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Feminism: For Better and for Worse

By Suzanne Fields



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Feminism: For Better and for Worse

Suzanne Fields

My readers frequently write to ask why I'm so critical of certain feminists and make such a strong traditional defense of motherhood and family when it's obvious that I benefited from feminist accomplishments and stretched the definition of tradition in my own adult family life. This speech is the beginning of my answer to such queries.

I belong to a transitional generation of women who have been able to look back to what has been lost in modern family life; at the same time, I was also able to enjoy the opportunities made possible by modern feminism. That is why this speech is called "Feminism: For Better and for Worse." I did not take the subtitle lightly.

Freud said the most important values in life require fulfillment through work and love. That is a huge order. None of us totally succeed as we would like in filling it, but most of us do find ways to derive meaning from both work and love.

I grew up in a transitional time and was like a Janus figure, looking back at the traditional roles for men and women as they were exercised in my family and looking forward to a new world as an ambitious woman, to the freedoms first suggested and then offered me by many of the feminist successes.

As a newspaper columnist who writes about social issues mainly through the prism of their impact on the family, and men and women as they love and work, I had to look hard at not only the political issues, but also the personal ones as they affected me in making my interpretations. If I turned on tradition, I would have to underestimate the sacrifices made by my parents and the benefits in my life from having traditional parents. If I refused the opportunities offered by feminism, I would shortchange my own potential. As a result, I was faced with a dilemma that was both emotional and intellectual. I wrote frequently about the virtues of the nuclear family made up of a father like mine, who was a full-time breadwinner, and a mother who was a full-time mother for my brother and me.

It was no surprise to me to learn that some of the most powerful feminists had lousy relationships with both their mothers and their fathers. A dislike of their fathers certainly propelled many feminists into their attacks on the nature of the father disguised (and sometimes not so disguised) in rhetoric against the patriarchy. I could never go that far. My father was a wonderful father *because* he was patriarchal, and to him that carried obligations and responsibilities for his family that he felt important in an abstract ethical sense, and through love in a most profound personal way. To dismiss the kind of man he was would be to dismiss half of my heritage.

To measure my father or any fathers against standards they could not understand would wreak havoc with their integrity and identity. It would be historically and psychologically

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dishonest. As we all know—even radical feminists—who we are and what we become are determined by many things, including the times in which we are born.

A dislike of their mothers, or at least the kind of lives their mothers led, was probably the most potent influence on the first wave of radical feminists in the 1960s and 1970s. It propelled their rhetoric even more than their contempt for their fathers because they saw their mothers doing the hard work of life. They rarely saw their fathers in green eyeshades, bored to death counting the numbers or cowering before a dictatorial boss, breaking into a sweat when trying to sell life insurance, a used car, or aluminum siding. Because such scenes took place somewhere away from home, much of father's work—if not father himself—could be romanticized.

Nor is it coincidental that many early feminists found an intellectual haven in feminist theory because they wanted to be anything *but* like their mothers. Let's not forget that Simone de Beauvoir, founding mother of feminism, described a pregnant woman as nothing but an incubator or an appliance. Motherhood was downgraded from the very beginning. (It is very interesting that Ms. de Beauvoir totally denied her maternal feelings until her mother got sick and she had to be maternal to her. When her mother died, she adopted a daughter, who was already 30, so she never had to be an appliance or raise a child to adulthood.)

From the very beginning of feminism, it was impossible for me to accept the premise that the generation of mothers like my mother were bad. Of course, they weren't perfect; no parents are. But I realized as an adult what many feminists refused to examine: that many of our strengths were bequeathed by mothers who were there nurturing full-time, helping me with my homework, giving me dancing and piano lessons, encouraging me in ways that were very different from what fathers gave. My mother, like most mothers of her generation, attended to the fine detail work, the meticulous daily requirements of a growing girl.

Mothers and fathers of that generation were the embodiment of what deprived children in our society today crave. In *Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness*, Peggy Noonan asks her 40-year-old brother-in-law a question all children at some time or another ask themselves when they are grown: "What was the best thing about your mother when you were growing up?"

He immediately said, "That she was there."

"There for you?" asks Peggy Noonan.

