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Contact: Jewish Women Watching
jww@jewishwomenwatching.com

Delivering a Shavuot Message that isn't about Delivering Jewish Babies

On Sunday, June 8, 2008, the eve of the festival of Shavuot, Jews from all over New York will make a pilgrimage to the Jewish Community Center in Manhattan to commemorate the giving of Torah at Mount Sinai. As they meditate on the theme of deliverance, Jewish Women Watching (JWW), the anonymous, rabble-rousing, feminist collective, will ask them to confront the Jewish community's misplaced priorities and relentless pressure to marry and deliver Jewish babies. Amidst wedges of cheesecake, JWW members, in full owl regalia, will distribute a profile for an online dating service - a parody that critiques the Jewish community's obsession with heteronormative partnership and procreation. You can catch them at 11 pm at the Jewish Community Center in Manhattan, located at 334 Amsterdam Ave. at 76th St.

The parody to be distributed exposes how the Jewish community's overemphasis on marriage and reproduction limits the possibilities for Jewish identity and engagement for both men and women. Instead of the typical dating site's "About Me" section, all that is available on the parody is "Why I Will Make a Good Wife." Willing to drop any unique attributes or accomplishments for the sake of being acquired by a husband, the subscriber reports on "worthless degrees obtained when the only one that matters is an MRS." She promises that she is willing to take a pay cut to ensure she is not the breadwinner, only the bread-baker, of the household.

The profile is followed by a call to consciousness and action:

The Jewish community's priorities of marriage and parenthood aren't a match for everyone

This Shavuot, as we celebrate the deliverance of Jewish law, deliver a message that isn't about delivering Jewish babies.

*Broaden the standards that are used to evaluate a Jewish life.
Recognize Jewish women as powerful beyond their reproductive abilities.
Celebrate the many types of families in the Jewish community . . .*

. . . These are the keys to Jewish continuity.

Yentl Yeshiva Boy, a JWW member commented, "My Jewish women friends feel desperate to find a *shidduch* and have it printed in Sunday Styles. All these voices around them – parents, friends, co-workers, religious leaders - are telling them they are worth nothing unless they are wives and mothers. Aren't there other ways of contributing?" The Jewish world today is filled with a multiplicity of diverse lifestyles, yet Jews feel pressured to embrace an old-world mentality dependant on finding a traditional match. Jewish women and men are saddled with tragic stories of their peers who are seen as failures because they haven't met the right match.

Emma Goldman added, “How is it that when I finished my dissertation and became the leader of a major Jewish organization, all people wanted to know was when there would be a ring on my finger?” Miriam the Prophet chimed in, “And how is it that when I married a woman, there was no room for celebrating on *OnlySimchas.com*?” It seems as though only some simchas take center stage.

Though a holiday filled with dairy delights, many Shavuot gatherings in and around New York City have become “meat-markets” for young Jews. As we mark the Harvest this Shavuot, JWW will remind the public that the value of a Jewish woman extends beyond the fruits of her ovaries. JWW calls for a deliverance from the communal fixation on coupling for continuity.

Please contact us if you know of any nice Jewish boys for them.

Jewish Women Watching is an anonymous activist collective that aims to rouse the public to challenge and change the sexist and other discriminatory practices in the American Jewish community. Since 1999, JWW has been criticizing the Jewish community's narrow-minded priorities through online, print, and street actions. For more information, visit JWW's web site at www.jewishwomenwatching.com. To arrange an interview, write to jww@jewishwomenwatching.com.

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