



# Get to Work: A Manifesto for Women of the World

*Linda R. Hirshman*

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When Linda R. Hirshman published an article called “Homeward Bound” in last December’s *American Prospect*, she fully intended to reignite the dying embers of feminism’s fire. But the ensuing maelstrom of criticism and applause from national op-ed columnists like David Brooks in *The New York Times* to mothers—stay-at-home and working mothers alike—surprised even her. Suddenly, the retired professor of philosophy and women’s studies is at the center of an increasingly hot debate on sexual politics. With *Get to Work*, Hirshman expands her now-infamous call for all women to realize the ideal of economic independence and self-determination.

Examining the trend of affluent, educated women abandoning their careers in order to raise children, Hirshman has concluded that the real glass ceiling that’s barring women from success in the workplace is in their own homes. Why, forty years after *The Feminine Mystique*, do men and women assign the low-level and generally unrewarding jobs of housekeeping and child rearing to women? The time is ripe for a new feminist revolution based on values and quality of life, not some false promise of “choice.” *Get to Work* will lead the national discussion as Hirshman lays out a strategic plan to help women rediscover that their place is not necessarily in the kitchen.

## Get to Work: A Manifesto for Women of the World Details

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## From Reader Review Get to Work: A Manifesto for Women of the World for online ebook

### Elaine says

Linda Hirshman is a heroine of our time, and you know it because liberals and conservatives both don't want to have anything to do with what she's asking them to consider - that we are all wrong, together, about how we view women in our culture. We've spent too many years patting ourselves on the back for winning the right to vote and have a few women in board rooms, as CEOs, and even representing us in government positions. But when we look at the vast numbers of men still outnumbering women in every position of power and prestige in our country, we have to take a step back, ask why, and re-evaluate what we truly believe and value.

I can't wait to read more books like these from minority perspectives, because when "research" focuses on so few individuals (predominantly from highly-educated, upper-class, wealthy family backgrounds), it really is just a book about trends and observations, and less of a journalistic or research-based approach. However, the trends and observations Hirshman makes here are valid, and if you just want to call her names because you disagree, guess what? You're proving her points, because you're refusing to add anything of value to the conversation. Grow up, and get to work.

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### C Solis-Sublette says

This is an important book because this argument is not entertained enough in today's society. As women, it is considered very poor form to question a career woman's decision to give up that career for child-raising. Yes, salary is forgone. But so is career furtherance, retirement savings; independence is exchanged for dependence, in so many ways. And returning to the workforce isn't always so easy. The fact that it is, more and more, middle and upper class college educated women who leave careers for mothering is more troubling as these are the women most needed in male-dominated professions. The fact that SAHMism is a badge of masculinity for the men that support these women (and children) and a status symbol for some women who do not have to work speaks volumes about how our culture views womens' roles and mens'. Is it any surprise, then, that employer coverage of contraception continues to remain a sticky point for many conservatives when lack of contraception could very well lead to less women in the profession and the continuation of a society where men hold the pursestrings?

For me, this book was most influential. It convinced me to secure my career and to take it seriously, to not just sign away on slipshoddy pension funds and weak pay packages. It reminded me of the value of my college education and gave me the courage to stay in the profession and trust my children to the care of my mom and quality day care providers so that I could continue to support them and myself, financially. Staying in the workforce, after reviewing my retirement statement, was the best decision I made for the whole of my family.

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### Rachel says

This is the rudest little book I've read in a while and I love it. I had heard of the "anti stay at home mom

book" and finally found it- it's about more than stay at home moms but it certainly does not shy away from examining them as one of feminism's failures, which is a perspective I've never heard in sincerity, only in parody.

Get to Work puts forth a 5 step plan for straight women to exist as straight women and pursue positions of power. She also completely denigrates the value of housework for the sake of housework, argues passionately against choice feminism being used as a shield against analytical thought, and explains why the dream of more flexible workplaces/leaves won't do the trick.

Hirshman writes in the middle of the "opt out" opinion wars over highly educated elite women. This book is written from a specific socioeconomic standpoint. The fact that it is straight and white when it comes to talking about stay at home moms is kind of the point- she never pretends that the choice to stay at home is anything other than a privileged choice to begin with, and she draws her material from women who fall on two ends of a spectrum. There are women who had the means to get into college (graduating with debt but still pursuing middle class dreams) and female Ivy Leaguers who wanted to be investment bankers. I can't pretend like that doesn't date or limit the book, but I urge you to go look up some of the current (2017) articles circulating around about working mothers, straight married life, childcare, etc. The problems have NOT changed and feminism has so far NOT changed our world in better directions here.

