PS1 for 3/23/89 # Women's Career Adviser Urges a Mommy Track

The **Harvard Business Review** is not a magazine that usually stirs up emotional controversies. But an article in the January-February issue is downright incendiary because it dares to challenge some sacred feminist dogmas.

Feminist ideology teaches that there isn't any fundamental difference between men and women, and that any laws, rules, or business practices which recognize gender differences are by definition discriminatory and evidences of the newly-created sin called "sexism." Feminists brush off the biological fact of pregnancy by pretending that it is just a temporary disability like a broken leg. That is, indeed, the rationale of the 1978 Pregnancy Discrimination Act.

The **Harvard Business Review** article, written by a credentialed career woman, Felice Schwartz, reasserts reason and common sense. She argues that corporations should offer their management-level female executives "Mommy track" instead of foolishly expecting theem to perform like men with 100 percent commitment to their careers.

This heretical proposal has upset the feminists like the little boy's assertion that the emperor has no clothes. Congresswoman Pat Schroeder denounced it as "tragic" and other feminist spokesmen (excuse me, spokespersons) are keeping their word processors hot by writing angry letters.

Ms. Schwartz comes from a feminist perspective, but she admits what has heretofore been an unmentionable, namely, that "the cost of employing women in management is greater than the cost of employing men" because most women drop out in their thirties to bear and rear babies, and management loses its investment in training them.

Some women are "career primary" and they should have every opportunity to rise to the top, in competition with men. But this decision, she says, "requires that they remain single or at least childless or, if they do have children, that they be satisfied to have others raise them."

Ms. Schwartz argues that the majority of women are "career-and-family women" who could be induced to stay on the job if the company would offer part-time work, flexible hours, job-sharing, and a Mommy track with lower pay and reduced rates of advancement. She says that "most career-and-family women are entirely willing to make that trade-off."

She argues that this would be smart business for corporations because it would enable them to keep talented mothers on the job and eventually realize their investment in them.

Meanwhile, the **American Medical News** has just published an article called "Medicine + Motherhood" featuring authentic accounts of women doctors who successfully and happily had "sequential careers." The article gave example after example of women who raised their children first and then went to medical school, or had their babies immediately after graduation of residency training, dropped out for 10 to 20 years, and then started a medical career.

No, they didn't earn as much money as some full-time career-primary doctors. But most sequential physicians earn more than $50,000 and some more than $70,000.

The article described the lifetime satisfaction enjoyed by these sequential women. They made comments such as, "I have had the best of both worlds of parenthood and a medical career… The time I spent with my wonderful daughters is worth every minute of the 10-year delay… I would advise my daughters to have children early and pursue a professional career later."

Now that even the **New York Times** and the **Washington Post** have conceded that we are in the "post-feminist" era, it's time to she some of feminism's silliness and bias against motherhood and recognize that, despite all the media propaganda and peer pressure on young women to become career-primary just like men, that's not what the majority of women want, especially if they are past 30.

Whether women want to be career-primary and childless, or mothers and then career women sequentially, or part-time mother/part-time careerist, is a personal choice. It's a choice that should be allowed by our laws and business practices, not be restricted by laws that require a mindless gender-neutrality.

Unfortunately, the federal Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, and the proposals for federally-mandated parental leave on-site daycare for employed mothers, are incentives to push new mothers back into the workforce a few weeks after delivering a baby, where they rejoin the fast-track of competition against career-primary men and women. Mothers deserve other options, and a frank debate about the Mommy track could start marking them available.