"No," he said, "actually there. In the kitchen. For twenty years she stood in the kitchen stirring the gravy. Every day I came home from school, she was there. When I came home with a broken arm or blood coming out of my lip, she was at the door. That's the big change. Kids have no one home now. I don't mean one-parent families, I mean two parents and both are out. And we'll never go back to the old way again, ever."

Peggy Noonan's brother-in-law is probably right: "We'll never go back to the old way again, ever." But that does not mean we can't go back to *some* of that.

As a transitional woman of her times, I was home almost every day when my children came home, but I was not there stirring the gravy. I do not even know how to make gravy. I was working in my study on the third floor of my house with the door closed. I frequently greeted the children, but often I did not. I was a working mother that moved from traditional motherhood to motherhood with a feminist awareness. A housekeeper downstairs in my house was stirring the gravy, preparing the meals, serving milk and cookies. I was upstairs writing lectures or articles, creating the "important" work in the brave new world for women.

This was the beginning of a new definition of maternalism. It was not all bad. It was not all good. But it was different. Mothers like myself had a bagful of rationalizations: “A happy mother makes a happy home.” “Children of working mothers are more independent.” “Two incomes are better than one.” But it was not long before many mothers were responsible for the only income in their family.

In the movie *Arthur*, the character played by Liza Minelli marries Arthur, a disinherited drunk who has never worked, played by Dudley Moore. When she tells him that they have to become a two-income family, he asks: “Oh, you’re going to get another job?”

That became a reality for many women who became mothers without getting married as the sexual revolution dripped, dripped, dripped like a Starbucks espresso down to the poor among us. Revolutions cannot be contained, and the modern feminists ushered in a revolution that—like the French Revolution—began its own terror, especially in the daily lives of many of our children who as infants were placed in inadequate day care and as youngsters were known as latchkey kids, coming home to an empty house.

Women who benefited from modern feminism in its initial stage enjoyed a headiness at first, a promise of boundless possibility. I know; I was there. But even in our original revolutionary excitement, many of us could feel a hole in our heart when we realized we missed seeing the first time Johnny or Elizabeth stood up or took their first steps.

We defended ourselves with self-important rationalizations, assuaged by the thought that our children were fine in the company of a baby-sitter who liked to talk baby talk and watch cartoons on television. As transitional mothers, we defended ourselves with our potential for change, but few of us asked our children for their honest appraisal. Would they rather have had more of us? What do you think? Of course, we know—and they know—we gave them special benefits by sharing our work, knowledge, information with them. We were not mothers; we were “role models.” In that sense, we were better in some ways than our mothers; we were also worse.

No one ever uses the term “full-time father,” not even today, but that is what many of us had in the 1950s and early 1960s. Full-time father meant that he took his role as father seriously. He never forgot he was a father first, but father did not mean the same thing then. Full-time father meant always knowing that his responsibility was to be a breadwinner, to support a wife and family; and nothing—absolutely nothing—was more important to that father—to my father, to most fathers—than his sense of self that depended on being a good provider.

Did that have its downsides? You bet. Men suffered greater stress, died younger than their wives, and missed out on some of life’s most gratifying experiences—watching their children grow in the ordinary events of everyday life. That was perhaps the biggest sacrifice of all. But what the radical feminists forgot in their attack on that generation of fathers was the noble goal of their hard work: to usher in a life for their children that would be more secure than the lives they led.

Most of you have read Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*. There is social criticism in that play—Arthur Miller creates a cruel employer in the son who inherits the business his father built—but there is a poignancy in Willy Loman that made him a good man who wanted to do right by his family. Even when he committed suicide, he was thinking of his family getting his insurance money. He got his values screwed up and twisted, but he cared about supporting his

family. When you look at all the deadbeat dads today, you know that in many instances that value for fathers has been lost.

Most social critics will now concede that the full-time working father and the mother stirring the gravy were in no way ideal, but society and our children have paid a heavy price for having fewer full-time mothers and full-time fathers to raise families. The first feminists, like true revolutionaries, attacked the good with the bad. Discrimination is rarely a revolutionary virtue.

Ironically—and unfortunately—many women became like their fathers, the workaholics or drudges they railed against when they were children. Today, they have a better understanding of their fathers' fatigue and frustrations.