A quote that is representative of Get To Work's animating force is: "The idea that men are entitled to be ideal workers in the market economy and that women are responsible for housekeeping and child rearing survived forty years of feminism without a scratch."

Stay at home moms are in absolutely hideous positions in relation to their working husbands, end of story.

Bloggers and the New York Times play a lot of parts in this book. That sounds and can be obnoxious, but I would refer you again to the "unsolvable" second shift articles.

Her gay history is wrong but whatever. To every straight person out there- If you can't find your own gay historians, store bought is NOT fine.

It's hard to review this book. I would love to talk about it, but it's hard to lay out all of your thoughts about such a visceral, emotional topic (but one that still absolutely demands a good faith intellectual effort). There's really not a lot of nuance about who does the majority of the housework in any straight marriages.

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### **Gail says**

In "Get to Work," Linda Hirshman argues - in a tone that fluctuates between starkly sensible and harshly snarky - that stay-at-home motherhood "is not good for women and it's not good for the society." She goes further than Jessica Valenti (whose arguments I now realize largely recap Hirshman's) in declaring that (1) "[c]hild care and housekeeping have satisfying moments but are not occupations likely to produce a flourishing life," and (2) "[h]ighly educated women's abandonment of the workplace is . . . a sex-specific brain drain from the future rulers of our society." While it is tempting to rage against Hirshman and her "plan to break through the glass ceiling at home," both critiques merit reasoned discussion.

In order to address Hirshman's aggressive statement that "[b]y any measure, a life of housework and child care does not meet . . . standards for a good human life" and the implication that women who choose to stay-

at-home with their children use not “their wits and their brains, [but rather] their . . . reproductive organs” - we have to examine Hirshman’s gender-neutral understanding of what it means to do important work and what it means to parent. Taking a decidedly pro-capitalist (as in, the market’s valuation reigns supreme), work-til’-you-drop stance for all, she declares that people who say “[they’ve n]ever met someone dying who wished they’d had more time at work” are foolish. Hirshman venerated big impact phenoms (e.g., Mozart, Bill Clinton, and anyone working in cancer research) while denigrating direct service providers (like music teachers, local politicians, or clinical physicians). In other words, she fixates on money, power, and prodigy to the exclusion of other indicators of “a good human life.”

Hirshman also criticizes “[t]he new, hyperdomesticated family,” writing that those who work “sixty to seventy-five hour weeks” can parent just as well as those who don’t. After all, according to her, “[a]lthough child rearing, unlike housework, is important and can be difficult, it does not take well-developed political skills to rule over creatures smaller than you are, weaker than you are, and completely dependent upon you for survival and thriving.” To “rule over”? I guess not. To guide and educate? You betcha; stay-at-home mothering has required much sophisticated politicking as well as other newly acquired intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. Suffice it to say, Hirshman and I have different standards regarding both personal fulfillment and effective parenting.

As for the specifics of her arguments, in my response to Valenti’s book (<http://readymommy.wordpress.com/2013/...>) I largely addressed Hirshman’s first point - that “a life of housework and child care does not meet . . . standards for a good human life” - with the response that it might not always, but it can. While some women may not be well-suited for childcare, others are “using [their] talents and capacities to the fullest and reaping the rewards of doing so” by staying at home with their children, thanks to the many different types of intelligence (Mozart’s great, but we need teachers too) and particularly if they ultimately return to the workforce (full-time childcare builds skills that reap reward in professional sectors).

Moreover, what it means to be a stay-at-home parent is very different for some than others. On the home front, as Hirshman writes, “Men are not natural villains, but they will not make a fair deal . . . unless women stand up and ask for one.” More of us need to do that (see <http://joiedeviv.wordpress.com/2011/0...> for my thoughts on the topic). Even when only dealing with their fair share of housework and childcare, Hirshman is right to question whether too many stay-at-home mothers live a life of drudgery and solitude. I largely refuse to “perform[ housework] in isolation,” preferring to invite other parents over on laundry days so that I can fold while we chat or to involve my kids in laundry “games” that are both educational and fun (e.g., sock matching as an exercise in pattern recognition and spatial reasoning). I connect with the larger community in a multitude of ways (in person and in writing) that use my “capacities for speech and reason” and constitute “engaging in political life with other adults[,] having social . . . independence[, and] giving . . . to the society” (also described in my response to Valenti). I demand flexibility from my husband, budget, kids, and community to pursue my own interests so that I remain a fulfilled woman as well as a wife and mother. Many stay-at-home parents - myself included - can do more to get out of the house, help others, enlist assistance in return, and generally engage more broadly so as to lead flourishing lives.

