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PROFESSIONAL WOMEN:
HOW THEY FIND TIME TO RAISE CHILDREN

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PROFESSIONAL WOMEN: HOW THEY FIND TIME TO RAISE CHILDREN

by

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Since 1970 the number of women in professions such as engineering, accounting, law, and medicine has been increasing rapidly. The majority of these women are married, and most of these married women want to, or already do, have children. Yet, almost all of these women were raised in the traditional American family where the husband is expected to work while the wife stays home and takes care of the children. Consequently, the wife in the dual-career family must find a way to combine the traditional responsibilities of being a wife and mother with the commitments that are involved with having a career. It is not easy, and not all women can do it. However, an organized woman, with the help of her husband, can find time to raise children while pursuing a career.

A professional woman's most difficult problem is to find time to do housework and other things that she, as a wife, is expected to do. Like anyone in a profession, she has some work from her job that cannot be done during regular office hours. Furthermore, since professionals are perceived as being people who spend most of their time on their work, there will be times when the professional women will have to put her work obligations first and her family obligations second. In addition to her work commitments, the wife is responsible for the care of her children. In a survey of dual-career families, only two percent "considered the care

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of the children as an equal responsibility of the mother and father."¹ Although the father is expected to help, his role is secondary. It is the mother's responsibility to "shop for the children's clothes, take them to the doctor, keep in touch with the teacher, and arrange for baby sitters and housekeepers."² The wife is also responsible for the household chores such as planning and fixing meals, and cleaning and decorating the house. Besides doing these mechanical chores, which could be done by someone else, the wife is generally responsible for making social life arrangements and buying gifts. The professional woman also wants to spend some time just being a loving wife and mother, alone with her family. Consequently, the biggest complaint among these women is that they do not have enough time to meet the responsibilities of being both a mother and a professional.

In order to spend additional time at home, some women alter their work schedules. This can be done by quitting their jobs, working part-time, working flexible hours, or doing their work at home. A few women quit their jobs while they have preschool children because this is the time when conflicts between work and family responsibilities are most severe. Although when they quit these women do not feel any resentment towards their families, they have "found that six to eight years out of the heart of a professional career might cripple it forever."³ As an alternative to quitting, about half of the professional women work part-time or have flexible hours while their children are young.⁴ However, part-time professional work is very hard to find. An increase in the amount of part-time work available would help women who want to stay actively involved in their career but who do not have the time to work full-time. As an alternative to part-time work, many women have found

that flexible hours allow them to get all their household duties done. The most common flexible hours are working through lunch and then leaving the office forty-five minutes or an hour early. This extra time is enough to make the professional woman's day less rushed. Other women, mainly those who are self-employed, have found that they can set up their jobs at home. This enables them to schedule their work and appointments to their convenience. Although all of these variations of work schedules allow professional women to spend more time carrying out their responsibilities as a wife and mother, the options for women who want to stay in the mainstream of corporate life are much more limited.

A woman seeking a career in middle management or higher is generally competing with highly qualified men and therefore cannot afford to drop out of her career path for any significant length of time. She must be able to maintain the same level of output as her competitors, and therefore must continue to work full-time. While doing research for their book, The Managerial Woman, Margaret Hennig and Anne Jardim found that none of the surveyed women in high levels of corporate management had any children.⁵ While this does not mean a woman cannot have children and reach high levels of management, it does illustrate the importance of coordinating childbearing and raising with career goals. The timing of the first child is particularly important for a woman because she has not proved herself capable of coordinating a career and a family. So it will not interfere with any upcoming promotions, childbearing should occur while in an entry level position or immediately after a promotion. This will minimize the possibility of being turned down for a promotion because of pregnancy. Similarly, a woman who takes more than a six to eight week leave of absence to have a child should readjust her career

goals. It will take her longer to reach a given goal than if she worked continuously. In planning their family, a husband and wife should try to maximize the amount of time they can spend with their children while minimizing the negative effects on their careers.

Since both the husband and the wife are wage earners, they can afford to spend part of their income on luxuries which will save them time. First of all, the dual-career family can afford to spend more money on food. For example, instead of shopping at supermarkets, they can shop at neighborhood convenience stores that are open in the early morning and late evening but are characteristically more expensive than supermarkets. Furthermore, a dual-career family can afford to spend more money on convenience foods such as frozen entrees and vegetables and canned foods. When compared to their fresh counterparts, these foods cost more but take less time and are easier to prepare. Also, a dual-career family has enough money to eat out regularly, which allows the wife to relax with her family before and after the meal, rather than hurriedly preparing for and cleaning up after the dinner. A dual-career family also has enough money to buy timesaving appliances and utilize cleaning services. For example, they can afford such luxuries as a second car, a microwave oven, and a dishwasher. They can also afford to hire commercial services to do their laundry, clean the curtains and carpet, and paint their home. If she spends money on these extra luxuries, the professional woman can devote more of her time to her job commitments and family responsibilities.

