

Balancing a career in science with raising a family

Prof. Ramit Mehr, Bar-Ilan University, Israel

- *My personal story*
- *Career issues for women scientists and anyone trying to balance career and family life (... and suggestions for solutions)*
- *Strategies for success*
- *Resources*

Career issues & solutions (1)

Family-career balance

I have yet to hear a man ask for advice
on how to combine marriage with a career.
- Gloria Steinem -

- Nowadays this is an issue for men too – those who do not want to miss their children's childhood.
- Family is not just children – sometimes we have to take care of parents or other relatives.
- It IS possible to have the cake and eat it too! but it requires:
 - *an enthusiastic partner;*
 - *additional support: day care, mothers' groups, flex-time, extended family...*
take all the support you can get! You deserve it!
 - *A **family-friendly** career path.*
 - *Your willingness to work at it.*

How I survived being a scientist **and** a mom (and for several years, **a single mom**) – 1

The term “working mother” is redundant.

- Jane Sellman -

- Little children love to do “grown-up stuff”. So from the moment they could understand instructions, I taught my children to “**help mommy**” with all the house chores. They loved this game – and grew up knowing that they have chores, and always helping.
- I also taught them to be as **independent** and **responsible** as possible at each age.
- I refused to be a “**superwoman**” like my mom! Cooked food can be bought, hired help can do cleaning and laundry, home does not have to look like a museum – **quality time with the family is more important!**



How I survived being a scientist **and** a mom (and for several years, **a single mom**) – 2

- When I was a single mom – I took **all the help and advice I could get**, from friends, hired help and the school system. I even made a couple of (very short) trips, with friends taking care of my kids.
- I refused to comply with **inconsiderate practices**: e.g. my boss in Princeton wanted to have lab meetings at 7PM, so I said “sorry, I am a single mom and cannot be here after 4PM”, and the time was changed.
- If your boss sees that the work is being done, and fast – and mine could see I was online all evenings – then he/she will not object.
- Even if you are an experimentalist, you can leave reading, writing and data analysis to do at home.
- **Being organized and planning your time is key!**
- I love my work, and it helped me stay sane and optimistic. 😊



Career issues & solutions (2)

Discrimination

- Nowadays – it is not overt, but atmosphere sometimes oppressive.
 - **Speak up!** Use humor rather than aggression – most males have good intentions and just don't realize some remarks are oppressive.



- Let's make the point again in *guy talk*. He didn't hear.

Career issues & solutions (3):

Glass Ceiling

- It certainly still exists; there are plenty of statistics to show current gender discrepancies in hiring, promotion and salaries, even when taking the “chronological gap” into account.
 - *Strategies below.*

**“Whatever women must do
they must do twice as well as men
to be thought half as good.
Luckily, this is not difficult.”**
- Charlotte Whitton -

Career issues & solutions (4)

- **Sexual harassment?**
 - *Educate yourself about the signs; and if it happens -*
 - **Seek help as soon as possible!**

**Nobody can make you feel inferior
Without your permission.
- Eleanor Roosevelt -**

Strategies for success (1)

- Be **AWARE** – of what it takes to succeed at the stage you're at and progress to the next one: not just the obvious **tasks** (publish, get funded, etc) but also the **politics** of the organization, the people involved, etc.
- **Never hesitate to ask for advice!**
- **Take all the mentoring you can get – and give back!!!**
- **Educate yourself as much as possible.**

A man's got to do what a man's got to do.

A woman must do what he can't.

- Rhonda Hansome -



Strategies for success (2)

- Be **INVOLVED** –
 - in group, department, organizational and professional society activities;
 - go to meetings;
 - seek and accept leadership positions whenever possible.
- **Visibility + more info = more opportunities!**
- **Role modeling for younger women in the pipeline.**
- **Educate colleagues re women's abilities by way of personal example.**
- **Warning: do not take TOO MANY service jobs!**



Strategies for success (3)

- Be **FOCUSED** – on your research and career goals.
 - Do not spread yourself too thin.
 - Be clear about your goals.
 - Select your tasks and roles accordingly.
- **Take good care of yourself** – **mind, body, spirit.**
 - Unless you are well, you cannot take care of others (students, staff, family...)
- **Enjoy life!**



Resources

- Website I compiled, with resources for women in science:
<http://repertoire.os.biu.ac.il/WOMEN/women-06.html>
- Robert Smith's great career resource list:
<https://netfiles.uiuc.edu/rsmith43/jobs/Handout.doc> and the slides of his talk on "How to get a tenure-track job" (for math biologists)
<https://netfiles.uiuc.edu/rsmith43/jobs/TenureTrackWorkshop.pdf>
- Network / forum within your society / organization (*if there isn't one, start one! I suggested the SMB women's luncheons...*)
- Take all the mentoring you can get. (*In 1999, I suggested the SMB mentoring program, which is a success,*)
- NIH grants for scientists-caretakers (to hire technical help)
- *Science Next Wave*, ScienceCareers.Org
- There are other resources for young scientists – seek them out.

