

Career Shock

A New Jewish Mother Enters the Mommy Wars

by Sarah Blustein



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An egalitarian society must have women in its leadership. But this can't happen when the choices are opt out or burn out.

In the third grade, 1976, I sit next to a boy named Rich. Like all the kids in my class, we work at “contracts.” Each week, we draw up a written agreement with our teacher for what we think we can reasonably accomplish that week. The faster students take on more. Rich and I work fast, but my motives for doing so are not entirely pure. It’s true, I’m a quick worker and easily bored. But I also want to beat him. Even close to three decades later, the memories of peeking over at his desk, of hurrying to finish, make my hands a little jittery. I want to win.

That was the starting gun in a race that has been going on ever since. My little racecar, painted on the side with bright colors, sometimes pulled ahead, sometimes dropped behind, but basically kept pace with the rest of the pack. Until now. Suddenly, as we zoom around the track, there is an obstacle smack in the middle of my lane. I don’t see it until it’s nearly too late. I grind to a halt as the other cars speed on around me. Jealous and exhausted, I come to a full stop.

I have had a baby.

When I express my frustration and puzzlement to people, I think their snickers are nearly audible. Didn't you know? Didn't you know you might cut back on work, lose status, lose income, lose professional contacts, lose friends, lose speed? In fact I didn't. I thought I could just take some time out while the little fellow got adjusted to the world, then get back to business, cutting back on my hours here and there, relying on my husband to do the same, adding day care, or nanny care, for the rest.

So into my seventh month of pregnancy, I was negotiating with my boss. I had been working 50-plus hours a week. I asked to work 30. My boss said no. I asked for 50, with two days a week at home. He said no. I considered taking my four months maternity leave and going back. I didn't consider it for long. I quit, and in an instant put myself back at what felt like the starting line of the race to have it all.



Nearly a year later, I am in the bathroom. I am sick with a sore throat, about to get a stomach flu. I am exhausted and weeping. My child, as sensitive as a nine-month old can be, looks worried, but he cannot suppress his baby-needs, either. He crawls around me, whining lightly. My husband, working down our long, narrow hall, talks on the phone. He is using his business voice, and it goes on and on. This makes me nearly crazy. One phone call after the next, pushing, negotiating, progressing. A tight fury takes over me. How did it happen? I ask this over and over, tired, weak, envious. We do similar work—he is a self-employed writer who works at home—so I thought his flexible schedule would help us divide it down the middle, cut the career costs in half. Instead, he is traveling full speed, while I am stalled, trying to pee before my kid crawls over and puts his hand in the toilet.

It's not fair, I know, to live this competitively. It's not a picnic for my husband either. And, as he points out when I complain, I have had every option. I could have returned to my job, hired full-time babysitting care to help. And indeed, having decided not to, I have found another situation that should be nearly ideal: I have a job, two days a week, working from home, with proportional benefits. Plus other freelance work and a sitter who comes three days a week. I can add more days when I'm ready, or not, as I like. I have Tuesdays and Thursdays to myself with baby to play, stroll, look for playmates and adventure. Even better, I have a husband who works at home. He stops at 6 every day to look after the baby while I make dinner. He gets on the stationary bike two days a week, and he spells me on Tuesdays and Thursdays for 45 minutes after lunch so I can do the same. Perfect.

And yet it isn't going well. Nearly every work day, as I try to lock myself in my office, I am distracted by some baby-stage I haven't encountered before, or just by my desire to go downstairs and give my toddling son a hug. When baby won't nap, I can't resist hovering in the hall to give advice to the sitter. When I hear him babbling away in full, incomprehensible sentences, I want to go babble back. When he cries uncontrollably, I know

I can go hold him for a minute and he'll calm down. In all this, during my work day my sitter and I are a team. I mostly let her be, but I keep one ear turned toward the rest of the house, so I know when the baby slept and for how long, when he ate, and generally how his day went. The tidbits—what he ate and how much, for instance—I ask the sitter as she gets ready to leave.

My husband takes his daytime breaks by checking the stock market. I break by reading and posting to "mommy" list-serves. One day each week, I work a full day, 9 to 5, out of the house. When I come home I ask my husband whether the baby took an afternoon nap. My husband tells me he doesn't know, he was working. I don't know how he does it. When our baby cries, it is almost as if I were crying. When he laughs, I wish I were there. I am shocked by all of it—my husband's ability to tune out the baby, and my inability to. Difference feminism did have a point. I know that if my career has taken a hit, it is at least partly my "fault."

