



**Women** confront specific challenges working in the sciences. Often-heated discussion of women's work/home balance is in vogue in US newspaper and magazine editorial and feature pages. Those pieces tend to focus on whether women can have both family and career, sometimes going so far as to draw lines in the sand about which choice "should" be made. However, they do not typically contend with issues that are peculiar to the sciences and related fields. Nor has the topic penetrated the cafeteria-table conversations of all physicists.

Making it in physics research, by cultural fiat, requires long hours, well beyond any formal job definition. Many physicists have no problem with this demand—they love their work and keep it upfront in their minds at all times. Some feel that having a research career is a life commitment rather than a work commitment. There is no right or wrong in these feelings. However, there is a serious problem when one physicist's perception of another's professional ability depends on how they eat-sleep-breathe physics.

The problem is most acute for women, but men are also very much at risk of being sidelined in their careers if they don't fit the norm. Particularly challenging for female physicists is that the typical age for bearing children coincides with attending graduate school, holding the first non-permanent postdoctoral position, and meeting the high expectations of a tenure-track position (trying for a permanent position). Some other fields have shorter durations for these career phases, allowing for permanent positions prior to childbirth. Or they accept a woman taking a few years out of the workforce to care for young children. In the physics community, there is much room for improvement.

There is no easy solution. However, we won't find a fix without the issue being part of our professional discussion. Without discussion, we will make choices about our own careers that inadvertently preclude others from participating in physics. What does it mean to your colleagues if you proudly work at least 60-hour weeks? What signals does it send to them about their "dedication" or "commitment" to the field and, subconsciously, how you might judge them for their lives?

This issue of *symmetry* includes an important story, "Breaking for Families," which we add to the discussion. Unless we talk more about the topic, we are preventing talented people from contributing to an endeavor we all care deeply about.

David Harris, *Editor-in-Chief*

**Symmetry**

PO Box 500  
MS 206  
Batavia Illinois 60510  
USA

630 840 3351 telephone  
630 840 8780 fax  
www.symmetrymagazine.org  
mail@symmetrymagazine.org

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