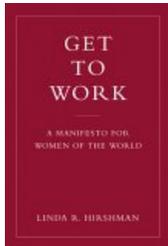


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The Mommy Wars Revisited

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[Beliefnet.com](#) has published a debate of sorts on the “mommy wars.” Linda Hirshman, author of *Get to Work: A Manifesto for Women of the World*, returns in [a lengthy interview](#) to her argument that women who stay home to care for children are “letting down the team.”

I was invited to write an [article](#) in response to Hirshman. Both articles are available at [Beliefnet.com](#).

In [her interview](#), Linda Hirshman is as strident and radical as ever. After explaining that she had determined what “the standards of secular Western goodness” might be, she applied these to stay-at-home moms and found them morally wanting:

I applied those standards to the decision to stay home and tend children and the household, and I found that they were, in fact, lacking. These women are not using their full human capacity. They are not independent, and they are not doing more social good than harm.

So stay-at-home moms are doing more harm than good? She doesn't stop there. They are also delusional.

I think they're making a mistake. The most frustrating thing about the whole business is the nonsensical stories that they tell themselves and me about what they think they're doing. The delusional quality of it is a little weird. . . .

I'm not sure what is going on. If they, in fact, believe the things that they tell me, then they are incredibly stupid and foolish. I'm hoping that they're reciting it like a mantra: “choice, choice, choice, choice,” or “I never met a man who wished on his deathbed he spent more time at work.” These are mantras that these women recite; they send them to me in e-mails. And so, when the whole society is telling you a set of things, it becomes very easy to just recite it. The interesting question is why they are unwilling to think through what they're doing. And I think it's because what they're doing is destructive and dangerous and they're afraid to face it.

The essence of Linda Hirshman's argument is that what she calls “choice” feminism has led to disaster, because so many women are giving up promising professional lives and money (the very things Hirshman says they should most value) in order to stay at home and care for children — a task she infamously described as unfit “for a complicated, educated person.”

She calls for feminists to return to their “judgmental roots,” refusing to accept women who choose motherhood over career as morally responsible. In her book, she calls for women to go on a “reproductive strike” until they are freed, as a sex, from any imbalance in responsibilities for child-rearing.

She presents herself as surprised that her radical vision is attracting opposition. Take a look at this:

I got a flood of really rabid e-mail—very personal, very harsh. And unlike the usual e-mails, they also were notable for their bad grammar and spelling. So I couldn't figure where this flood of e-mails was coming from, and then someone sent me a speech by [Albert Mohler](#), the head of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He said, “This woman is the instrumentality of the devil.” He lied about what I said, and then he told everybody that I was the end of civilization as we know it. That was my first clue that the forces of organized religion in America were going to be aiming at me.

Well, a little truth-telling will help here. I never said that Linda Hirshman “is the instrumentality of the devil.” As a

matter of fact, I have not said that of anyone. Then she says that I identified her as “the end of civilization as we know it.” She flatters herself. I do believe that her ideas—if taken seriously by many persons—*would* be the end of civilization as we know it. There would be no one left to care for the children.

I have never given “a speech” about Linda Hirshman, so I must assume that she refers instead to [my commentary](#) on her and her ideas [[found here](#)]. The article is a straightforward analysis of her writings and media appearances. Judge for yourself. The problem is her ideas. It is virtually impossible to present her proposals as more radical than they are.

In my [Beliefnet.com article](#), I responded to her book and proposals. She says that she fears “the forces of organized religion” in opposition to her. She can let go of that fear. It’s America’s moms who are in an uproar. As I wrote in the article: “Hirshman has little to fear from conservative Christian men—it’s the moms she had better look out for.”

Further:

The actual work of motherhood disgusts her. After reading the diaries of mothers, she notes: “their description of their lives does not sound particularly interesting or fulfilling for a complicated person, for a complicated, educated person.” Being herself a complicated, educated person, she cannot understand why a woman would, for example, wipe the soiled bottom of her baby. Complicated, educated women just must not do such things, she insists—or they are letting down the team. She even compared mothers to the “untouchables” of India—a caste consigned to sweep bodily wastes and care for the bodily needs of others. “Get to Work” will attract attention, of course. The book is so radical and strident in its tone that the media will not be able to resist its allure. Nevertheless, a half-century after the feminist revolution was launched, women simply aren’t buying its message—not if it means that women who love motherhood are “letting down the team.” The persistence of motherhood is a sign that women really do know what they want.

Let’s all be very thankful for that fact — and honor those women who take up the complicated and educated task of raising the next generation, starting at the cradle.

We discussed this controversy on Tuesday’s edition of [The Albert Mohler Program](#) [[listen here](#)]. We also discussed the issue on editions that aired [February 23, 2006](#) and [June 30, 2006](#).

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