But it's not just the work days that are hard. Nearly every "baby day" is harder. Usually I start out full of beans, happy to give breakfast and set out on an adventure to Barnes and Noble or the waterfront. But work spills over from the other days, and I not-so-silently pray for my baby to nap easily and long. When he doesn't, I am overwrought, sometimes enraged. My husband's tap-tap-tapping on the computer down the hall only invites comparison and I fume. From time to time, during the work day, I notice that my husband takes a nap or a walk to Starbucks for a slice of iced lemon pound cake. This is indeed the icing on the cake. I tell him in a fit of anger one night that he must walk the dog, take out the trash, and wake up at 6:30 am with the baby one day a week so I can sleep in. He does all that, but it doesn't help. Every minute of our Tuesdays and Thursday I count as his "freedom" and my enslavement.

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It's like me and Rich in third grade all over again, doing similar work side by side. But someone has slipped a caveat into my contract—"Sarah will accomplish these things in her career, with exceptions for the times she is changing diapers, getting up at 4 a.m. to breastfeed, preparing dinner, taking the baby to his doctor's appointment"—while my husband's is unamended.

Basically, my complaints come down to this: How come my career has taken a hit and his, entirely, has not? Sometimes the answer seems like a societal conspiracy, sometimes an accidental byproduct of being around the house, sometimes a flaw in our relationship, and sometimes just a result of my own overactive superego. But then I look around and I know that the latter can't be the whole story. Everywhere I look the moms are stopped on the track. I talk to them, or e-mail them, every single day. I joined the DC Urban Moms listserve and the

NoVa (Northern Virginia) Moms listserve; I joined DC Urban Mommies listserve, and the MOMS Club of Old Town and the Old Town Moms listserve. Hundreds of moms. Thousands of moms. One afternoon, I meet a stay-at-home dad. Once. I don't know all these moms' stories, but the very fact of them tells me that things aren't as different as they were supposed to be. We women are still stopping our little racecars. Some of us for three months. Some of us for three years. And the men (and non-procreating women) in our lives speed by.



I read everything that's written about "my" situation. And these days, that's a ton. Every magazine, every publisher, is finally reflecting the ambivalent truth that has been dawning on individual women for a decade or two: The gains of the feminist revolution were massive—but incomplete. Women were making professional gains, but at too a high cost to their personal and familial lives.

I was of the next wave of working women, starting out from college in 1991. My friends and I don't talk about being Wonderwoman. We're straight out of the pages of the new books and magazine articles (see page 21). Nearly every childed woman I know is negotiating for part-time work, at-home work, something to keep the mind alive while keeping the relationships sane. Which means that when I am offered the opportunity to apply for a major office-based job, I let the deadline slip by, sending off a hopeful e-mail that "next time" they have a spot I'll be ready to roll.

Those who are afraid of this new development call it a backlash. I think it sounds a bit like progress. But a part-time career—or even a moderately slowed career—was never what I envisioned. I half suspect that if I had been better prepared for all the changes that come along with baby—if I had really learned to expect the arc of my professional life would include a gap for childrearing, I wouldn't be so angry. What bothers me is not the "price of motherhood," as Ann Crittenden called it in the title of her important book on the subject, but the differential between the professional price of motherhood and the professional price of fatherhood.

When I talk to older feminists about the way things were, they'll tell you that no one expected women to do anything with their careers. It was great if you did anything at all. Born in 1969, I learned the opposite lesson. You can do anything a boy can do. Just listen to the words of 1974's "Free to Be You and Me." It's full of the gender-rule bending that we now think we take for granted.

In my middle school and high school, boys and girls played sports in gym together, attended shop class (our choice of wood or metal) together as well as home economics, applied to the top colleges. In college, it was much the same. We took the same classes, graduated, competed for the same jobs. No one talked about babies. No one suggested to our 22-year-old selves that our ten- or 15-year plan include some time out—even four months—for child-bearing. No one suggested that we find careers that would be flexible when the time came for us to want to spend time with our families. And, quite

frankly, we didn't think about it.