We can help them do so. Hirshman is correct that “women have squeezed as much out of their days as they can without more help.” Let’s get them more help. Hirshman rejects public child care, paid housework, and other suggestions meant to enable women to work happily outside the marketplace as solutions that “involve wishful thinking about changing a deeply conservative culture and politics.” Instead, her “strategic plan to get to work” includes the following: “Don’t study art. Use your education to prepare for a lifetime of work. Never quit a job until you have another one. Take work seriously. Never know when you’re out of milk. Bargain relentlessly for a just household. Consider a reproductive strike. Get the government you deserve.

Stop electing governments that punish women's work" (i.e., abolish "joint marital [tax] filing"). In other words, work in a highly paid profession and have fewer kids. Once again, I hear a feminist asking women to shoehorn their own values and desires into the glass slipper offered up by society. At the risk of drawing fire for misremembering my history, perhaps she is the Booker T. Washington - urging the oppressed to work and rise within the system - while the "opt-outers" are W.E.B. Du Bois saying we won't take the seventy-five hour weeks (that keep us from interacting with our children as much as we'd like) or the woefully insufficient part-time options.

Hirshman makes one argument regarding stay-at-home parents' long-term happiness that gives me pause. It is one from economic independence: "your 'choosing' to shoulder the household at the expense of your market employment means you will be disempowered at divorce." I personally put my faith in my husband and the law (a.k.a., both varieties of spousal support). I refuse to live my life preparing for a doomsday scenario where both abandon me. I'm also comforted by my desire to return to the workforce no later than when my youngest begins kindergarten. Each stay-at-home parent ought to mull over her/his own degree of economic dependence and plan accordingly, and policymakers should monitor the development of the law to ensure that a non-working parent's contributions over the course of a marriage are fully valued and remunerated upon divorce.

Finally, there's the contention that strikes the deepest chord with me: even if an individual stay-at-home mother lives a fulfilling life, she is morally irresponsible. According to Hirshman, only working women "giv[e] more to the society than they take." Those "who drop out of the public world demonstrate a singular indifference to the larger society . . . [W]hen the[y] . . . do some volunteer work, it [i]s almost always at their children's schools or at churches . . . [T]he social good is concentrated only in a narrow, familial world." I happen to believe that we should get more stay-at-home moms involved in volunteering and provide institutional support for the community strengthening they already do. Let's also work on social and economic integration so that volunteering close to home doesn't mean only serving those who look, act, and live like ourselves. But how anyone can discount the power and importance of grassroots efforts after Obama's election is beyond me.

As for the second prong of the moral responsibility argument, Hirshman writes: "The abandonment of the public world by women at the top means the ruling class is overwhelmingly male. . . . The stay-at-home behavior also . . . tarnishes every female with the knowledge that she is almost certainly not going to be a ruler." In other words, it's less the brain-drain that's the problem and more the sex-specificity of it. If I believe that stay-at-home parenthood is a personally and societally beneficial institution that fits some personalities and skill-sets better than others and can be improved with institutional and communal support, how do we get more men to do it? Get more SAHM's to serve as examples of market "rulers"? After mulling it over briefly, I find myself turning to one of those ideas that "involve[s] wishful thinking about changing a deeply conservative culture and politics." Hirshman says that women like myself who plan to parent full-time as a sabbatical of sorts and think they can then return to professional life and achieve great things are kidding themselves; they'll never go back, and those who do will have lost too much ground to get the "ruler" positions. Here we have a bit of a cart and horse problem. If we alter the marketplace so that opt-outers returning to work can ultimately assume positions of power, maybe more of them will do so. If we count days or years at home as job development (something like a stint at the local DA's office would be for a big firm lawyer or a year writing in the countryside would be for an English professor) and give both mothers and fathers who have worked "in-house" for a few years a fighting chance, practically and culturally, maybe more men will choose it. Once again, Hirshman has a fair point - though not one that should be wielded at women like a cattle prod, herding us back to the market.