"Children begin by loving their parents," writes Oscar Wilde. "As they grow older they judge them; sometimes they forgive them." I believe that older feminists can afford to be more forgiving now. As for younger women who have lived through some of the successes of feminism, they can also see that, as President Clinton would put it, "mistakes were made."

Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963. It was a transitional document that changed the way women—and therefore men—would see their social roles. A rereading of that book, which became such a Bible for the first wave of modern feminism, shows that the frustrated suburban housewives Friedan interviewed never said they wanted the life stresses of men. They only said they were bored and wanted something more for themselves. Most of these women enjoyed a good family life, but as their children were getting older, the gratifications of being mom were increasingly reduced to chauffeuring and "schlepping" the kids to school, Little League, piano lessons, and the orthodontist. The absence of public transportation in the suburbs was crucial to this phenomenon.

These suburban women were not hostile toward men, nor did they want to reject the dominant roles they maintained in family life. If Friedan had asked the women she interviewed whether they would have preferred working in high-powered (i.e., stressful) jobs when their children were young, I think they would have been shocked and turned off by the idea. They wanted to be more creative, which meant working to earn money in part-time jobs, or to go back to college to train for something in the future when their children were grown and gone. But I suspect none of them wanted an absolute 50–50 relationship of work (i.e., earning power) instead of being the mom.

Typical was the mother of four who left college at 19, who told Friedan that she had tried everything—hobbies, gardening, pickling, canning, being very social with neighbors, joining committees, running Parent Teacher Association teas. "I love the kids and Bob and my home," she said. "There's no problem you can even put a name to. But I'm desperate. I begin to feel I have no personality."

Put aside for a moment how spoiled this woman sounds to a mother today—a mother who has to work to support her family and who would be thrilled to have the time to garden and can fruits and vegetables. This woman interviewed by Friedan was not the consciousness-raising male-bashing feminist who followed her. She was a woman who felt stuck in the suburbs, who had leisure time once her children were in school, and wanted to live more creatively and was rethinking her future in the world of work.

By 1981, when *The Second Stage* was published, Friedan was hearing a different complaint. She was in California in the office of a television producer who pulled her aside to talk to her

privately. This woman, in her late 20s, was not only “dressed for success,” but she looked like the fulfillment of the feminist crusade: an executive with power and a good paycheck. “I know I’m lucky to have this job,” she told Friedan, “but you people who fought for these things had your families. You already had your men and children. What are we supposed to do?” She hated working for a woman who was married to the company and whose only aspiration was more power in the firm.

It was a lament that would dominate the post-feminists in the 1980s who were resentful that they might get only half a loaf, work without family. If Friedan had continued to set the agenda for feminism, I believe the vocal feminist hostility toward motherhood and family would not have been so overwhelming. Fifteen years after the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*, she would decry the dangerous polarization that had grown up between feminism and the family, between women and men, between traditional women and feminist women. But by then the “feminist mystique” ruled women’s lives, and Gloria Steinem rather than Betty Friedan had become its titular head. Feminists attacked Friedan for caring more about family issues than about lesbian ones. She did indeed.

Friedan, after all, had been married with children; and although she was later divorced, she knew firsthand the realities and compromises, the intensity of the pleasure and the sharpness of the pain that comes from being a wife and mother. Steinem, forever single, forged several intimate relationships with men but never made the commitment to one man or one family. She could not experience what most women, feminist or not, want. That limited her life view. *Ms.* magazine, reflecting this view, became a platform for radical feminist-lesbian-leftist politics. This was not the place in which most women lived. The hardships, not the accompanying joys of motherhood, were emphasized in its pages, and the *Ms.* brand of feminism, with its limited insights, turned many women off.

A survey in 1996 of more than 18,000 women, taken for *Parents* magazine, found that 68 percent of the working moms say they work for money, not emotional or intellectual satisfaction. That’s up 12 points in seven years. Big majorities of mothers prefer part-time work to full-time work when their children are young. A mere 4 percent say they would choose full-time work. Although 49 percent of working mothers say they envy at-home moms, only 11 percent of at-home moms actually envy working mothers.