Of course I'm not suggesting that better "preparedness" is the end of the story. I'm not going to line up with the difference feminists and say that because I hear the baby's cry louder than my husband does, I—and professional women everywhere—are fated to accomplish less than our male counterparts. The difference might be biological, but I haven't found a significant difference in my intellectual capacity or in my ambition. It's time for a revival of equality feminism—with a twist. What if we suggested that instead of women always trying to accomplish more, men might accomplish *less*. What if we acknowledged—finally—that child-bearing and child-rearing always slow a career, but that we can distribute that slowing more fairly. What if there was actual equality between the sexes—equal parental leave offered for mothers and fathers? And what if fathers, and fathers-to-be, learned to expect and accept that the birth of any child would impact the work they did over their careers—less money earned, one less book written? Yes, this would require the entire working world to acknowledge the existence of families more than it does today. It would spell the end of the mommy track and the beginning of the "family track"—which, since *most* people still have children, might over time become just the way work works.



In the end, these voices were too loud in my head. I couldn't bear it.

After 11 months of not working and working part-time, I decided to get in the fast lane again. One good opportunity after the next came along, and I had been taught to say yes, take the bull by the horns. So I took on full-time work and hired just enough babysitting to cover: If I work every minute of every day that my sitters are here, I will have just barely fulfilled my obligations.

It is an impossible situation, trying to connect with baby and husband, work full time, do grocery shopping, make dinner, manage the "staff." I often wake up at 5:30 in the morning—no alarm—and sneak in some work before the baby wakes. On Saturdays, my "sleeping-in" day, I sometimes manage to secretly turn on the computer while husband and baby are downstairs and work for two hours instead of sleeping. One recent Saturday afternoon, I dumped two pounds of string beans for that night's dinner party onto my desk and snapped the ends off while I read through materials I was supposed to have finished days before. Right now, it is 3:30 a.m., and I am at the computer, loathe to waste the insomniac's hour or two readjusting my pillow.

I am not happier, but I am less angry this way. I am back on track. I am again the person I was. But if I am less angry, there is a different tug at my heartstrings. It has only been two weeks, but I miss my baby, though I see him throughout the day. I even wish for an afternoon with him, loading the dishwasher while he pulls the spoons out and spreads them on the floor. Full speed ahead doesn't leave time for that. And so I find myself, at 4 in the morning, weeping again and agonizing about what I've taken on and what I've given up. No sooner



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We Need a Playground Revolution

by Miriam Peskowitz

It's a bit crazy and a big surprise. Am I really a stay-at-home mom who spends five afternoons a week at the neighborhood playground? Nearly every day, for years, I pack my young daughter into the stroller. I load the sippy cups and snacks and balls and toys, the bug spray, extra diapers, baby wipes, sunblock, and a bottle of water for me. When we arrive already it is filled with strollers, preschoolers who run, climb and swing, and their parents. We will stay until rain, sundown or mealtime takes us away.

Much of the time, it's moms only at the park. The women I meet are there because they have quit their jobs to care for their children in a hands-on way. At the playground, day after day, we talk about almost everything—local preschools and morning-out programs, what's happening in the world and the city, our pasts, our families, our travels, restaurants, breastfeeding, weaning, potty training, how we put our kids to bed at night and how little sleep we had the night before. We discuss the weather and hope for rain, sun, warmth, cooler air, lower humidity, or whatever we don't have at the moment. When I need advice about the parenting life, I head to the playground and from the women there I learn much of what I need to know.

My daughter was born early in the fall of 1998. Before that, I was a university professor. I worked hard. I taught and researched and published voraciously. I received fellowships, awards, and prizes. I worked evenings and weekends. I lived in one city and commuted to my job an airplane ride away. When I grabbed the brass ring of tenure, I was not yet 35. I was on the fast track, just like my husband, my best friend, and, more

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or less, everyone I knew.


Just as I was awarded tenure, I learned I was pregnant. Eight months later, I had taken a two-year leave that would, in the end, turn into a resignation. We had left our apartment, moved into a little Craftsman bungalow, and I was a mother, learning how gender really works in our society. All my academic writing had been on feminist topics. My

training prepared me to be aware of how gender works in our culture. That same training had largely bypassed any critical information about motherhood and parenting and children. Could anything have prepared me for the real-life lessons I was about to receive in how gender works? In what happens when a woman faces her society and her workplace with a small child in tow?

