

This Free E-Book is brought to you by Natural-Aging.com.

100% Effective Natural Hormone Treatment
Menopause, Andropause And Other Hormone Imbalances
Impair Healthy Healing In People Over The Age Of 30!

You Can Have It All (Just Not At The Same Time)

By Andrea Hayhurst

You Can Have It All (Just Not At The Same Time) by Andrea Hayhurst

I was glancing at a local paper recently when an ad for a nearby health club caught my attention. There was a picture of an attractive, well-dressed woman who appeared to be pregnant. The ad started off by giving her first name and followed with a list of the essential elements of her life, including the fact that she has been married for 12 years, has 2 kids (with another on the way) and owns her own business. The message of the ad was that not only does she take care of her family, but she also makes time for herself by dropping her kids off at the health club's kiddie room so she can Aqua-cise on a regular basis and treats herself to a massage at the club's spa twice a month.

There was a time, not so long ago, that seeing that health club ad would have evoked in me a mixture of envy, insecurity and guilt. Those advertisements and articles used to make me feel, as I'm sure they do many women, that there was something wrong with me. As a professional woman with a law degree, a good job, stable marriage and a beautiful daughter, why did I feel miserable most of the time? Why did other women seem to juggle it all so effortlessly while I felt that the minute I stepped out of bed every morning I was in a race to beat the clock, a race which wouldn't end until close to 18 hours later?

It wasn't until I had a second child and slowed down for a while after her birth that I was able to recognize and come to terms with what I had been feeling for so long. I was also able to take a look around and what I saw was that the majority of women in this country seem to be feeling the same things I had. I heard and saw the same disillusionment from ordinary women such as myself and it didn't seem to matter whether they had professional degrees or not. The hair colorist seemed to be just as disillusioned as the medical doctor. I also began to notice more articles about women choosing to leave the workplace to raise their children. I even read recent popular works of fiction in which the use of nannies and the struggle by one or more female characters to "have it all" was not portrayed as something to be desired.

It seems that a new word has even been coined to describe this phenomenon—it's called "sequencing". To my understanding, it's supposed to convey the notion that at certain points in their lifetime women need, or want, to concentrate on different aspects of their lives and that once children enter the picture women should be able to step away from the workplace for however long they deem necessary in order to concentrate on their children and families. I knew that there must really be some mighty strong winds of change in the air when I heard a medical student state on a nationally syndicated program

You Can Have It All (Just Not At The Same Time)

that once she was married her family and children would come first and that she did not intend on being a working mother. She went on to say that she saw her own mother do it and was placed in day care herself from the time she was very young and that she did not want to raise her own children in that way. She said that she felt so strongly about it that if she were to get married while she was still in medical school that she would drop out since it would be useless to pursue a medical degree if she was that close to starting a family.

I also read the now often cited piece by Lisa Belkin in the New York Times about all those professional women "opting out" of their careers to be stay at home moms. But I also saw many non-professional women doing the same thing. I think the article in the Times was only touching the tip of the iceberg. Yes, well-educated, professional women are giving up their careers to raise families, but so are women without advanced degrees. I think that this trend toward putting aside work to concentrate on family is about women in general in this country, not just about one subcategory of women.

According to the 2000 census, the number of children being cared for by stay at home moms has increased nearly 13 percent in less than a decade. Two-thirds of mothers aged 25 to 44 now work less than 40 hours a week. Fifty-five percent of women with infants were in the labor force in June 2000 (the most recent data), compared with 59 percent just two years earlier. That was the first drop in that number in a full quarter century. And as for the previously mentioned professional women, between a quarter and a third are out of the work force.

My informal education about the topic seemed to indicate to me that contrary to what women in their 30's had all been raised to expect, it was nearly impossible to have a career, a contented marriage, children and time for yourself all at the same time. Not in a 24 hour day anyway. I still don't know how those supposed "superwomen" that I mentioned in the beginning of the article do it, but I am certain that they are in a very small majority. And I definitely know that I no longer feel either envious, insecure or guilty. As a matter of fact, the first word that comes to mind when I see those ads and articles nowadays is pity. No matter how easy those women make it look, no one can keep all those balls in the air for very long before getting very, very tired. Not even Superwoman.

It also seems that public opinion supports the novel idea of people actually raising their own children. A Gallup survey last year found that only 13 percent of the respondents thought that the ideal family situation was for both parents to work full time outside the home. Forty-one percent believed the ideal situation was for one parent to work full time while the other worked either part time or at home. And another forty-one percent felt that one parent should stay at home solely to raise the children while the other parent worked to support the family. Surprisingly, the Department of Labor ranks full-time homemakers as the largest single job category in the country. And the numbers are probably even larger than we know, since mothers who do any paid work at all out of their home, even if just for a few hours a week, aren't even considered full-time homemakers by the government, even if that's how they categorize themselves.

Before going any further, let me say that I wholeheartedly believe in all the feminist principles and ideals that women fought so long and hard to achieve. I think that women absolutely should be free to pursue whatever path they choose and be able to do so without being pigeonholed by their gender. However, I also think that women for a long time felt that they had to be exactly like men to be considered equals with them. After the feminist movement, women entered the corporate world and began to compete on a man's playing field. For decades now, women have been attempting to compete, achieve and succeed in a man's world. But it seems that we women have forgotten that we are very different from men in some very real and important ways. But that in no way makes us less

You Can Have It All (Just Not At The Same Time)

equal. While men and women are very different, those differences, on the whole, are complementary. I think that for too long now women have been trying to push their femininity to the background in order to compete in a man's world. Isn't it time we simply acknowledge the very real differences between the sexes and be proud of them? Women shouldn't have to be carbon copies of men in order to gain equality. Different doesn't mean better or worse—it just means different.