Most startling of all is that the majority—the *majority*—of young mothers under 25 say they prefer the lifestyle of the 1950s, the decade the feminists love to hate. Forty-three percent say they long for the security and less pressured lives of that decade.

Readers of *Parents* magazine make up a special sampling because nearly all of them live with their husbands, the fathers of their children, and have been married only once, and more than half are college graduates. They sound a lot like younger versions of the women Betty Friedan interviewed for *The Feminine Mystique*. What a difference 40 years makes.

More recently, after the November elections, Kellyanne Fitzpatrick conducted a poll for the Independent Women’s Forum. In a survey of 1,200 respondents, one-third of all those surveyed would choose to have one parent at home full-time with their children if their economic situation allowed it. I have met many young mothers, especially among those women who have already worked in law or business offices, who prefer spending more time at home than their working mothers spent with them.

My oldest daughter imitates my mother's life more than she imitates mine. She lives the script my mother wrote for me but that I rejected. She studied to be a chef, has worked in restaurants, writes restaurant reviews, and occasionally teaches cooking or caters a dinner, but she wouldn't think of putting her infant son in day care to enable her to be a full-time chef. She sees herself as privileged to be able to stay at home, nurturing her son. Her husband supports that choice, and both make the sacrifices made by a family without a second income. My daughter also laments that in the urban neighborhood where she lives, she is usually the only mommy supervising children in the play groups. All the other women are nannies.

Feminist changes have made it easier for my daughter to have broader choices than women had growing up when feminism was in its insurgency. She knows she has work options if she chooses them, options that the 1950s generation of mothers did not have. But she has no illusions about what it means to be a working mother. A pressured and stressful job can't compete in the quality of life categories with cooking for her husband and son.

Mothers like my daughter simply do not find that self-esteem or status in the world necessarily derives from what you do in the work world. These women have been called "post-feminists," "neo-feminists," even "feminists, not!" But whatever you call them, they look at work without glamorizing or overrating it. Many of them know they will not necessarily be able to count on a husband's financial support forever, so they want to have something they can do to earn money. They also want to spend more time with their children when they're young, living with husbands whom they love, if—and this is a big if—they can put trust in a husband's financial support.

I meet many women in their late 20s and early 30s who have worked for years and now say they prefer to take off a few years to raise their children. They will not all forego a full-time career for motherhood, but many of them say that they look at work for a father as different than work for a mother. There is time for a woman to have a full-time career later, when their children are in school, or they can enjoy a full-time career before they have a family. These women—and I think this is important—do not choose to be full-time mothers because they believe it is in the best interest of their child, although that is part of it, but because they don't want to miss out on watching their babies grow through their early years.

Such women, of course, will have a different timetable for earning money. Women, in much greater numbers than men, are willing to sacrifice money to time at home. That is why legislation that proposes converting time for overtime into time off rather than more money for working mothers is an intriguing idea.

Legislation recently passed in the House called the Working Families Flexibility Act, sponsored by Cass Ballenger (R-NC), would enable private employers to offer their workers "comp-time" (compensatory time off) instead of cash for overtime pay. One hour of overtime would equal one and a half hours of paid time off with regular pay. Each employee would be limited to 160 hours a year. The worker would take cash for everything else.

This is an idea whose time has come. Most of us have acknowledged at one time or another that time is money and money is time, and this is especially true for working mothers. We do not need a poll or a survey—even though there are many—to know that a large majority of working mothers struggle daily to balance work and family. Making more money for overtime simply is not good enough if we miss those special times with our children that are as important to them as they ought to be to us. Kellyanne Fitzpatrick also found in her post-election poll

that fully 55 percent of those questioned were willing to give up some seniority or pay for more personal time.

Comp-time sounds like an idea that Bill Clinton would love: It's high in the polls, and working mothers especially like it. But the Clinton Administration opposes it, setting up one straw man after another. The actual reason is that the AFL-CIO opposes it, and the President is beholden to labor. So is the disaffected liberal wing of his party in Congress; only 13 Democrats voted for comp-time.

Peggy Noonan is instructive here, too. In her book *Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness*, she tells of a woman who had been a full-time mother of two children for six years and was offered a high-paying, high-status White House job. But she wants Noonan to tell her whether she should take it, noting that her most humiliating moments in life come from being asked, "What do you do?"

