FEMINIST PROGRESS:
THE IMPLICATIONS OF WOMEN IN POWER AND THE "HAVE IT ALL" MENTALITY

By

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Abstract

In this paper, I analyze the “have it all” mentality and discuss whether women can be successful both personally and professionally. I question whether Hillary Clinton’s potential run for presidential office in 2016 will enforce the idea that women can advance into high power professions. I then discuss Sheryl Sandberg’s lean in theory and describe her three suggestions for women to find happiness in their personal and professional lives. Next, I emphasize the struggles women face when attempting to balance their work and home lives, through utilizing research studies and articles. Then, I consider the confidence gap between men and women and explore why such a gap exists. Finally, I suggest that women simply cannot have it all in today’s society, as structural, social, and physical forces act against women in their pursuit of balancing their personal and professional lives.
In this paper, I will analyze the “have it all” mentality, which suggests that women can find happiness and success in both their personal and professional lives. First, I will explain the implications of Hillary Clinton’s possible presidential run in 2016 and evaluate why it is important for feminist progress and the “have it all” mentality that she do so. Then, I will elucidate Sheryl Sandberg’s lean in theory and present counterarguments to her ideas. Next, I will analyze the “catch-22 of female ambition” and examine the confidence gap between men and women that prevents women from advancing at work. Finally, I will discuss the idea that women cannot have it all in today’s society due to structural, social, and physical constraints.

To begin, women and girls currently compose “the majority of the world’s unhealthy, unfed, and unpaid,” (Clinton, 581). In December of 2013, women still held less than 22 percent of all seats in Parliament and Legislatures worldwide. In many Arab countries, women cannot open bank accounts or sign contracts without the permission of their husbands or fathers. Their participation is still limited in the economy in hundreds of countries. Even in countries where women can participate in the economy, pay for men and women is unequal. In the United States, where women possess more rights than those in other countries, women hold the majority of low wage jobs in the United States. Even then, nearly 75 percent of these jobs, such as waiters, bartenders, or hairstylists, all rely on tips, which pay even less than the minimum wage for hourly work (581). Further emphasizing the lack of women in high power positions, only 5.2 percent of women are Fortune 500 CEOs (Helfat, etc., Women).

Due to these grim statistics and women’s failure to apply for or seek high-power positions, Hillary Clinton could greatly benefit women and the feminist movement by
showing that a woman can indeed be a successful presidential candidate and grandmother. The birth of Hillary Clinton’s granddaughter, Charlotte Clinton Mezvinsky, lends itself to evaluating whether women can indeed have it all in today’s society. In light of Charlotte’s birth, the public has questioned whether Clinton will even run for office, and if so, whether she can be a successful president and grandmother. These questions indicate the injustices women face today, as they have never been asked about Clinton’s male counterparts and the presence of a grandchild has rarely hurt a male presidential candidate’s chances at election. Some claim that being a grandmother may actually force Clinton to run and aid in her candidacy, while others argue that Clinton may simply pass on the candidacy (Miller, Hillary). Perhaps her bid for president will emphasize to women that it is necessary to seek promotions and may spur more women to hold high power jobs.

If Clinton declined to run, she would do little to promote political and economic gender equality. Clinton would also enforce the commonly held belief that women cannot be successful in both their professional and personal lives. She is currently at the cusp of globally advancing women’s rights and establishing women as integral aspects of societal, political, and economic spheres versus substantiating the claim that society must change in order for women to be truly successful.

Others argue, however, that Clinton may desire to stay home with her family and refuse to run for president. This suggestion in its very essence is sexist and detrimental to the feminist movement. Debbie Walsh, director of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University said, ‘There’s a disproportionate attention to [Clinton] being a grandmother. Certainly, many men have run for president as grandfathers.
And nobody worries if they can’t do their job’ (Miller, Hillary).

When asked about the his wife’s potential presidential candidacy, President Bill Clinton stated, ‘If you ask her, I think she’d [rather be a] grandmother, but I have found it best not to discuss that issue’ (Miller, Hillary). Clinton herself even said she was hesitant to run for office, stating, ‘I know I have a decision to make. But part of what I’ve been thinking about, is everything I’m interested in and everything I enjoy doing—and with the added extra joy of I’m about to become a grandmother. I want to live in that moment. At the same time, I am concerned about what I see happening in the country and the world’ (Miller, Hillary).

Clinton’s and her husband’s statements are incredibly troubling, as they emphasize a disjunction between Clinton’s ability to be a successful grandmother and president. They suggest that even though Clinton has argued women can have it all, the idea that women cannot is so engrained within society even she cannot overcome these doubts. This inherent disbelief of the power and authority women can have enforces the “confidence gap” between men and women and largely contributes to a lack of women in high-powered positions.

