Careers, Choices, Costs, and Biases

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America's massive news gathering apparatus and round-the-clock coverage should have us surfeited with all the news that's important. Yet two liberal-leaning authors have just tackled a subject that has consistently been off-limits to public debate.
Sylvia Hewlett, in her much publicized book "Creating a Life," breathlessly reveals what she calls a "well-kept secret," namely, that "at mid-life, between a third and half of all high-achieving women in America do not have children," and most of them did not choose to be childless. Bernard Goldberg, in his best-selling book "Bias," tells us that "the most important story you never saw on TV" is "the terrible things that are happening to America's children" because "mothers have opted for work outside of the house over taking care of their children at home."

These social commentaries are two sides of the same coin. The feminist movement, which flowered in the 1970s, persuaded young women to opt for a career in "a man's world," and whether they ended up with or without a child, they don't relish suggestions that they were mistaken in their priorities.

Hewlett's book is a compilation of depressing interviews with women who broke the business barriers and achieved enormous career success, now earning six-figure incomes, but are not happy. They confide in Hewlett how they yearn for a baby, enduring expensive and humiliating medical procedures trying to get pregnant, or traveling to the ends of the earth to adopt.

Goldberg's book, which is an expose of the biases of the media elite, describes how female media executives who do have children drop them off every morning in daycare or leave them with a nanny, and then are fiercely hostile to any criticism of the plight of the children. The feminists have made it taboo for the media to report or debate the social costs of the fact that millions of American children have been left to fend for themselves, "with dire consequences."

Goldberg says that these feminists have so completely intimidated media elites that all the TV anchormen routinely dismiss any negative news about daycare with their favorite epithet, "controversial," and even tough Sam Donaldson "turns into a sniveling wimp when it comes to challenging feminists." Feminists react to any discussion about the troubles of latchkey kids or about daycare's diseases and behavior problems as though it were a personal attack on the mothers as well as on the feminist movement.

A New York Times front-page article labeled Hewlett's book "the publishing world's mystery of the year" because it's been a total flop in the marketplace after receiving unprecedented free publicity. Why is anybody surprised? Even Oprah, 60 Minutes, the covers of Time and New York magazines, and the morning and evening television shows can't make women buy a book that rubs salt in the wound of the central feminist mistake.

While Goldberg worries about the plight of home-alone children, Hewlett is busy portraying career-minded women as victims. She thinks that when 49 percent of $100,000-a-year women executives, but only 19 percent of men executives, are childless, that proves hard-hearted employers and government have discriminated against women during their childbearing years.

Hewlett thinks she has made a sensational discovery that women after age 40 are less fertile than they were in their twenties. Our oppressive male-dominated American society has forced women into a "cruel trade-off": if they focus on their careers in their youth, it's extremely difficult to get pregnant after age 40.

Hewlett's solution for the problems of the successful career women is preferential treatment (not equality!) by both employers and government. She wants employers to give every working parent a "time bank" of six months of paid leave to be taken at the employee's option until each child reaches age 18, plus a Mommy Track of reduced working hours without diminishing pay and promotions.

Hewlett thinks European countries are much better for women, especially Sweden, where mothers can limit their workday to six hours until each child is eight years old. She doesn't tell us that few Swedish women earn $100,000 a year.

Like a typical feminist, Hewlett is full of plans for more government spending and regulation. She wants even small companies to be forced to give women paid medical leave, tax incentives given to companies that give women paid time off, and legislation to prevent employers from requiring longer hours of work.

Goldberg shows how the media elite "have taken sides." Instead of anyone saying on television that kids would do better if a parent were home after school, we get so-called experts calling for more quality daycare and legislation to enable employed mothers to continue working out of the home and spend less time with their children.