Noonan replies cautiously that of all the ways you can spend your time between now and death, she thinks "work is just...overrated." There are two fundamental reasons to work: You need the money to support your family, and you feel driven to make a mark, whether in politics, art, government, medicine, business, or you want to manufacture widgets. Status is not a good reason.

Noonan's friend decided not to take the White House job. She wanted to continue to spend more time with her young children. She was fortunate; she did not need the money. But moms who do need to work to support themselves will benefit from comp-time.

The saddest letters I receive are from working mothers who tell of their disappointment in the radical feminist promise of gratification derived from work when it deprives them of time with their families. I was flooded with letters from such women after Hillary Clinton's column first ran in *The Washington Times* some months ago. The First Lady hosted a luncheon for working mothers. Fair enough, but the women who wrote me wanted to know if she might host a luncheon for working mothers who stay at home, their work being their children. Good question: In my column, I suggested that the First Lady might like to do just that, but I wouldn't hold my breath because that kind of attitude is still not politically chic among the Democrats.

They don't like to admit it, but conservative women have changed the terms of the debate. Working women are no longer loath to say that they consider motherhood their most important accomplishment. Anne Roiphe, a novelist who also describes herself as a feminist, scolds feminists for downgrading motherhood and eliminating that as a positive choice. "The only thing I know for sure," she says, "is that I would rather have a child than a book." (She has both.)

Mothers who work typically (and I include myself in this category) are more frazzled in balancing career and home than mothers who do not work. That is not all bad, but it makes it somewhat impossible to reflect the sense of wholeness that mothers of my mother's generation had. And I think it's especially hard on young children.

In the movie *This Is My Life*, writer Nora Ephron develops the conflicts of a mother and work by depicting a loving and ambitious mother who must leave her children frequently to be successful as a comedienne. Says Ms. Ephron, mother of two, of her fictional creation: "Everything that is good news for her [the mother in the movie] is bad news for [her] kids." I have had similar experiences in my work life. The more I write about "family values," the more radio and

television commentators want to interview me on the subject, and the less time I have for my family.

Many younger fathers are more engaged in everyday family life than fathers of my father's generation, and that helps. Younger fathers of Generation X (and X-plus) say they plan to spend more time in day-to-day activities of their children than either their mothers or fathers spent with them. They are less likely to be the organization man spawned in the 1950s: "the man in the gray flannel suit" whose work for the family took him away from the family. Lots of young fathers today will decline a promotion if it requires that they move their family to another city, or that they put in more time away from family. Family-friendly firms have both mothers and fathers in mind when they provide day care or flextime.

But no matter how fathers' roles have changed at work or inside the house, fathers in general do not experience the stress and conflicts that come from the mix of work and home that working mothers do. We call a working mother's anxiety "maternal guilt." Voices inside the working mother speak with a different vocabulary than those of the working father.

Maternal guilt also resides in the hearts of traditional women who do not work outside the home, mothers who often wonder whether what they are doing for their children at a given time is "right." Are they allowing their child enough independence? Are they too protective? Not protective enough? This comes with the territory of being a mother, working or not. Most fathers simply do not suffer that kind of anxiety.

The notion of "quality time" for mothers was always a fraudulent idea, a rationalization without a direct connection to feelings, a false premise of feminist rhetoric. It was an invention for working mothers, not fathers. Quality time is what most "good enough" fathers always thought they gave their children without guilt. But a mother, traditional or not, knows that a child demands ordinary time from her.

A child wants ordinary time from daddy, too, but only a mother knows in her heart, in her bones, in her womb, that she is the one who is absolutely responsible for ordinary time. A father gives it when he can; a mother gives it whether she can or not. She wills it. If she works, she wills it when the baby wakes at midnight from a bad dream; she wills it in the morning by not forgetting to put raisins in with the Cheerios; she wills it when she remembers which child likes crunchy peanut butter and which child prefers the smooth, when she packs peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in the lunch box.

