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Are Women Their Own Worst Enemy? “Postfeminists” and the Mommy Track

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Columnist Cathy Young sees trouble among young college women. She responds to the recent report that increasing numbers of young college women intend to be stay-at-home mothers for their children. Writing in *The Boston Globe*, she observes:

What's clear is that, in the 40 years since the rise of the modern women's movement, large numbers of women blessed with the opportunities denied to previous generations have not followed the egalitarian feminist script. Instead, they have, to a greater or lesser extent, embraced traditional female roles — much to the chagrin of feminists such as Yale women's and gender studies professor Laura Wexler. "I really believed 25 years ago," Wexler told the Times, "that this would be solved by now."

Young identifies the problem, not with oppressive men, but with women who favor traditional roles as wives and mothers. Women who prefer the more traditional roles — who see a particular responsibility for mothers in child-rearing — are practicing their own form of sexism, she argues:

If there is a solution to this conundrum, it is greater flexibility of gender roles in the home. But to move in that direction, we need to get past the notion that the only obstacle to equality in parenting and homemaking comes from sexist men clinging to patriarchal privilege. Women are just as likely to regard child-rearing as their turf and to regard the freedom to choose between various options of work-family balance as a female privilege. Yet few feminists have confronted the hard truth of this female version of sexism. What's more, all too often, feminism — academic feminism in particular — has been inclined to treat men as "the enemy" rather than potential equal partners. Until that changes, feminists are doomed to wring their hands over young women's abandonment of equality.

How far will she get with that argument?

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