



Does full-time motherhood allow for fulfillment and a sense of accomplishment in today's culture? Does working full time give parents a sense of balance in raising their children and handling the demands of a career? The answer is NO to both.

Betty Friedan, author of "The Feminine Mystique" wrote that, after nearly two decades of women abandoning their careers to have kids and stay home, these women were more depressed, isolated and frustrated than ever, even if they have first gone to college. "Like a two-headed schizophrenic...once she wrote a paper on Graveyard poets; now she writes notes to the milkman..." The Feminine Mystique was written nearly fifty years ago but could have been written today. While more women ARE going to college and finishing their education, many accept the role of mother and wife, thereby forgoing the chance to shape and express their own identities in society.

I am one of 'them.' Raised mostly by a foster family and people other than my own parents, I quit my highly stressful job when I had my daughter. After countless hours of pushing her on the swing and rushing to the park in between naps, I witnessed the annihilation of my mental abilities. The biggest challenge became whether to cook chicken scaloppini or pasta for dinner. For years I felt as if I were suspended on a thread that depended on the passing of time; one day melded into another and my days were interminable. When I tried to return to work it proved disastrous, caught as I was between the guilt and the anxiety of leaving my child behind and the demands of my job. The result was that I couldn't perform either one to my satisfaction and eventually quit trying to do both.

Friedan asserts that the unhappiness of women (and at times men) while raising a child full time is the result of the fragmented, unrecognized, and undervalued existence that women conduct. I can't agree with her more. While it is very rewarding to be with our children, it can also wipe our sense of identity and direction.

Friedan continues her study by stating that, “with the career woman out of the way, the housewife with interests in the community becomes the devil to be exorcised...there is the discontent suburban wife who raises hell at the PTA; morbidly depressed, she ...envies her husband...” I have seen with my own eyes the multitude of talented women vying for a spot in the various groups where we could express our skills and abilities. The question is: is the lack of pursuits in a woman’s life a consequence of the denial suffered by society or is motherhood a determining factor in the obliteration of other areas of interest?

Of course, one has to take into account the social class of the individual(s) in question. As a white, middle to upper class woman who has had the choice—albeit not always—to pick between homemaking and full time work, I suffered the conflict of wanting to be home with my child and yet longing to express my creativity in full. Over the years I quickly morphed into what Dr. Polly Eisendrath-Young defines as the ‘hothouse mother’ (from *Women and Desire*, an account of women desires and pathologies in the context of a patriarchal culture) which states that: “when a mother is “perceived simply as a resource for others’ needs rather than as a person in her own right, she becomes the Hothouse Mother”. In her estimation, the ‘hothouse’ concept is simply the result of society’s inability to respond to the needs of the parent of a young child, especially mothers. In their desire to become ‘ideal mothers’ women cut themselves from society and the ability to function amongst adults in the workplace. They become depressed, isolated and neurotic, which in turn plays against the image of what they are trying to achieve.

Friedan suggests that the solution for a society who doesn’t want to deal with women’s dissatisfaction is ‘the disappearance of the heroine altogether’ (the mythical figure from the past), which provides the answer to one of today’s dilemma also. Many women are talked into compromising their goals in the name of raising families and adjusting to the community. When a woman is seen only in terms of her sexual role, says Friedan, the barriers to the realization of her full potential—career, education and political interests—are no longer a problem. What remains is ‘the problem that has no name’ a vague wish for something more to which magazines reply by suggesting the adoption of a different outfit.

The central question remains: why is our society not capable of providing full time parents with a sense of their worth as they educate and form the individuals of tomorrow? Could it be that our capitalistic culture acknowledges and only rewards those who produce in a materialistic sense?

This is something we must strive to change. Unless we understand that caring for one another and contributing to each other’s wellbeing and education is the only guarantee for a prosperous future, we will suffer losses and produce less-than-whole members of society.

The topics around motherhood in industrialized societies, the fragmentation phenomenon and the consequences it carries, the isolation aspect—endemic of an industrialized culture—and the issue of re-entering the work force once the kids leave home are many and I will be addressing them in the blogs to come.

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