

Women, how do you do it?

Why it's okay to ask women "how do you do it all?"

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During my internship on Capitol Hill this past summer, I met a high ranking woman professional. She is the president of a major non-profit and historic organization. Her name I don't have permission to divulge. She managed to work her way to this prestigious position while in a successful marriage with kids. I was inspired by her, and so, asked her what advice she had for young women just starting their careers, who also want to be wives, and mothers. How can young women balance all of these major responsibilities, giving each its owed attention, without being overwhelmed by it all? I waited patiently to be given this insight that I cannot get anywhere else, and I never got a response. Even now as I write this, I am still hopeful for that ever desired email with step by step instructions, and perfectly imparted wisdom, from a woman who has been there and done that, to a woman who is still getting there. Yet, no response.

Women being in the workplace is still relatively new territory, this is not something women have been doing for many centuries like men. As a result, there is a dearth of great examples of women who have rewarding careers, successful marriages, and happy kids all at the same time. The women around me had one, maybe two, but not all three. I and I'm sure many other women are hard-pressed to find out how women who do have all three, do it exactly. I have never felt this question was insulting, or one that puts women down. With the migration of women from domestic duty into the workplace, occupying a myriad of professions, comes with it the question "how do you manage it all?" A question many women respond to with an irked tone, or, in my experience, not at all. The question baits popular responses like, "no one asks this question to men." "men get to have careers and no one wonders how they manage it all!" Well that's for a reason, and not the one we rush to assume.

As rabid feminists, who hate the idea of man-woman love, traditional relationships and family structures, will have women believe, to ask a woman this question reinforces patriarchal oppression and ideas that women are somehow inferior. As a result some women get it in their heads that asking this question is belittling as if to say "oh aren't you precious! Look at you doing what the boys do. All this work must be so hard for you" **Proceeds to pinch her cheeks.* This is not the case at all! If anything this is poisonous propaganda which I have to disagree with. If you are already looking to be offended, then of course it will be offensive. If you give heed to ideas that conversations about balancing career and family are oppressive, then in your mind it will be. However, I challenge these women to not rush to victimhood, and feelings of perceived oppression under "patriarchal tyranny". Instead consider the actual reality of the matter. No one asks this question to men because, men have not historically had both a career,

and the duty of primary caregiver of their children. Men have historically had a career, and a wife who reared their children. When women came into the professional arena, they didn't drop the duty of primary caregiver, they carried this responsibility too, and men carried theirs of secondary caregiver. Also just have a closer look at the people who ask this question, it is mainly women asking this question to other women. Why would a woman who wants this insight go and ask this question to men? How exactly would a man answer this for a woman? Asking this question to men would get her no good answer.

Some may say that men don't have to worry about child rearing, they get to just live their lives, that it's unfair. I beg to differ, I think it is plenty fair, and also a bit tone-deaf to claim he doesn't have to "worry". Of course he does! Providing home, food, and financial security for other people, a job men have had for eons, is a high risk and stressful vocation. Risks being, should he fail to work, for even a day, his families security may hang in the balance. He doesn't get to do what he wants, he lives for his family, a good husband at least, centers his family by centering his work. The lives of all those in his care are in his hands. That is a daunting responsibility to have, and yet many men carry it. Secondary parental care is not less stressful and easier, or "fun" if anything it is harder. This idea that wives do all the heavy lifting and their husbands just laze about like princesses is simply not true. Working for the domestic life is not polarized to womens side alone, there is no unfairness, or foul play.

To my main point, it is perfectly proper to ask women how they manage the upbringing of their children, a healthy bond with their spouse, and a rewarding career. Women know, better than men, the difficult task of shaping the next generation of human beings directly as the primary caregivers, while working and being wives. Asking women how they manage it all is not a question that should cause offense, it is perfectly reasonable to think a marriage, a career and primary child care is hard. Because it is!

What were once rites of passage between older women and younger women have now been twisted into being some kind of sick ritual that reinforces unfair power dynamics and patriarchy. It is foolish to think men don't have these conversations, they absolutely do. Men have outlets to have these conversations about work and family obligation too. The golf course, pub, gym locker room, water cooler etc. Older men take younger men under their wing and show them how to be men, husbands, and fathers. Women have been convinced to shun the idea of mentor-mentee relationships with younger women. That the very idea of sharing these life lessons will somehow confirm perceived ideas of inferiority.

Woman to woman relationships are vital, rites of passage are vital, it's how we keep one generation from falling into destructive paths, from making unnecessary mistakes. Rather than feeling victimized by questions that are really just attempts to make a bond, take the opportunity

to help shape future women who would otherwise resolve to figuring it out on their own, grasping around in the dark without a prayer.

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