In "Get to Work," Hirshman is right to ask probing questions about the institution of stay-at-home

motherhood, and I am grateful for the opportunity to think deeply about my chosen occupation. What I don't appreciate is (1) her wholesale rejection of the institution and the women who choose it, rather than a willingness to look at reform, and (2) the current of judgmental nastiness (like calling Naomi Wolf a "so-called feminist") that underlies much of her book. We do need to "get to work"; we need to get to work on the twin necessities of cultural and institutional change that will address Hirshman's valid concerns - and to pay no heed to the rest of what she says.

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### **Rylie says**

I checked this out on a spur of the moment at my library, looking for some feminist literature that I haven't already read yet. I liked the overall feel of the concept of the book, but I really made a mistake by judging this one by its cover. Linda Hirshman, fortunately, gets right to the point which allowed me to put the book down after the first few chapters because I was, unfortunately, disgusted. I guess it was my mistake for not reading the inside coverlet. This book does almost nothing but slam women and even men who choose a Stay-At-Home-Parent lifestyle. Hirshman's opinion on feminism in regards to women's potential can be summarized in one sentence from her book: "The most disheartening part about women's deciding to stay at home is that they say doing so is their choice."—This is as if to say that women don't really mean to choose motherhood or the Stay-At-Home-Parent lifestyle. Hirshman goes on to explain how it would be "beneficial" to women to have their choices narrowed down so that motherhood is less of an option. There is even this sickening tone of shame drenched all over the passages: "What do you need to live a good life in the real world? Among other things, a real job—and changing diapers isn't one." Sentences such as this are littered like garbage all over the book making it obvious that, according to Hirshman, being a mother is not a respectable thing for a woman to be and she should not choose it.

I was very frustrated reading this book. Her ideas are very wild. As a feminist and a woman who will be choosing motherhood one day, I found it offensive to women and I think this book gives the wrong message to young feminists who are beginning to experiment with life choices. Books like this insinuate the wrong idea—that women don't have a choice even in feminism, and this is simply not true nor is it any way to open the minds of women. After reading this book, I can see how a young girl, new to feminism, would get a sense of shame toward herself because, before opening this book, she had desired a family of her own one day. AS IF US GIRLS NEEDED ANY MORE SHAME IN OUR LIVES!! I gladly give this book 1 star and I am glad I haven't seen it on many Top Ten lists of feminist literature.

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### **Heather says**

Hirshman hypothesises about the pitfalls of "Choice Feminism" or the "Opt-Out Revolution" in which women go to school, are trained to do great things and end up giving up their careers for the life of housework while their husbands continue to work. At first, it's hard to agree with her, because how can you argue with the value of a family, but then it got me thinking: Why is it assumed to be the woman's job to drop out to care for the children? That doesn't seem fair at all! No fair!!

Backed up with facts, even when it's maddening, Hirshman sticks to her guns and lets you know what she thinks about it. Definitely a great read to get thinking on the subject. I wouldn't say I agree 100% with her, but it's a great entryway into feminist literature.

It's also really well written. I even read the bibliography!!

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### **Allison says**

This short manifesto made me re-evaluate how I think. One of the points from the "strategic plan to get to work" that the book laid out seemed meant for me -  
"Never know when you are out of milk."

I feel that my husband I have a pretty 50/50 relationship when it comes to household duties. Still I always feel some how that I am doing more around the house. This book helped me realize perhaps why I feel that way.

Overall a quick interesting read that I would recommend to anybody.

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### **MM says**

Highly recommend this one (I'm inclined towards manifestos and polemics anyway -- I like the genre and find the agon useful). Hirshman basically critiques what she calls "choice feminism" as illusory choice. That is, the line of reasoning among women that suggests, "whatever I choose is ok -- whether it's staying at home with the kids, trying to become elected President, or enslavement."

She points out that the women's rights movement of the mid-20th Century was great for starting to dismantle the patriarchal institution of work, but that we've done nothing to change the patriarchal institution of family. And that's where the real challenges lie now, she suggests; only when we fundamentally change this patriarchal arrangement and challenge these assumptions within family arrangements (i.e. which sex is the primary money-maker, which is the primary caregiver, etc.) will women become consistent and useful participants in public life. In order to get women into powerful positions, in other words, we need to free them from the patriarchal arrangements in their family lives.

