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Sent: Wednesday, June 27, 2012 10:02 AM
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Subject: Fw: Awesome piece

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Sent: Wednesday, June 27, 2012 09:26 AM
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You'll love this. I did.

Why There's No Such Thing as 'Having It All'—and There Never Will Be

By Lori Gottlieb

Women can't have everything they want all of the time. Neither can men. Who ever thought otherwise?

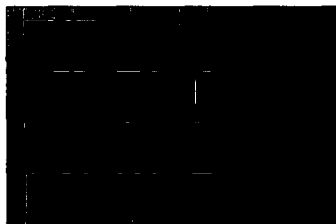


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I may get Slaughtered (pun intended) for this post, but somebody has to state two basic facts:

(1) Nobody, male or female, married or single, young or old, tall or short, educated or not, pretty or plain, wealthy or poor, with kids or without, can have it all -- neither in the very narrow way Slaughter defines "it," nor in the broader context of life.

(2) Recognizing this makes people happier! In fact, the people who accept this don't lie awake at night wondering why they've been handed the keys to the palace but the gilded moldings just aren't sparkly enough.



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How does a smart woman like Slaughter still believe in the childlike notion that people (of either gender) can have whatever they want whenever they want it, regardless of life's intrinsic constraints? Imagine if this article had been written by a kindergartner:

"But I want to go to my gymnastics class *and* I want to go Rosie's birthday party and they're both on Saturday morning!" rails the 5-year-old journalist. "Why can't girls have it all? This is so unfair! Somebody has to make it possible for socially ambitious girls like me to be at gymnastics *and* Rosie's party! The solution is to accommodate me by moving Rosie's party or the time of my gymnastics class. I want justice, because no girl should ever have to feel trapped like this!"

Well, any reasonable adult would explain that the world does not revolve around one particular person; that the child can't be two places at the same time; that she must choose one activity or the other; and that, in so choosing, she gains one opportunity but forfeits another.

This isn't because the child is a girl. This isn't a feminist issue. This is Life 101, something all people learn as kids -- until they grow up to be a high-level government official who has to choose between one six-figure job near her kids and one far away, and can't accept life's inherent limitations.

Everybody makes choices, and every choice has a cost. Don't blame others for those consequences.

Like a kindergartner, Slaughter seems to think that she -- and women in general -- should somehow be exempt from universal realities that have nothing to do with gender inequality and everything to do with the fact that you can't defy the laws of physics. Forget biological clocks. Time and space do not magically expand because you'd like to be two places at once or do more things than can fit into a 24-hour period or even a life span. Somebody might want -- and have the talent -- to be an Olympic gymnast, a Nobel-winning mathematician, and a professional ballerina, but there are age and health and time limitations involved. There isn't a policy in the

world that could change the fact that if you choose to be in Washington five days a week, you can't also be at home tucking in your children and dealing with their issues back in Princeton.

Did Slaughter, despite her intelligence, somehow imagine that she could be an involved, engaged parent while living in another city for two years? Did her inability to anticipate the fact that she might miss her children and they might miss her make this the fault of feminism, or just a case of not completely thinking through one's decision? Where is her responsibility in this, and what does this have to do with inequality?

Life involves dozens of choices on a daily basis. Some are big and some are about which toilet paper to buy -- less soft and more economical is a trade-off for plush and expensive. The secret to happiness? Pick one, and don't complain that it's too rough or expensive. If you don't like your choice, it's a free country, and you can change course -- as Slaughter did when she decided to come home to Princeton and turn down the very generous option her bosses offered of working only four days a week in Washington. (How many middle-class women get those kinds of accommodations? How many men do?)

Rather than accept the very basic childhood lesson that choosing one option might impact the feasibility of another, Slaughter blames the government, men, society, feminism, cultural attitudes, the workplace and other externals. If you choose Harvard because you like Cambridge better than New Haven, you have to give up Yale and your love of its drama department. If you order the salmon entrée at your favorite restaurant, you have to forgo ordering the steak entrée that night. If you choose to have kids, you have to give up a certain amount of your freedom for the next 18 years. Not just career freedom, but marital, economic and social freedom as well. Order up what you want -- Harvard, the wild salmon, the kids -- but know that there's no such option out there called "having it both ways."

IT'S JUST AS TRUE FOR MEN

It's interesting that men -- who, as Hanna Rosin writes in her forthcoming book, *The End of Men*, nowadays have far *fewer* choices than women -- don't seem to ruminate over life's inherent limitations in the same way. Would a man be taken seriously if he wrote a 15,000-word article stating that he's entitled to both marriage and the freedom to have sex with any woman he wants? Or would he be told to grow up and get real? In today's society, he can choose marriage and the compromises that come with it -- sexual commitment, financial commitment, emotional commitment, along with a bevy of childcare and Mr. Fix-It commitments -- or he can choose to remain single and maintain his freedom but give up the joy that marriage and raising kids might bring him. He might dearly desire both situations, but he can only have one.