Although a substantial amount of money is spent on luxuries, the largest expense associated with a dual-career family is for child care. When not in school, about half of all school age children are cared for in their own home by a sitter or housekeeper while the other half care for

themselves. Younger children are most often cared for in someone else's home. Only six percent of preschool-age children are sent to conventional day care centers.⁶ The most common reason families give for not utilizing day care centers are the center's reluctance to accept infants and the necessity of picking up the child by a specific hour with no flexibility in arrangements.⁷ Consequently, most women prefer to hire housekeepers who also baby-sit. In one survey, eighty-five percent of the dual-career couples questioned had employed full-time household workers at some time.⁸ Obviously, hiring a housekeeper greatly reduces the amount of house cleaning that the professional woman must do. A housekeeper is also more convenient when children are sick and for women who must travel occasionally. Yet "the difficulty of finding a housekeeper was the single most predominant complaint" among women doctors in a recent survey.⁹ In fact, since 1965 the number of working women with preschool children has been rising while the number of household workers has been falling.¹⁰ An increase in the availability and quality of day care centers would help to alleviate this lack of reliable household workers; but many women would still prefer to have someone come to their home.

Even though a professional woman may be able to buy certain goods and services to make her work easier, she needs her husband's co-operation. A working woman is not able to do as much for her husband as a nonworking woman. If the husband cannot tolerate the inconveniences, he may force his wife into making a decision between not working and leaving him.

Furthermore, because the professional woman is not following the traditional role of womanhood, she needs encouragement from her husband. Consequently, the husband should have a positive attitude towards her career.¹¹

Because most husbands in dual-career families have this positive

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attitude, they help their wives with household chores more than other husbands do. Although, as mentioned before, the wife is responsible for most household chores, almost all professional women emphasize how helpful their husbands are around the house. According to one survey, each couple delegates certain tasks to each spouse and then shares the remaining chores. For example, the husband will take out the garbage, feed the children, and change their diapers, while the wife prepares dinner and does most of the shopping. Some tasks such as cooking breakfast and washing the dishes are done by both the husband and the wife. Generally, these household chores are divided between the husband and the wife according to interest, skill, and convenience. For instance, most wives clean the house because they do it more efficiently than their husbands can. Similarly, if a husband dislikes doing the laundry, the wife will do it; and if the husband works near a grocery store, he will do the grocery shopping. Nevertheless, in most dual-career families the wife is the manager of the household. Even though the husband helps, he does it graciously rather than out of a sense of responsibility.¹²

Just as the man in the dual-career family must have certain qualities, the woman who tries to pursue a career while her children are young needs to be organized and have an abundance of energy. In order to meet her work, household, and social responsibilities, this woman needs to be organized. For example, she cannot afford to waste time going to the grocery store three times a week if going only once a week would suffice. A professional woman also needs to be energetic. A woman who comes home from work exhausted everyday would not be able to meet her responsibilities as a wife and mother.

But most of all, the professional woman needs to have self-confidence. A young mother who works full-time is likely to be criticized by relatives,

neighbors, and co-workers who believe that a mother should be with her children most of the time while they are young. These outside pressures may make the woman feel guilty about not following the traditional methods of raising children. Although very few women have these guilt feelings, those who do must be careful not to spoil their children. Some professional women frequently bring their children gifts and never make them help with the housework. These women are overindulgent because they feel that they are not being good mothers as long as they are working full-time.¹³ Furthermore, some professional women feel that they are being less of a woman by being successful. These feelings are hard to cope with if the woman does not believe that she and her family are benefiting from the dual-career family situation.

Because very little research has been done in this area, there are many opinions concerning the effects of a dual-career environment on children. The famous Dr. Benjamin Spock gives the most pessimistic opinion concerning a woman who works instead of staying home with her child: "If a mother realizes clearly how vital this kind of care is to a small child, it may make it easier for her to decide that the extra money she might earn, or the satisfaction she might receive from an outside job is not so important after all."¹⁴ Other child psychiatrists feel that it is the mother's responsibility to stay home with the child at least until he is two years old.¹⁵ Yet the little research that has been done has shown that children of working mothers learn to talk sooner, talk more distinctively, and are more independent than children of nonworking women.¹⁶ The reason for this conflict between the opinions and the data may be that the traditionalists, such as Dr. Spock, have not reevaluated old ideas. In 1976, thirty-seven percent of all mothers with children under the age of six were in the labor

market, whereas when Dr. Spock was establishing his reputation, there were less women to base his opinions on.¹⁷ Furthermore, now that Dr. Spock is famous, he does not need to keep up with current trends, and he may feel uncomfortable changing his opinions.