So I wander about in a daytime world composed primarily of women and children. One question starts to take over: “How did we end up here?” We are college-educated women, raised in decades of massive social change that opened up opportunities for women in higher education, the professions, and public life. We are mostly in our 30s and older, have held interesting jobs, traveled and adventured. We were brought up to be economically independent. Certainly no one really expected us to end up chatting with each other about how to start a baby on solid foods while our husbands work at the office to bring home the family wage. This was not supposed to be the end of the story, and it won’t be. The question becomes my obsession. I ask everyone I know. I interview total strangers, new acquaintances, close friends.

Mothers at the playground toss around reasons they are at home. Often these come in a negative form. Someone passes on a horror story about daycare. Everyone shudders and says how glad they are to be near their kids. It’s harder to talk about the positive reasons for working less and being with our children: the everyday sweetness of it, the commitment and love amid an ongoing sense of ambivalence and the downright oddness of learning a new way of life, resisting a culture that would have us work all the time.

The statistics tell us that we will never make up the lost pay, and that as mothers we will earn much less in our lifetimes than



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had we not had children. For some women this is true. When they want to return to the workplace, their opportunities are fewer, and they find themselves stuck in mommy-track jobs. But other women take five years off and jump back in with no problem at all. When we quit our jobs, we have no idea what will happen. We don’t know whether this sojourn at the playground last six months, a year, or for life. We take a risk.

When I left my full-time job, it felt simultaneously like the right decision for me, and a move that was entirely retrograde and violated every value I believed in. It’s no longer 1952. Women with college degrees aren’t supposed to routinely give up their jobs to take care of their children while their husbands bring home the breadwinner’s wage. I worried constantly about my decision. Can this be me? Should it be me? Many of us choose to be with our kids not because we have to, but because we want to be near the children we bring into the world. This is a truth that is hard to voice. It comes so close to statements that

in the past have limited women’s options and opportunities. It risks being misunderstood as anti-woman and anti-feminist. It seems like a dangerous retreat.

Yet, it is real. Something new is happening, something that in my more optimistic moods I think might just give us a little more wiggle room, to break out of the old gender divide that separates work from home, male from female, mind from body. When the media discuss mothers, they tend to divide us into working moms and stay-at-home moms. I can tell you that at the playground, life is more complex. The numbers, too, tell a different story. Roughly speaking, about 40 percent of American mothers combine parenting with full-time jobs; 25 percent are fully at home with their children; and the other 35 percent, combine parenting with some kind of paid work. Mothers in this third group may work five hours a week from a home studio or 30 hours a week at an office. They may take three years off and then build a small business from a spare room. They may work on a consulting basis for a former employer. They may switch fields altogether. The stories are endless. The reality for American mothers, though, is that most of us don’t work full time. We need media attention, social policies, and corporate attitudes that acknowledge this. And we need men generally and fathers in particular to share in the labor of children, much as we all share the labor of work.

The playground moms are always talking about work. One woman is a former social worker. Now she leads internet-based support groups for the caregivers of Alzheimer patients, and she does this one evening a week from her home. Another woman has been a flight attendant, and we all know when she has to take a flight or find someone to cover for her, in order to keep open her chance to return to work in the future. Another sells real estate; several times I offer to watch her girls while she goes to a closing. “The attorneys get mad when I bring them,” she jokes. Another woman is a nurse, and every Tuesday she does a shift at the hospital. I teach a course each semester at a nearby college. Many of the playground moms work. Still, all call themselves stay-at-home moms, not working moms. Their part-time labor remains invisible. We need words to describe life in between, the real life of parents who want to parent less than full time and to work, also less than full time, despite the societal pressure to do one or the other.

This third group of mothers are refusing to choose between being solely at home or at work, fully private or always public. We know that the system does not work for us. We know that if we want to spend more time with our children, we do so with great economic sacrifice. Part-time work is not well rewarded, and it mostly comes without benefits, advancement, or fair wages. We know that fathers, too, should be making these sacrifices so they don’t fall so heavily on a generation of women. The world of work is open to us as women, but not set up to accommodate us as parents, as mothers. The feminist revolution that made the workplace and some of our laws more equitable to women is going to have to expand to include us mothers, too. The next feminist revolution may just come from the playground. ●

Working? Mothering? Conflicted? It's Everywhere.

