while. It didn't bother me. Stay there until doomsday... And then when the kids came I just said, "You have to help me."

And he did.... Today, with their two girls, aged four and six: "It's about a 50-50 split with him doing everything that I do. I mean cooking, cleaning, washing, dressing children, feeding children. We both do all of that." Her voice is filled with pride when she explains that equal sharing means he does "everything" she does....

In some families, ... women developed a sense of entitlement to equality after their children were born. Feelings of entitlement grow or shrink through the actual experience of family life....

Women also set the stage for equal sharing by insisting that family work be valued as strongly as paid work. Mothers who eventually became equal sharers had often worked part time or taken time off from work entirely and done the majority of childcare when their children were young. Yet they had fought for the principle that domestic labor carries the same importance as paid work. In practice that meant that when their husbands came home from their jobs they had not earned the right to relax any more than their wives, who had been caring for the children. Like their wives, they were expected to be on duty when they returned home. For example, Rita asserted in no uncertain terms that her fatigue counted as much as her husband's: "We both have tough days. Maybe his is one way and mine is the other way, but that doesn't mean at five one of us can come home and take a nap. That pretty much established the fact that from the time we get up until the time we go to bed we both better pitch in." Establishing the principle that unpaid work counts as much as paid work makes for a smooth transition to equally shared parenting when women return to full-time paid work....

The equally sharing mothers are also not afraid to use power, and the language of power. Dorothy's "strikes" and Roberta's "hard negotiating" reflect men's resistance to doing domestic labor. Simply communicating one's expectations in a clear and direct way doesn't always work; it may take the exercise of power to change the division of labor at home. For some women, shared family work was a precondition or even an ongoing condition of their marital commitment....

Compared to the unequal women, equally sharing mothers may simply possess more power in their relationships because they are relatively less attached to their husbands than their husbands are to them, or because compared to other men, their husbands care more about having children and their relationships with children or care less about career success. In short, equally sharing mothers may use power more because they have more power.

Interestingly, by and large, the power equally sharing women report using is not economic power. Their power is derived from their husbands' love for them and their husbands' desire to have children. These women make it clear that they wouldn't get married, stay married, or have children if their husbands failed to live up to their equal ideals. Although equally sharing mothers don't use the word "divorce," the implication is clear. Arlie Hochschild argues in *The Second Shift* that the implicit threat of divorce leads many women to give up the fight for equality. My findings suggest that the reverse is also true. Men succumb to the threat of divorce by agreeing to carry the load at home.... The equal sharers in my study have bet successfully that their husbands' love for them is strong enough to withstand their exercise of power. In their fight for equality, however, the equally sharing mothers are the exception....

[Addressing the situation of unequal sharing women, Deutsch writes] Carol works fifty-two hours a week at her job and also does virtually all the housework. When her

husband is home he plays with the kids while she does the work. He admits to doing no housework and seems to feel entitled not to. When I asked how he responded to her desire for him to do more he said, "I just chuckle."

Although tired and stressed, working a double day, Carol doesn't expect him to do much:

I just want him to pick up after himself. I don't particularly expect that he is going to vacuum... My husband doesn't even know how dishes go in the dishwasher... all I would really like him to do is pick up behind himself. I really don't ask him more than that, and to be considerate of things like not walk across the floor I've just washed with his boots on...those little things too, not that I want him to wash the floor, but if he just wouldn't get it dirty quite so quickly, that's all I ask....

Other women struggle for appreciation of the value of the work at home: "What I wanted from him was appreciation. I don't know, a back rub.... Some sense that what I had done that day was not considerably less than what he had done." This woman, who had severely, yet happily, compromised her career to be home with her children wanted her husband to acknowledge her efforts: "'You are at work with all these bigwigs and I'm home with children playing blocks. I've had a hard day too.' And he'll appreciate it. But he needs to be reminded every time."