Consider a rather thought provoking theory propounded by the authors Coney & Mackey in their 1998 article "Cultural Evolution & Gender Roles: Advantage...Patriarchy." In it, they state that evolution is not in favor of females overtaking the work force. They note in their study that across the world the female is expected to be the primary caretaker. This notion arose out of the fact that in the past "if a job or task interfered with mothering, then that task was given to men." This would explain why women are genetically programmed to be caretakers. Coney & Mackey go on to establish that the expansion of opportunities, both in education and other areas, for women is correlated with a reduction in fertility in that cultural group. Consequently, they conclude that groups which expect and emphasize women to take on the mother role will eventually replace other societies. That's a pretty powerful theory, but their hypothesis is based on solid research and data.

I also know that there are plenty of examples out there of men raising children and same sex partners adopting children and having families of their own and I have no doubt that they do an excellent job of

caring for those children. I simply think that as a society maybe it is finally time for us to acknowledge that women on the whole do tend to have an inherent caretaker instinct that does not exist, at least not in the same way, in men. I mean, from the beginning of time women and men have just been put together differently, both in a physical and mental/emotional sense. Even in our earliest days, men were the hunters and gatherers and women were the ones who did the nurturing. I don't think it was an accident that society, on the whole, tended to organize itself around the family as the central unit with the male partner providing for the family in an economic sense and the female partner tending to care for the home and family in the domestic sense.

Again, I am not trying to perpetuate stereotypes, but simply trying to acknowledge the very real reason that women today feel torn between their families and work lives in a way that very few men do. Instead of demanding equality on our own terms it seems to me that women have demanded equality on men's terms.. No wonder women now feel such conflict in their lives. They are attempting on one hand to do everything a man has traditionally done and at the same time they cannot give up the real sense of obligation they often feel to be the nurturer and caretaker of their home and family. So they end up taking on both roles and soon realize that there is not enough time in the day to do both. And when you add children to that mix, the conflict becomes even more apparent.

Men, on the other hand, don't face the same sort of conflict in their lives since they have never, as a group, attempted to take on two roles at the same time. Sure, there was a time when men were encouraged to "get in touch with their feminine side" and there is no doubt that as a result of the feminist movement men are much more hands on around the house and with the kids than they once were, but men have never felt the need to take on the caretaker role in order to prove themselves entitled to anything.

With women, however, it's a different story. We go into the office and work hard at showing the corporate world qualities that are traditionally considered masculine in nature such as competitiveness and winning at all costs and then have to do a 180 degree turn at the end of the workday when we go home to our families who are expecting to see a wife and mother walk through the door and fix a tasty, nutritious and well-balanced dinner.

You Can Have It All (Just Not At The Same Time)

Let's face it, very few men have qualms about using slice and bake cookie dough for their child's annual school bake sale or being too overscheduled to make every dance recital, school play or PTA meeting. When a woman frets about these things her husband will tell her not to worry, no one could possibly expect a woman with a full time job to worry about baking home made cookies or attending every school function that's scheduled smack in the middle of the day. What the men don't get is that WOMEN do expect it. As a matter of fact, working women expect it of themselves more than anyone else. We feel guilty because we see those domestic functions as being our area of expertise and god help any husband who innocently suggests that he step in to help out with one of these tasks. Women may complain that they need more help or support from their husbands, but they also don't want any of the traditional job responsibilities that go with the "mommy" title being appropriated by them either. I made the decision to be a stay at home mom after my second daughter was born. Once I committed to the decision I felt like the weight of the world had suddenly been lifted from my shoulders. For a short while, I felt like I was betraying the entire feminist movement, which in earlier days I had quite vocally supported. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized that more than anything else, I finally felt like I was being true to myself. And isn't that what the real goal of the feminist movement was all about? I don't need to prove to myself or any man that I can earn a paycheck and "make it" in a man's world. I've already "made it" in my own world. I'm surprisingly content being the domestic caretaker of my family. I revel in trying new recipes and doing all those other domestic tasks that I never had time for before I made my decision to be a full time mom. I will even admit to having spent hours making cranberry and popcorn garland for the family Christmas tree this past holiday season, a task which I previously wouldn't have even considered given my former notorious lack of spare time. But you know what? I'm not ashamed of that one little bit. And you know what else? When I fall into

bed every night absolutely exhausted from taking care of my two toddlers, at least I know that I have spent my day making a difference in their lives, no matter how insignificant that day's activities may have been. When I worked outside the home and fell into bed exhausted every night I felt miserable because I had spent my day doing a variety of completely mind numbing activities for a faceless corporate entity and working my tail off to put a couple more million into some CEO's pocket whose name I can honestly say I don't even recall.

I'm not trying to make women who work outside the home feel guilty or ashamed for their choices either. I am perfectly aware of the harsh realities which dictate some family situations. All I'm trying to say is that I think women have painted themselves into a corner. We can be our husband's equals without having to live in their world. Women should learn how to celebrate and be proud of the differences between the sexes. So go ahead and be that domestic goddess if that's what you truly want and don't let anyone make you feel anything less than proud for having the courage to live the life you want! I absolutely love this quote from an unidentified woman who was interviewed for a book entitled "And What Do You Do? When Women Choose to Stay Home". She said that her favorite answer to "And what do you do?" was "I'm changing the world.....one child at a time." We've come a long way, baby!

Andrea Hayhurst is a freelance writer who specializes in writing articles about family and women's issues as well as fiction novels. The author can be contacted via email at ahyhrst12@aol.com for further information.

You Can Have It All (Just Not At The Same Time)

By



This Free E-Book has been brought to you by Natural-Aging.com.

100% Effective Natural Hormone Treatment
Menopause, Andropause And Other Hormone Imbalances
Impair Healthy Healing In People Over The Age Of 30!