Who Am I?

When I had a three-year-old and a seven-month-old, I loved my children passionately, and I was also very unhappy. This made me guilty. What did I have to be unhappy about? I had two healthy, beautiful sons; a husband who sometimes got on my nerves but whom I loved; a house that was often dirty but had a lot of potential; an interesting, albeit badly paid teaching job; several hours a week to write; and enough money at least for the time being. So what in the world was wrong?

...hardest for me as a wife and mother was—maintaining a sense of myself as an individual; work ambitions vs. desire to be a focused uber-mom; negotiating pregnancy advice literature and birth options without resorting to crippling self-blame; barbed negotiations over housework and childcare with my husband; judgmentalism at baby-and-me classes and preschool potlucks; and realizing I didn't have to radically alter my personality for my children's sake."

—from *Dispatches From a Not-So-Perfect Life, or How I Learned to Love the House, the Man, the Child*, by Faulkner Fox (Harmony Books)

Is Motherhood Ridiculous?

It seems that on a cultural level, the image of a woman who takes care of her children is not unlike the old psychoanalytic image of the "castrated" woman. Once upon a time, Freud suggested that women's penis envy was psychological bedrock; that it was women's fundamental condition to perceive themselves as lacking. The psychoanalyst Karen Horney pointed out that women did not simply envy an ostensible anatomical advantage; they envied men's participation in the public domain. Today, women participate in the public domain, and the perception of lack once ascribed to women in general has been shifted to the figure of the caregiving mother....

In light of this cultural image, it is not surprising that some women contemplating motherhood fear that their agency, power, prestige, and their very identities are at stake.... Though feminist activism has helped secure for women the public power previously denied them, it has done little to challenge the assumption that women who spend their time caring for children are powerless, un-self-actualized, and at the margins of cultural life."

—from *Maternal Desire: On Children, Love, and*



The juggling act goes on. This LILITH magazine cover is from Spring 1988.

the Inner Life, by Daphne De Marneffe (Little, Brown)

Is Motherhood Sublime?

We are both mothers, and we adore our kids....But like increasing numbers of women, we are fed up with the myth—shamelessly hawked by the media—that motherhood is eternally fulfilling and rewarding, that it is *always* the best and most important thing you do, that there is only a narrowly prescribed way to do it right....

The new momism has evolved over the past few decades, becoming more hostile to mothers who work and more insistent that all mothers become ever more closely tethered to their kids. The mythology of the new momism now

insinuates that, when all is said and done, the enlightened mother chooses to stay home with the kids. Back in the 1950s, mothers stayed home because they had no choice, so the thinking goes.... Today, having been to the office, having tried a career, women supposedly have seen the inside of the male working world and found it to be the inferior choice to saying home....In other words ladies, the new momism seeks to contain and, where possible, eradicate all of the social changes brought on by feminism. It is backlash in its most refined, pernicious form because it insinuates itself into women's psyches just where we have been rendered most vulnerable: in our love for our kids.

—from *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women*, by Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels (Free Press)

Be All You Can Be

Strong, ambitious, highly competent women—the very ones for whom the Feminist Movement opened the doors to power and success—find themselves at a difficult crossroads today, a time when one major need, desire, biological urge (to love, to nurture, to have children, to be the good mothers our own mothers were, or weren't) is in direct conflict with another: that of not only contributing a necessary share of the family income, but of fulfilling the intellectual and professional ambitions for which we've been groomed and primed, often for our entire young lives.

—from *The Bitch in the House: 26 Women Tell the Truth About Sex, Solitude, Work, Motherhood, and Marriage*, edited by Cathi Hanauer (Perennial Books)

Reversal of Fortune

Then, 15 years ago, it all seemed so doable. Bring home the bacon, fry it up in a pan, split the second shift with some sensitive New Age man. But slowly the snappy, upbeat work-life rhythm has changed for women in high-powered posts....For dual-career couples with kids under 18, the combined work hours have grown from 81 a week in 1977 to 91 in 2002, according to the Families and Work Institute.... Meanwhile, the pace has quickened on the home front, where a mother's job has expanded to include managing a packed schedule of child-enhancement activities....