Unlike Rita, who insisted that her husband pitch in when he got home because of the underlying principle that the work at home has equal value with the work outside the home, this unequal mothers, who wants her work to be valued, does not insist on its being *equally* valued. She readily reports that she has less leisure time because after her children go to bed she is left doing household chores while her husband is doing the *New York Times* crossword puzzle. If the work at home were given the value of work outside, why would he earn the right to relax while she continues to work?...

The unequal men are hardly fighting to do an equal share of the work. In part, they feel entitled to their wives' domestic services, entitled to pursue unfettered careers, and entitled to relax after their day at the job. Yet they don't feel as entitled as their fathers did. They recognize that their wives are out doing paid labor as well. The men in my study virtually never justified their lack of involvements in household work by invoking some inherent right or privilege they held as men. Although even recent statistics show that women do much more of the household labor, the raw spoken claim of male privilege seems to have become taboo. Men do resist, but their strategies are largely indirect. They include: passive resistance, strategic incompetence, strategic use of praise, the adherence to inferior standards, and denial.

*Passive resistance*: "Just say nothing!" seems to be the motto of some men who resist their wives' efforts to involve them in household work. The most obvious form of passive resistance is simply to ignore the request. When I asked one father how he responded to his wife's entreaties, he answered, "In one ear, and out the other."

Obliviousness can be another form of passive resistance....:

He plans himself on the couch. As soon as he's home from work sometimes... If there's something going on with kids, the kids could be screaming and yelling. He's totally oblivious to it. I'm listening to it (while preparing dinner) and I have to come out and say something to them.

Sometimes men give in and perform a particular household duty, but their grouchiness while doing so becomes another form of passive resistance:

...I think I ... try to sleaze out of it (responsibility while at home) as much as I can... I try to dicker or make an excuse or something as my first response, but I usually end up, perhaps somewhat nastily, taking care of them (household chores)....

*Incompetence:* Ruining the laundry, leaving grease on the dishes, ignoring children when one is supposed to be watching them, and forgetting to pick them up from activities are all examples of the strategy of incompetence. Incompetence has its rewards. It allows men to justify the gender-based distribution of domestic labor....

*Praise:* The flip side of men's self-portrayals of incompetence is their praise of their wives' skill in domestic labor. Although praise may be a sincere expression of appreciation, a benefit to its recipient, praise at home may also have the insidious effect of keeping the work within women's domain. The underlying message from men to their wives may sometimes be: "You're so good at it, you should do it."...

Praise can be insidious precisely because women do derive satisfaction from a job well done at home and from receiving recognition for it. Ironically, praise may undermine women's struggle for more help because they don't want to lose the self-esteem they derive from husbands' admiring accolades.

*Different standards:* Another strategy men use to resist work at home is to maintain different and lower standards. Their spoken or unspoken claim is that they don't care as much as their wives if the house is clean, if a nutritious dinner is served, or if children have after-school activities.

There are three ways that couples might respond to this difference. First, men could raise their standards to meet their wives'. This rarely happens among the unequal couples. Second, women could lower their standards, which occasionally does occur among this group. Most commonly, however, the difference in standards becomes a driving force behind an unequal division. The person who cares more takes the responsibility and does the work.

Women usually care more about keeping the house neat and clean because they, and not their husbands, are judged to be lacking if the house is a mess. "He wouldn't care if it wasn't dusted once every six months. I care because it's a reflection on me. Now that's another problem. Why should it be a reflection on me? He lives here too. But if anybody comes in here and the house is dirty, they're going to think that I'm a slob."...

*Denial:* Just as a magician tricks us by directing our gaze elsewhere while he makes his move, some fathers deny there is a problem by focusing attention elsewhere while their wives do the work at home. Denial takes a variety of forms. Men exaggerate their own contributions by comparing themselves to previous generations, attribute greater contributions of their wives to their wives' personalities or preferences, and obscure who's doing what by invoking rules and patterns that sound fair and equal....