Men know that you can't be the married guy and the single guy at the same time. Slaughter, on the other hand, wants to be in a high-powered job and also at home making pancakes and doing school pick-up in another city. And merely because she wants this so badly (gymnastics or Rosie's party: I want*both!*), she believes she deserves it. Why? If her job requires her to be present with colleagues and she wants more time with her kids, she could simply consult from home, make a lot of money, and still influence policy, rather than take an in-house position.

Voila! 15,000-word dilemma solved.

If her greatest passion were to be an astronaut, would she ask to work from home, too? Or would she say, "I'm not willing to be in space for months on end, so I'll take a scientist position on Earth instead"? If she wanted to be a surgeon, would she also ask to work from home -- have the hospital set up an operating room in her guest house to accommodate her desire to see her kids? No, she would either choose to be a surgeon and work those hours at the cost of seeing her family less, or she would pick a medical specialty like dermatology or radiology that allows the stability and flexibility she seeks. (Many female physicians choose these fields specifically because they afford decent and predictable hours.)

If she wanted to be the president, would she propose that the presidency create a flex-time position with half the travel and half the "face time" with world leaders to make it "fair" for women? High powered jobs come with high-powered workloads, high-powered commitments and, often, high-powered salaries. If that's what a person -- male or female, kids or no kids -- chooses, trade-offs will always be involved, whether you're trading your sleep, your health, your leisure time, your social life, or time with your kids.

The big, newsworthy, cover-story concession for Slaughter? She went back to her prestigious, lucrative, flexible and fulfilling career at Princeton, which includes teaching a full course load, writing a book and giving 50 speeches a year to interesting and influential audiences, while also being able to see her kids. Is this so awful?

She writes about this as if it's *Sophie's Choice*, as if this were some traumatic, harrowing ordeal. Meanwhile, she doesn't realize (in any real way, given the solutions she poses in her article) that most people don't have the choice between a prestigious job in Washington and prestigious but cushy and flexible job in Princeton; and that most "normal" jobs can't be done from home. She bases so much of her argument on the idea that if only women could work from home more, work-life balance would be achieved and ... kumbaya.

What?

THE IMPOSSIBLE MATH OF 'HAVING IT ALL'

I work from home three days a week and am away at my office the other two, and as far as my son is concerned, my being home is no different from my being at the office. Am I spending quality time with my son when I'm working from home? No. I'm working! Would I get any work done if I were interacting with my son while trying to focus and write on deadline? Of course not. If, as Slaughter states, women are capable of being so productive while at home with their children on sick days or snow days, it's certainly not during the hours that their children are awake - unless they send their children off to play in another room by themselves or be cared for by a nanny, which defeats the entire purpose of staying home to "spend time" with your children.

She also believes that mothers would just love more opportunities to spend those utterly exhausting post-bedtime hours -- when their brains are so fried that they're slurring their words and their bodies are so weak that they're too tired to have sex -- doing even more work on their computers until midnight. Does being on the computer late at night feel *liberating* to most mothers? Is that how they'd like to spend their evenings?

Not everyone wants to work 24/7, the way that Slaughter proposes. (One suggestion from her article: let women have the flexibility to get work done at home on weekends. Hooray for working on Saturdays and Sundays!)

Most working women want to see their spouses and children and friends and watch a little mindless reality TV or read a good novel or soak in a bubble bath or organize the family photo albums on evenings and weekends.

The problem with Slaughter's so-called dilemma is that it never occurs to her that maybe the math doesn't work. You can't give 100 percent effort to two full-time, demanding endeavors. You have to cut back on one or the other or both. So, like grownups, we make choices. I don't use a cell phone for work and have never sent a text in my life, precisely because I made a choice that I'm incredibly grateful to have: I can forgo assignments if an editor calls when I'm not home. I can tell bosses that I'm only available on my landline. I can ride in the car and converse with my child instead of a colleague. I can turn down therapy clients I'd enjoy working with during primetime evening hours because I don't want to miss my son's bedtime more than one night per week.

Do I write cover stories about how upset I am that as a trade-off, I make less money, my child goes to a public school with large class sizes, we live in a small space, and I give up a degree of professional fulfillment and success? No, because I *chose* to cut down my hours to spend that time with my kid. That doesn't seem unfair at all. Work less, earn less, achieve less. Achieving as a mother means more to me than achieving professionally.

Of course, somebody else may choose to work more and earn more and achieve more at work, and that's perfectly fine, too, and an equally valid choice. But there will always be something lost on either end. That's life, at least for those of us fortunate enough to have choices.

So why do women with choices have such a hard time accepting this? Thirty years ago women used to complain that they wanted "a wife." Now that women like Slaughter *have* wives (in the guise of her husband who, functioning as a single dad, took care of two kids and the entire household every weekday for two years while he also held down a job and earned a living), they don't like being the husband very much. To their surprise, it turns that husbands don't "have it all" either. And Slaughter is mad as hell to have worked this hard and given up so much only to discover that being the husband kind of sucks. Being the husband requires far more compromise than she and many high-powered women ever imagined.