Lots of dads do the same things today, but deep down—and I've talked to lots of them—they still think they're doing something special. Nor do dads suffer like a mom when these tasks are taken over by a babysitter. But increasing numbers of affluent families are installing video cameras to spy on their babysitters. You cannot be around working mothers without listening to anguished tales of child care, whether in their own homes or in a daycare center.

We know that any woman who decides to stay home to become a full-time mother will discuss that momentous decision with her husband. Does he mind bearing the burden of being the sole breadwinner? Most men do not mind if they can afford it. But it is a rare couple that has this discussion in reverse. While "househusbands" were once celebrated as a solution for feminist women, that myth has gone with the celebration of androgyny. Househusbands are merely the exceptions that prove the rule.

But if househusbands never quite materialized, what did occur for many men feeling the pressures of feminism was to remain single for as long as they can. Countless women in their early 30s who are ready for marriage and family have told me that they are meeting middle-class men who do not share their urgency and who want to hold open their potential for adventure (i.e., lack of responsibility) for at least another year or two or three. In my parents' generation such men were few, and they were described pejoratively as refusing "to settle down." Women today call them "babies," and they are finding a lot more of them.

Almost one-third of all single men aged 25 to 32 were living with their parents in 1990, according to the Census Bureau. Only 20 percent of the single women of the same age live at home. Is this a Post-feminist Male Syndrome (PMS) or what? Also according to the Census Bureau, a high proportion of men are postponing marriage. The proportion of Americans getting married in 1991 was lower than in any years since 1965. In 1990, 17.6 percent of men between the ages of 35 to 39 had never married, up 7.8 percent in 1980. Never-married women between the ages of 35 to 39 had almost doubled, from 6.2 percent in 1980 to 11.7 percent in 1991. The percentage of people who never marry has doubled in our lifetime.

Many reasons are given for these sociological changes—economic and psychological—and there is not one catch-all explanation. Nor can all of these changes be laid at the feet of feminism, although certainly feminism has had an impact on men delaying marriage. But many young adults who suffered in families in which divorce was a painful experience want to be absolutely sure that they will not inflict divorce on their children. That is an honorable goal, but sometimes it scares men into waiting and waiting and waiting for "Ms. Right."

Women who want full-time careers today are the big-time winners in the successes of modern feminism. Women are starting new businesses at double the rate of men. The number of women who own businesses increased 43 percent from 1987 to 1992. Approximately 8 million women own businesses in the United States, and they employ 15.5 million people, creating \$1.4 trillion in sales.

Men manage bigger businesses than women, which accounts for the most lucrative government contracts, but women have not yet chosen to pursue construction or the production of munitions and weapons. Women's gains in the corporate economy are stunning. The number of female vice presidents more than doubled in the past decade; the number of female senior vice presidents increased by 75 percent. Fewer women are CEOs, but rarely because of sex discrimination. Several studies show that men not only work longer hours, and spend more years working, but crave the "top dog" position in greater numbers. Only about a third as many women as men actually aspire to be a CEO. Typically, women in corporate work tend to drop out in their 30s after they have children, which is why in most surveys of Generation Xers, you will hear women espousing the message that they *expect* to work full-time. The birth of a child may alter those opinions.

Women who want to be physicians are no longer facing admission discrimination at top medical schools. In 1996, the Yale Medical School admitted a class that is 54 percent female. In 1995, 60 percent of all obstetrics and gynecology residents were women. Female obgyn specialists, on average, earn just 1 percent less than their male colleagues, a percentage that can easily be closed.

It is testimony to the success of feminists that the wage gap in the United States is down to 2 percent in 1997 among women and men who make similar life choices and who compete

equally for the same kind of work. Women who are earning 98 percent of what men earn are between the ages of 27 and 33 and have never had a child, according to *Women's Figures: The Economic Progress of Women in America*, compiled by economist Diana Furchtgott-Roth and historian Christine Stolba.

But we must all face the reality of these statistics. If women are to compete head-to-head or toe-to-toe with men in power and money, they must make the same life choices as the most ambitious men they are competing against. President Clinton can call for an extra day in the hospital when a woman has a baby, and that is fine, but a woman who competes with a man while enjoying the fullness of a generous maternity leave is unlikely to compete with a man equally in the money department.