[Returning to the patterns observed among equally sharing couples, Deutsch heads a section of this chapter "Strong Women and Reasonable Men"]: Strong men and reasonable men resolve the conflict over domestic work by inventing equality. Equally sharing mothers are an assertive crew. They communicate in a clear and direct manner,

and use whatever clout they have to elicit their husbands' cooperation. Their husbands acknowledge the strength of these women in establishing equality at home:

Sally is very strong. There's no question about that. I think it's partly that Sally ... makes it that we both share. She feels very strongly about that.

I think the most important reason is that Bernice absolutely, completely insists on it.

However, part of the reason that women appear strong is their success, and although women's strength may be necessary in the fight for equality, it is not sufficient. The strength and assertiveness of the equally sharing mothers is matched by the sense of fairness evident in the behavior of the equally sharing fathers. Equally sharing men have relinquished male privileges to which at least some had initially felt entitled....

One extraordinarily honest equally sharing father acknowledged that although he "irrationally" wished his wife would create a more traditional family life, "rationally" he recognized that it wouldn't be fair: "I'm hardly a raging feminist, but I do have enough sense to see that that's a completely unfair distribution of labor."

Thus a sense of fairness motivates some of the equally sharing men to accept their wives' well-argued claims. Moreover, that sense of fairness drives some of the men to share even without a struggle. Let's not forget Paul, the father of five, who jumped in to help without prompting from his wife. His sense of fairness and his love for his wife dictated that it wouldn't be right to shirk while she worked.

The sense of entitlement that men and women bring to marriage affects the content and conduct of their conflicts but it also changes and develops over time. Feelings of entitlement lead women to fight for principles, make clear and rational demands, and back them up with power-assertive strategies. But the feelings of entitlement expressed by the equally sharing mothers can also be a product, rather than a precursor, of their success. When their husbands accept principles of equality, respond to their demands, or indicate that their relationships are more important than male privilege, they promote a feeling of entitlement in their wives (Deutsch, 1999, 61-83).

**In chapter 8 of *Halving it All*, titled "Why Couples Don't Practice What They Preach," Deutsch examines the pull of traditional gender roles and their impact on men and women's patterns for paid and unpaid work:**

The transition to parenting is often accompanied by overwhelming feelings about what parents should be doing as men and women. All parents grapple with the cultural ideals of masculinity and femininity that they've internalized and continue to confront every day. Men feel their self-worth is tied to paid work, whereas women may feel they have the prerogative to abandon their jobs without suffering the same loss in self-image. The flip side of the prerogative to quit paid work, however, is the deep sense of responsibility women bring to parenting. A woman's self-worth is usually more tied to motherhood than her husband's is to fatherhood. Men often act as though they have the prerogative to bow out of parenting, either by making incompatible commitments to their jobs or by actively or passively resisting the work at home. It's hard to build equality on this scaffold of gender differences....(153)

Jobs were often seen as a given, nonnegotiable part of men's identities. We saw in the last chapter that men usually maximize their jobs opportunities. Although some of the unequal men and women might have been all for equality when answering theoretical questions about it, that didn't seem to influence them when men contemplated jobs. They might not have set out to make their situations unequal, but neither did they consider how their choices would affect the possibilities for equality in their families.

Achievement, rather than breadwinning, seems central to the identities of many upper-middle-class men. They pursue careers without compromise because they feel driven to achieve professional success. As Ben put it, "Men in our society are brought up to feel that their worth is much more tied to work than women are."

But even if Ben is right and on average, men's self-worth is more tied to their work than women's, let's not forget that many women today also derive self-worth from their career-related achievements. The problem is that there may not be room in a marriage for achievement on that scale for two, especially when children enter the picture... (155)

[F]or every unequal mother who told me that she found infant care immensely satisfying, I found many more who were desperately unhappy during the years they spent at home without paid work... Why then do they do it? In most families, women simply feel responsible for responding to their children's needs, or what they perceive as their children's needs. They want a certain level of care for their children and feel more responsible than their husbands for providing it. They do it because they would simply feel too guilty if they didn't. Their motherhood is at stake.