In the professional and managerial classes, where higher incomes permit more choices, a reluctant revolt is under way. Today's women execs are less willing to play the juggler's game, especially in its current high-speed mode, and more willing to sacrifice paychecks and prestige for time with their family.... Their mantra: You can have it all, just not all at the same time.

...Census data reveal an uptick in stay-at-home moms who hold graduate or professional degrees—the very women who seemed destined to blast through the glass ceiling. Now 22% of them are home with their kids. A study by Catalyst found that 1 in 3 women with M.B.A.s are not working full-time (it's 1 in 20 for their male peers).

—from “The Case for Staying Home: More Women Are Sticking With the Kids,” by Claudia Wallis, *Time Magazine*, March 22, 2004

A Different Desire

Arguably, the barriers of 40 years ago are down. Fifty percent of the undergraduate class of 2003 at Yale was female; this year's graduating class at Berkeley Law School was 63 percent women; Harvard was 46 percent; Columbia was 51. Nearly 47 percent of medical students are women, as are 50 percent of undergraduate business majors (though, interestingly, about 30 percent of M.B.A. candidates). They are recruited by top firms in all fields. They start strong out of the gate.

And then, suddenly, they stop. Despite all those women graduating from law school, they comprise only 16 percent of partners in law firms. Although men and women enter corporate training programs in equal numbers, just 16 percent of corporate officers are women, and only eight companies in the Fortune 500 have female C.E.O.'s. Of 435 members of the House of Representatives, 62 are women; there are 14 women in the 100-member Senate.

Measured against the way things once were, this is certainly progress. But measured against the way things were expected to be, this is a revolution stalled. As these [professional] women look up at the “top,” they are increasingly deciding that they don't want to do what it takes to get there. Women today have the equal right to make the same bargain that men have made for centuries—to take time from their family in pursuit of success. Instead, women are redefining success. And in doing so, they are redefining work.

—from “The Opt-Out Revolution,” by Lisa Belkin,

Getting Mobilized: Resources on the Web for Working Moms

www.mothersandmore.org

An organization that “cares for the caregiver,” a national support group for women who have changed their workplace participation in some way because of parenthood. They connect mothers to each other and provide support as women navigate the rough ground between work and family life.

www.mothersmovement.org/index.htm

The Mothers Movement Online is devoted to the social, economic and political issues affecting mothers. An outlet for women to write about these issues themselves.

www.mothersoughttohaveequalrights.org

Government and society at large place no economic value on those caring for family members. Mothers Ought To Have Equal Rights (MOTHERS) believes that “correcting the economic disadvantages facing caregivers is the big unfinished business of the women's movement.”

New York Times Magazine, October 26, 2003

Trying to Work Again

“Taking time off for family reasons has been a compelling option for women who can afford it. Many mothers say the benefits, especially time spent with their young children, are invaluable. Reversing a nearly 30-year trend, the percentage of mothers in the work force with a child younger than one-year-old dropped to 55% in 2002 from 59% in 1998, according to the Census Bureau.

But many women ultimately want or need to resume their careers. A recent poll of nearly 500 highly educated women who left their jobs mainly for family reasons found 66% wanted to return to work, according to the Center for Work-Life Policy, a New York nonprofit.

...A few companies try to maintain ties with employees who leave for family reasons....Consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton offers former female employees small-scale contract work, such as proposal writing, idea development and working with clients, which can be done from home. Deloitte & Touche LLP, the accounting firm, is planning to launch a “Personal Pursuits” program this year, which will allow employees to take unpaid leave for as long as five years. The firm will run training sessions for those on leave and assign them mentors to stay in touch with them. The company says it hopes to cut down on turnover costs by rehiring people after their leaves.

Catherine King, ...one-time Wall Streeter, stayed home after she had her second child....“There's a part of every woman who has had what it takes to succeed on Wall Street that yearns for that type of overachieving applause that you got, and that motherhood does not allow you to have. There's just no applause,” she says. “And I miss that.” ●

— from “Second Chances: After Years Off, Women Struggle To Revive Careers,” by Anne Marie Chaker

Why Women's Organizations Won't Repair Our Mind-Body Split

How to juggle home and workplace? Who is responsible for helping families keep all those oranges in the air? These have been focal questions for feminists since the movement began. The passage of the U.S. Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) in 1993 was a great victory. But thanks to restrictions in the act, more than 41 million people, or half of the country's private workforce, are not covered under the act's guarantee of unpaid, job-protected leave, according to the National Partnership for Women & Families. And even if workers *are* guaranteed unpaid medical leave, many cannot afford to take it. And the act doesn't come close to solving the many day-to-day conflicts that come up for parents—mainly women—who are pursuing careers and raising children simultaneously.

