

Motherhood and the Curse of Perfectionism

by Nina Sutton (Writers 2)

We all know it. The desire to achieve, to prove, to claim our greatness. We've done it - the Ph.D., the corner office, the byline, the book. It works, we have climbed the Zermatt of our career, or at least we have that pinnacle in sight.

Then, one day, we are pregnant. OK, we can do this. We can add another hat to those already adorning our perfectly coiffed heads. Our husband/partner will be welcoming of the new baby and everything will move along smilingly - or so we pray/meditate/manifest. We are much too savvy to fall into the traps described in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*.

What high-achieving women need to know is that in a Columbia and Yale University-based study called "Developmental Themes in Women's Emotional Experiences of Motherhood" (2001) women of high ego development have more difficulty adjusting to motherhood, due in part to tendencies toward self-reflection. Yes, those-of-us-who-can-do-it-all face a significant challenge. Self-examination and maladaptive perfectionism (compared to healthy goal setting and standards of achievement) not only harms us along the journey of motherhood, but claims its victims as our children get older - in their own burgeoning lives. Our own self-doubt and criticism will be mirrored in our children and hamper them from eventually developing into the healthy and productive adults we hope they will become.

In a chance meeting I had a few years ago with Gloria Steinem, I asked how she would respond to the exasperated statement made to me by another suburban mother, like myself at

the time. "Sometimes I wish we didn't have all these choices!" In response, Ms. Steinem put her hand on my arm and said, "You have to promise me - if you write about this topic, you MUST include the men." The men? Gloria Steinem?? Yes, because we cannot do it on our own. It takes a team. Her point was that it is important that men take an active role in parenting and, equally as important, that women accept their participation. By accepting help and not trying to 'do it all' by ourselves we can avoid the traps of perfectionism.

So, there it is. Those of us who want to make our mark and won't settle for less in any area of our lives must come to a realization. We tend to have laser focus on a task at hand. When we become mothers, there is always a question of where that beam should be focused. Or, is it time to soften the lens? Ultimately, that is for each of us to answer in our own lives by knowing ourselves and our priorities.

★ Celebrating Our Achievements ★

★ I had an abstract accepted to the Annual Meeting of the Society for Neuro-Oncology! The abstract described the work I have done on drug delivery for brain tumors.

Laura Serwer (Woodhull 57)

★ I just became the Chapter Director of the New Jersey Chapter of the Younger Women's Taskforce, a nationwide, diverse and inclusive grassroots movement dedicated to organizing younger women and their allies to take action on issues that matter most to them. If you're in Jersey, contact me at ywtf.nj@gmail.com!

Dana Dabek-Milstein (Woodhull 61)

★ I've been coaching male friends from Nepal, who complain about getting paid too little, how to negotiate in

the work place for payment (especially artistic work.) I start off by saying: "By the way, I learned this at a workshop with feminists." They are always impressed by it, and they always put it in practice.

Sushma Joshi (Woodhull 7)

★ I was elected as chair-elect of the American College Personnel Association Commission for Student Development of the Two-Year Colleges for 2008-2009. I will be chair from 2009-2011.

Lisa Kelsay (Woodhull Chicago)

★ The Women Wasserman recognize our opera diva Beth Greenberg's heroic recovery. BRAVA!

Victoria Wasserman (Woodhull 46)

★ I just concluded a 6 month internship with the Division of Fire Safety in Erie County, NY. I was the first female student to be awarded this internship opportunity in a male-dominated field.

McKenzie Higgins (Daemen 4)

★ I'd like to announce the publication of my second book, co-authored with my OB GYN Mom, Carol Livoti, MD: *The Stress-Free Pregnancy: A Doctor Tells You What to REALLY Expect*. This book takes the unnecessary fear out of pregnancy while equipping future moms with all the information they will most likely need to navigate pregnancy confidently and calmly.

Lizz Topp (Woodhull 43)