Further, she calls for a moral critique of the so-called choices women are making -- particularly the choice to drop out of a career to be a stay-at-home mom. She suggests that this particular choice is highly mitigated (i.e. there are loads of institutional arrangements that lead women in this direction -- starting with the tax codes and ending with unquestioned assumptions about gender roles). She also asks: 1) are these choices good for the individual women, arguing that no, being a stay-at-home mom is not good for a flourishing life, and 2) are these choices good for society, arguing that no, keeping women out of powerful roles in society delimits us, and does not help anyone. Anyway, it's an interesting and quick read.

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### **Christa says**

This book was an awful example of the concepts that some neoliberal feminists can put forth. She is a complete capitalist/individualist and encourages all women to go into business and tears down culture and family life. She completely ignores the construct of gender and is super into the binary gender system. I

wouldn't recommend this book to anyone.

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### **Ingrid says**

I'll be brief: halfway through the book, I had to send the author fan mail. I felt like she'd said everything that had been in my mind and heart for the last 10 years. I polished it off in one sitting and bought copies for all the working mothers I know.

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### **Christine S says**

3.5

- feminist theory
  - flawed
  - fascinating
  - a tiny bit validating, a tiny bit of a scolding
- 

### **Michele says**

I agree wholeheartedly that if inequitable households are preventing a parent returning to work then that poor division of labour must be addressed.

However, I feel that the author's assertion that the only flourishing life can be found in the high powered workplace to be limited and lacking in imagination. She had no real perspective on how many people's lives operate. Very few of us are likely to be Mozart, Einstein, MLK, Condé etc. (Her list, not mine). The reality is that work serves the purpose of putting food on the table and a roof over our heads. The vast majority of working women and men go to work for that reason and are fortunate indeed if they attain a high level of satisfaction and fulfillment.

Every one of us is unique and what one may find restrictive another may indeed flourish. Anyone can push a vacuum around (physical capacities a given), what is important is what is happening in the mind, the brain, the thoughts and analysis that can happen at times when our bodies, though busy, our brains are free to range. And is the paid workplace free of mind numbing tasks?

As an argumentative text I found it poorly written and at times incoherent. Her solutions were not that.....God forbid that anyone should enjoy having children so much that they have another one.

At one stage she states that Betty Friedan, when writing The Second Stage had.... "lost her edge". The book was "full of useless, grandiose, and wishful rhetoric."

My response to that .....sounds familiar. The same can be said of Get To Work.

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### **Ingrid says**

THE BEST BOOK I HAVE EVER READ! This is the guidebook for my life. Every time I feel discouraged at work, I re-read this book. You will be inspired to be independent, make your own money, have your own

aspirations, be your own person, and soar as high as possible.

Working moms: You are not harming your kids by having a career. You are providing an excellent model for them!

Ladies, put down Redbook and pick up The New York Times. Feed your brains! Go after the corner office. Climb that ladder. The world deserves your intelligence and hard work. You are not going to change the world by sitting at home. Get out there and give it all you've got.

Wives: Have money of your OWN! If your husband dies or walks off, you need your own savings, credit, retirement, etc. Men take care of themselves financially - why shouldn't women?

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### **Amy says**

Infuriating and also insightful, everything a good book should be. It will either make you cheer or want to pull Hirshman's hair out, but very entertaining.

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### **Elyssa says**

Linda Hirshman is VERY direct and this will not sit well for all readers, especially if you don't agree with her premise. I found the book refreshing because I think the feminist movement is in need of radical transformation and the most effective arena to do so is in the world of work.

As a working mother, I felt affirmed by her message that women need to abandon the illusions of "choice feminism" and claim their place in the work world, especially in leadership positions where we can make policy (including policies about work/life balance). This book inspired me to think beyond my middle management position and explore ways that I can have an impact on policy in my agency and in my field.

As with all books about being a mother, I wish she had incorporated more about the need for fathers to step up and contribute equally as parents, so that the question isn't "should mom stay at home with the kids or go to work?", but instead "how can a mother and father best equalize the time spent in careers and the time fulfilling their parenting responsibilities?". I know by posing these questions I am excluding single parents, but wouldn't we have more dialogue about gender roles and supportive policies for ALL parents (single and partnered) if we had more women in leadership positions?

I wish Linda Hirshman could have toned her book down a decibal or two because I fear that her aggressive manner is preventing many people from hearing her core message. I urge anyone who is thinking of reading this book to do so and give her a chance. If anything, she will challenge your thinking.

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