For the most part, women's organizations, including Jewish women's organizations, aren't doing anything to help. Repeated calls to the National Organization of Women (NOW) yielded no response to this question, and the policy section on their website devoted to the work-family balance

and childcare has not been updated for a year and a half. And at the Feminist Majority Foundation, LILITH's inquiries were directed to an online columnist for Ms. magazine, which is now part of that organization.

Nor are any Jewish women's organizations making this issue a priority. A spokesperson from Hadassah said that while women's issues such as reproductive freedom are at the forefront of their current agenda, helping women balance work and family is "not on the screen at the moment, although it may be in the future." Sammie Moshenberg of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) said that while she believes that quality, affordable childcare for middle-income women is lacking, especially within the Jewish community, NCJW and other women's organizations don't have the resources at the moment to fight that battle. "The political and economic realities today means that NCJW and others are playing defensively and reactively right now. There is not enough [money] and motivation to do proactive work right now," she told LILITH.

Advocacy aside, Jewish organizations generally don't even promote family-friendly and mother-friendly policies *within* their own organizations, saying that they don't have the resources. Of the largest organizations, Hadassah offers some emergency alternative childcare and NCJW offers some flex time and telecommuting options, but no paid family leave, on-site or back up childcare, or a policy of reimbursing childcare costs for after-hours meetings.

In a research project for Journey, the journal of Ma'yan, the Jewish Women's Project of the JCC in Manhattan, Susan Sapiro spoke with a range of Jewish organizations and found that "only one [The Nathan Cummings Foundation] had a paid maternity leave policy that guaranteed an income for longer than a week. ...In many Jewish organizations, staff are expected to accrue and use all of their sick leave and vacation time in order to be able to take paid maternity or parental leave." Sapiro also found that with childcare. "Flexible arrangements are made on an individual level, rather than an institutional one. What this means is that one's ability to get flexible work arrangements is dependent on the good graces of one's supervisor."

Some good news comes from the National Partnership for Women & Families, which spearheaded the FMLA a decade ago and is working to expand benefits where the act leaves off. But, says Jodi Grant, director of Work and Family Programs at the National Partnership, "It's also about changing attitudes in the workplace" to encourage men to take advantage of these same benefits. "If the policies are just used by women, women will continue to be discriminated against in the long run."

Jewish women's organizations should be setting an example for family-friendly workplaces, and working to bring these issues to the top of the national policy agenda. If women are going to be able to lead the Jewish community, Jewish organizations had better make sure that the "opt-out revolution" doesn't take capable women right out of the pool. ●

—Miriam Stone

Jewish Organizations are "Awful"

Sociologist Rela Mintz Geffen, President of Baltimore Hebrew University, has had her eye on Jewish organizations' policies on childbearing and the workplace for decades. In the 1980s, she directed a groundbreaking LILITH/American Jewish Committee survey of "Jewish Women on the Way Up" ["Struggling? Juggling? Trying to Integrate Our Multiple Roles," LILITH, Spring 1988]. She says that today's dual-career dilemmas are very similar to when she started studying them in the 1970s and 1980s.

She labels "elitist" the arguments, promoted by professional women in a recent spate of articles, that the best thing for working women is to give it a break while they stay home and take care of their children. Focusing on the behaviors of these privileged women deflects attention away from how we change "the structure of society and the workplace...so that mothers *and* fathers can spend more time with their children."

Geffen told Sarah Blustein recently that the Jewish community is "obsessed" with fertility, and that this obsession distracts from the important work of making Jewish workplaces family-friendly for women and men; on this, she says, the Jewish community is "abominable."

"I think that the Jewish community talks a good game" in its programs on this subject, Geffen said, particularly in women's departments of Jewish federations or young leadership groups. "In theory they are in favor of family-friendly workplace," but in practice, they are "awful...very good on advocacy for the rest of the world."