THE WOMEN WE WANT TO BE

Here's the part that finally relates to the real Sophie's Choice many American women -- those without Slaughter's options -- have to face: help pay the mortgage or spend time with the kids. This is a very significant dilemma for women outside of Slaughter's demographic, and it shows where her assumptions about women and what they want out of life are so misguided. Most women, given the luxury of choice, might or might not decide to work in some capacity, but they wouldn't decide to be high-powered executives, even if they had the talent, education, and opportunity to do so. As Slaughter discovered about her own desires, they'd rather be doing the carpools and play dates and volunteering at school and staying home when their child has strep throat without suffering massive amounts of guilt. They don't want to die young and look ten years older than their actual age because of undue amounts of stress trying to keep up with their kids' lives and hold down a demanding job at the same time.

I realize that this bums out Sheryl Sandberg, but being Sheryl Sandberg or Carly Fiorina simply isn't what many women, privileged or not, desire. It's not what they aspire to, not what they consider "the good life" or "a

meaningful life." Not what they want on the proverbial tombstone and not what will give them the most pleasurable memories at life's end.

Even women with resources and education like Slaughter don't necessarily yearn for the kind of "success" that Slaughter does. How many women whose husbands can comfortably support them choose to focus on family and kids instead of work, but also hire nannies in order to create their own life balance? Even in countries like the Netherlands, with generous government incentives of the kind Slaughter proposes, Hanna Rosin writes in her book that "Dutch women do not want to work full-time, because they would rather have their afternoons free for coffee with friends." When we look at Slaughter's demographic, it's perfectly socially acceptable for a woman's work to consist of writing a mommy blog (for free), or contributing occasional articles to magazines or newspapers, or working three days a week at her own business or law practice or therapy practice, while she employs a nanny so that she can go to yoga class. Can men do that?

Imagine a stay-at-home dad whose wife supports the family. Imagine if he had a nanny once or twice a week so that he could fit in some "me-time." Imagine if while the nanny was there, this dad went for a massage, or met the other stay-at-home dads at a baseball game, or played a game of golf. Do you know what his wife would do when she came home? He'd be pilloried! He'd be called a lazy-ass deadbeat! Meanwhile, a woman whose husband supports her gets a nanny once or twice a week in order to go to Pilates and sip some tea with her friends, and nobody blinks an eye. In fact, she's encouraged to take some "me-time." (Just read any women's magazine.) And now Slaughter wants employers to create "me-time" for women as well. But what about the men?

Does Slaughter really want to talk about gender inequality?

(Related to gender inequality, besides working long hours and not getting enough sex, many husbands are also expected to do the laundry and change the diapers only to be told they're doing it the wrong way and then endure eye rolls and sighs and admonishments. Meanwhile, do men ask their wives -- working or not -- to fix the leaky toilet, haul out the heavy garbage, and set up the baby gear with those 10-page instruction manuals, then go into a blind fury because she's "doing it wrong"?)

Just as Slaughter wants it both ways, so does the rhetoric around gender. Look at the recent covers of this magazine. On the one hand, women are told that they're superior to men (Hanna Rosin's "The End of Men," Kate Bolick's there's-a-scarcity-of-men-in-my-league "All the Single Ladies") and in the same breath, that they're victims of them (Slaughter's piece).

Neither reflects what really goes on in our families or in our hearts. Most important, nobody's looking at the consequences of the choices these writers want women to have. Slaughter suggests making school schedules match work schedules. Is this fair to our kids? Does this solution meet *their* needs? Do you really want your child in school from 8am to 6pm *every day*? That may work for some kids, but many might feel robbed of a childhood, of never having had enough contact with their parents or even having spent enough time just being able to hang out in their own bedrooms.

The real problem here isn't about women and their options. The real problem is that technology has made it possible to work 24/7, so that the boundary between work and our personal lives has disappeared. Our cubicles

are in our pockets, at the dinner table, next to our beds and even next to our children's beds as we're tucking them in. In many households, one income isn't enough, and both men and women have to work long hours -- longer hours than ever before -- to make ends meet. The women Slaughter cites as being efficient - who wake up at 4 am each day, who punch in 1:11 or 2:22 on the microwave rather than waste the millisecond to punch in 1:00 or 2:00, who put their babies in front of the computer while they type rather than savor that tiny infant in their lap - made me want to cry. How terribly sad those lives are. But to make this about women misses the point. The problem here is that many people work too much -- not just women, and not just parents.

Whether we choose to work or have to work, it's up to us to change that. I, for instance, could stay up an extra hour right now to re-read and edit this post, but it's already midnight, I'm tired, and I'd rather get to sleep. I'm sure I could be more concise and articulate, but in the scheme of life, it's not as important as my having the energy and good humor to enjoy the day with my family and friends tomorrow. Do I lack ambition? Or are my priorities the same as what Slaughter realized, in the end, were hers? It doesn't matter. I made a choice and I blame nobody -- not the *Atlantic*, not the patriarchy, not gender inequality, not feminism, and not even my mother's generation and its ideals -- for my sleep deprivation but me.

This article available online at:

<http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2012/06/why-theres-no-such-thing-as-having-it-all-and-there-never-will-be/258928/>

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This email is UNCLASSIFIED.