Although there is no published research to back them, there are numerous theories indicating that dual-career families have a positive effect on their children. First of all, children in dual-career families learn to accept responsibilities at an earlier age than those in traditional families. These responsibilities range from putting away clothes and toys to doing the laundry. Since they are always pressed for time, the parents in dual-career families teach their children these jobs as soon as they are old enough to learn them. Secondly, although the professional mother spends less time with her children than a traditional mother does, the father in the dual-career family spends more time with his children than the traditional father does. This happens because the dual-career father helps his wife with her responsibilities as a mother. Furthermore, the "active involvement of the father has a positive effect on both male and female children."¹⁸ Thirdly, the daughters of professional women are more active and autonomous than the daughters of traditional mothers. This may be due to the fact that the professional women themselves are generally more active and certainly more autonomous than traditional women. However, these are all theories. More research should be done to find out if, in fact, there are differences between children in dual-career families and children in traditional families.¹⁹

Although the children in dual-career families may or may not benefit from their environments, the women do benefit. A woman should have the choice of being a full-time mother or pursuing a career. However, the

professional woman is generally happier with her family relationships and has more self-esteem than her traditional counterpart. A "woman entering an independent career establishes a second anchor for her self concept and relieves the marriage relationship of the total burden of satisfying her needs."²⁰ On the other hand, a nonworking woman depends on her family to give her most of her satisfaction. Furthermore, professional women generally feel more competent about the way they raise their children than nonworking women do.²¹ Best of all, most professional women with children feel a sense of accomplishment, a sense of fulfillment, and "a feeling of participation in the world."²² These women realize the joys of being a mother coupled with the satisfaction of pursuing a career.

Until there is more equality between the sexes, it will continue to be difficult for the dual-career family to exist. The acceptance of women into the professions of engineering, accounting, law, and medicine is a recent phenomenon. Yet, if women are going to continue to go into these professions, our society will have to change to accommodate them. Too many women are being discouraged from pursuing careers either by their lack of time to carry out their tasks or by the predominantly negative attitude most people have toward working mothers. In this age of widespread birth control, more men must become aware of the fact that both the decision to have children and the responsibilities of raising children should be divided equally between the husband and the wife. Of course, if a woman does not want to work, she should bear the bulk of the responsibilities of raising the children. But if both the man and the woman want to pursue careers, the responsibilities of raising children and managing the household should be divided equally between the man and the woman.

NOTES

¹Margaret M. Poloma and T. Neal Garland, The Dual Professional Family: Summary of Research (Washington, D. C.: Business and Professional Women's Foundation, 1971), p. 2.

²Poloma, p. 2. See also Robert E. Riegel, American Women: A Story of Social Change (Rutherford, N. J.: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1970), p. 337.

³Poloma, pp. 1,8.

⁴Lynda Lytle Holmstrom, The Two-Career Family (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1972), pp. 74,91; Poloma, p. 4.

⁵Margaret Hennig and Anne Jardim, The Managerial Woman (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press / Doubleday, 1977), p. 146.

⁶Allyson Sherman Grossman, "Almost Half of All Children Have Mothers in the Labor Force," Monthly Labor Review (June 1977), p. 44.

⁷Leah Yarrow, "When Both Parents Work," Parents (December 1978), pp. 51-55.

⁸Holmstrom, p. 75.

⁹Lois Wladis Hoffman, "The Professional Woman as Mother," in Women and Success: The Anatomy of Achievement, ed. Ruth B. Kundsinn (New York: William Morrow, 1974), p. 226.

¹⁰Caroline Meyer, "Being a Working Wife: How Well Does it Work?" Reader's Digest, 102 (January 1973), p. 132.

¹¹Lotte Bailyn, "Family Constraints on Women's Work," in Women and Success: The Anatomy of Achievement, p. 97; Poloma p. 1. See also Holmstrom, p. 133.

¹²Holmstrom, pp. 67-70, 75, 90.

¹³Hoffman, p. 223; Meyer, p. 133.

¹⁴Holmstrom, p. 78.

¹⁵Dorothy V. Whipple, "Doctor, Wife, Mother, Can It Be?" Occupational Outlook Quarterly, 13 (Winter 1969), p. 5.

¹⁶Yarrow, pp. 51-55.

¹⁷Grossman, p. 41.

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¹⁸Hoffman, p. 225.

¹⁹Joanne D. Denko, "Managing a Practice and a Home Simultaneously," The Woman Physician, 25 (January 1970), p. 37. See also Hoffman, pp. 224-225.

²⁰Elizabeth Douvan, "Two Careers and One Family: Potential Pitfalls and Certain Complexity," Papers in Women's Studies, University of Michigan, 1 (October 1974), p. 52.

²¹Hoffman, p. 222.

²²Meyer, p. 134.

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