There are exceptions, of course, but it is nevertheless a great illusion for a woman to expect the same money at the same time as her male competitor if she chooses a different lifestyle. Young mothers who want to stay home with their young children and not work at all have to think of their professional or work lives as "on hold." What many women forgot in the early stages of the feminist revolution was that there was enormous pleasure in the daily details of everyday life with children, the gratifications of sacrificing time and money for the little humans we have created.

"The real income gap today is between child-raising families and other types of households," says Harvard Law Professor Mary Ann Glendon, who was the Vatican representative to the United Nations' Fourth Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. I also attended that convention and, like Professor Glendon, was stunned by the final report, which was a call to action on behalf of women that hardly mentions the significance of marriage, motherhood, and family life: Money and power is all.

Younger women share the shock of Professor Glendon and myself at the thrust of this international "feminist" report that so denigrates maternity and marriage. They accused the American feminist leaders in Beijing, who were in their 40s, 50s, 60s, even 70s, of being behind the curve, out-of-date on current concerns of women. Younger women in this country, many of whom I meet on college campuses and in adult organizations when I lecture, tell me they do not want these women to speak for them.

Several contemporary writers, including myself, increasingly call for an updated look at feminism, for a rapprochement between conservative and liberal women with the hope that we can bring a fresh understanding to family life that will benefit future generations. Ann Roiphe—novelist, essayist, and mother—tells it like it is: "Feminist politics may be personal, but the personal always slips out of the grasp of the political," she writes in *Fruitful: A Real Mother in the Modern World*. "It seethes and squirms, it bites and soothes in ways that make all rhetoric seem like baby talk, while real life is experienced in the parentheses, in the subclause, in the ironies."

It is time, I believe, to bring a hard-headed understanding to what feminists have won and lost for women and men, in their relationships with each other, and most especially for their children.

We have come a long way from the *Murphy Brown* debate, and now it's difficult to find anyone who does not believe that Dan Quayle was right. *Murphy Brown* as modern myth carried a devastating and nonchalant acceptance of the idea that it was okay to have an illegitimate baby. The show indeed added chic to glamour when several real life media stars attended *Murphy's*

make-believe baby shower. After all, Murphy—like highly paid professional women in real life—could afford to take care of a baby.

But only seven years ago, it was difficult to speak out in defense of the Vice President's position that fatherless families were not terrific for children. The *Phil Donahue Show* invited me to join them in discussing the Murphy Brown contretemps. I said I would appear as long as I could readily argue my point of view. Donahue's producer said that was precisely why they wanted me to participate. When I arrived in New York, I saw that the program's staff had stacked the deck much as the rest of the mainstream media had done: 4 to 1 against common sense. I was on stage with four single mothers claiming that, like Rodney Dangerfield, they "don't get no respect" and that women like me were a big part of the problem. I was there to show "disrespect."

One of the single mothers boasted about how she took her two children to the sperm bank to show them the deep freeze where their daddy's sperm came from. The audience thought this was terrific. She got lots of applause.

I took issue with these women by saying simply that statistics and a little common sense show that children have a greater chance to thrive when they have both a mother and a father: that I felt fortunate, for example, that my three children—two daughters and a son—enjoyed a close relationship with their father, the man to whom I was married.

Well, my observation on my own family life made several women in the audience very angry. Suddenly, praising the virtue of a family with a mother and a father was perceived as elitist. One member of the audience jumped up out of her chair to scream at me, and Uncle Phil quickly put his microphone in her face so as not to miss the attack. "Mrs. Fields," she sneered contemptuously, "I feel sorry for you. You had to raise your children with the help of a man."

This story would be funny if it was not so sad. But it is refreshing now to see shifts toward recognition of the importance of the intact family and putting children first. That really should be our priority.

Modern feminism began with women raising their consciousness by attacking men. Mercifully, that phase has passed because too many women enjoyed fraternizing with the enemy, and that made traitors of us all. The sexual revolution changed the rules of engagement and blurred the battle lines in the eternal war between the sexes. But as we seek an amnesty, calling on men and women to lay down their arms (so that they can fall into them), both sides ought to be prepared to renegotiate the terms of an honorable surrender. Instead of "for better and for worse," for example, they could rediscover "for better *or* for worse."

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