Women and Depression: The Cost of Trying to Have it All

April 29, 2010 By David Evans

There's a great article in the U.K. newspaper *The Guardian* today, a meditation on the perils of modern womanhood and why women who try to "have it all" so frequently end up depressed. The article spends time deconstructing the problem (quite well I think) among career women, and proposed some possible reasons for the inequity between men and women in regards to depression.

Kira Cochrane, who wrote the article, launches into the problem by highlighting the noted writer Allison Pearson's recent revelation that she won't be writing her regular column for the *Daily Mail* anymore due to the onset of a serious depression. Pearson's 2002 novel, *I Don't Know How She Does It*, gave a face to the millennial uber woman, describing a female hedge fund manager, wife and mother of two. Unfortunately Pearson, whose life many thought resembled the protagonist in her book, found that her desire to be "the best kind of girl" seriously backfired.

Cochrane goes on to note a number of other super-achieving women who've come out about their depression in recent years. Cochrane speculates that the modern pressure on women to be professionally accomplished, great mothers, good wives, and perfect housekeepers--all while remaining young and beautiful--is an arithmetic equation whose result can't be good.

"There's still this idea that you've got to be a wonderful mother, but you also have to have a brilliant career, and you've got to look attractive all the time," the psychologist Dorothy Rowe told Cochrane. "There is no way that you can maintain that and bring up children. But it's still being presented to women all the time, in

every magazine, on every screen, that you should."

"We're brought up on the principle that if a job's worth doing, it's worth doing well," continues Rowe. "And actually, what women need to learn is that if a job's worth doing, it's worth doing badly - as long as you get it done."

I doubt that Cochrane, or most women for that matter, would suggest that women should have to choose between motherhood and a career. What I think she's saying instead, is that women should realize that they are human and fallible and that there is a high price to pay for trying to be perfect.

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