But what children need is neither obvious nor agreed upon. Do infants need a parent at home? Donna and Kevin thought they did. So Donna, the parent who felt more responsible, quit her job and stayed home. When couples felt that full-time parental care was essential, almost invariably the mother provided the care, no matter how much they protested that in theory either parent would do. For some mothers, like Donna, it was a sacrifice they bore because their husbands wouldn't. Other women couldn't tolerate the idea of losing the number-one position with their children. If their husbands cared more about their careers or earning money, so be it. The choice to stay home was uncontested.

Mothers usually sacrificed more of their work-related goals in families even when parents didn't think children needed full-time parental care. Women often gave elaborate answers to what they would be doing differently in careers if they weren't mothers, while their husbands were usually pursuing the career they wanted to. Mothers worried more than fathers did about too much daycare, so women altered their lives to reduce the amount of substitute care. They made sure their children got what they thought children needed, even when they resented that they were the only parent worrying about it... (157)

As much as some couples believed in equality, the fear of daycare, the desire to be home after school, and the worry about having enough time with children weighed more heavily on women than on men, and convinced many to take a significant amount of time off from paid work and to go back only part time. The gender bias behind these choices was based not on old-fashioned beliefs that mothers should be the parent doing these things, but on each woman's overwhelming feeling that she personally should do it for her child. Sometimes joyfully, sometimes reluctantly, and sometimes resentfully, women heeded the call of their own consciences, consciences very much shaped by their

being women, and shaped by a culture that announces in no uncertain terms that maternal care is best.... (161)

Unequal women, like Shelley, often invoked their own choices when explaining why they carried more of the load at home: “Why I do more of the parenting? I think that’s a choice on my part.” By shifting the comparison from what they and their husbands were actually doing to their ostensible freedom to choose, women implied that gender equality exists in their families after all.

Although in one sense they are choosing, as we saw in the last chapter, the choice is not free of gender bias. The invocation of choice ignores how our genders affect what choices feel right and rewarding: what we feel responsibility for and what opportunities we are offered in life. In a world free of those differences, we can imagine truly equal families in which one parent emphasizes family work while the other puts his or her energies into paid work. But until the differences that foster gender inequality are erased, neither women nor men are entirely free to choose. It is telling that these “choices” are often barely discussed. What feels like a choice may be nothing more than the well-internalized deep sense of responsibility that women bring to parenting and men to breadwinning. (162-3)

Some of the unequal couples, however, especially the 60-40 couples who were trying hard to share, did provide substantial nontraditional lessons, even if they weren’t exactly equal.... [But as the mother in such a family put it,]

Even when we try and break out, we tend to teach what were taught, live what we saw lived. It’s very hard to break out of a cycle that is reinforced by a culture that is very deeply and profoundly sexist. You can swim against the tide just so hard... It takes conscious work all the time to not fall into what were very well-ingrained patterns, so I feel like we’re living our upbringing and we have rebelled against a lot of it.... (165)

But efforts get easier and feel less unnatural over time. The equally sharing mothers who watched their young children having fun at daycare relaxed and focused on the benefits of group care. The fathers who felt awkward got more comfortable. (167)

Francine M. Deutsch, *Halving it All: How Equally Shared Parenting Works*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999

### Questions.

1. Are the couples Deutsch studies typical or unusual? Who is more likely to buy into the idea of equally shared parenting in our society, and why?
2. How can a woman make this idea seem absolutely taken for granted and normal as she develops a long-term relationship with the potential for raising children?
3. What obstacles do men and women who want to embrace shared parenting face from their bosses and workplaces? Their families and friends? What can/should they do about such obstacles?

One approach that makes sense for dealing with gender gap issues is the personal level effort to work out an egalitarian relationship with one’s partner, and being self-conscious and explicit about how exactly they mean to go about sharing unpaid nurturing and household work, and pursuing their careers. But this can be an

uphill struggle, as we've seen from work on high achieving women who "opt out" because their supervisors are reluctant to accommodate their childrearing responsibilities, and the practical difficulties that well-meaning couples have to deal with as they try to earn enough to support their families in a workplace culture that punishes less than 110% efforts by "ideal worker" employees. The next chapter presents readings that propose institutional approaches to change.