Sheryl Sandberg, the Chief Operating Officer of Facebook emphasizes the importance of women in power and is a strong proponent of the “have it all” mentality. In a TedTalk titled, “Why We Have Too Few Women Leaders,” Sandberg urged women to “lean in” and seize leadership positions in their careers. She pushed women to “forget about their ‘likeability,’ abandon gender stereotypes, seek out strong mentors, and to confidently and unapologetically advance their (corporate) careers” (Maier, 55).

In this speech, Sandberg illuminated the three ways she believes women can have it all.
First, women must sit at the table. Second, women should ensure that their partner is a "real partner." Third, women should not leave before they leave (Sandberg, TedTalk).

To illustrate Sandberg’s first suggestion, Sandberg discussed an instance during a meeting with a senior government official where two women who were travelling with the official refused to sit at the table. Instead, they opted to sit at the other side of the room, while the men occupied the seats at the table. Though Sandberg encouraged the women to join the group, they refused. Sandberg suggested that the lack of women sitting at the table may be my men are advancing faster at work than women.

Sandberg does acknowledge that it is not that easy to simply believe that women sitting at the table will advance them in their careers. She noted, “success and likeability are positively correlated for men and negatively correlated for women” (Sandberg, TedTalk). To test this correlation, researchers at Harvard Business School conducted a study on a woman named Heidi Roizen, a very successful venture capitalist and operator in a company in Silicon Valley. One professor took her case and changed her name to Howard Roizen. He surveyed his students using both cases, Heidi and Howard Roizen, yet he changed nothing else about her career. The students agreed that Heidi and Howard were equally competent, yet thought that Heidi was political and aggressive. They were not sure they would want to work for Heidi, as opposed to Howard. Due to this example, Sandberg stated that though women should sit at the table, they must do it in a world where they do not have to make sacrifices (Sandberg).

Sandberg’s second message that women must pick a real partner emphasizes the need for women to find a partner who is willing to split the responsibilities. Data
suggests that in situations where men and women work full-time and have a child, the woman does twice the amount of housework and three times the amount of childcare as the man. In her speech, she encouraged women to find a partner who would allow women to stay in the work force and cooperate with them to balance career and family (Sandberg, TedTalk).

Sandberg’s final message concerns women who choose to start a family and begin “leaning back.” She claimed that the moment women begin thinking about having a baby, they don’t raise their hands anymore, don’t look for a promotion, and don’t take on new projects. Sandberg stated that it is very difficult to leave a child at home, especially if the woman’s job is not challenging and interesting. She encouraged women to continue advancing at work and to ensure that they do not make decisions about family life too far in advance.

The talk received positive feedback, so Sandberg wrote *Lean In: Women and the Will to Lead*. Many women sought the personal and professional success Sandberg advocated for and claimed was both desirable and attainable. Sandberg hoped that by encouraging women to lean in and take responsibility for their success, society would not be faced with gendered social and economic systems, structures of inequality throughout the world, and sexist corporate cultures. The general idea was that if women could overcome inner obstacles that prevented them from participating, they could be just as successful as men (Maier, 56).

While a noble concept, Sandberg’s ideas did not come without issues or contest. There are structural, social, and biological factors that prevent women from leaning in. Ann-Marie Slaughter is one woman in particular who found fault with Sandberg’s
speech. Slaughter contests Sandberg’s claim that women can have professional and personal success by stating, “… juggling work with the needs of two teenage boys was not possible” (Slaughter, 2). Slaughter is a Professor of International Affairs at Princeton, President of the New American Foundation, and former Head of Policy Planning at the United States State Department. She is also married and has two teenage boys. Her article, titled “Why Women Still Can’t Have It All,” claims that in today’s society, women cannot be successful in both their professional and personal lives. She urges women to stop pretending that they can have both and instead realize that America’s economy and society are structured to prevent women from being successful in both aspects of their lives (1).

Two years ago, Slaughter held a position as the first woman director of policy planning at the State Department. Though this was the job she had dreamed of, Slaughter was constantly distracted by thoughts of her son, who had just started 8th grade. He had already begun skipping homework, failing math assignments, and disrupting class. Though she had been home throughout the summer, she and her son had barely spoken. Slaughter had an incredibly supportive husband who cared for both her sons during the school year, so she only returned home on weekends. Though Slaughter once believed she could balance both her career and personal life, she began to feel that women could not have it all (Slaughter, 1).

After two years at the State Department, Slaughter returned home, due to Princeton’s rules concerning tenure and because she felt she could not effectively balance a government position and care for her family. People reacted to her return home by suggesting that her parenting and professionalism were substandard, since
she was unable to properly manage both. Slaughter was furious with this suggestion and disgusted with herself for previously being so naive. She stated that by previously telling women they can have it all she had “…been part of making millions of women feel that they are to blame if they cannot manage to rise up the ladder as fast as men and also have a family and an active home life” (Slaughter, 2). She claimed to have always been the one advocating women can have it all and insinuating that the women were to blame if she could not climb the professional ladder and have a family. However, after floundering while trying to do both, Slaughter realized that while men and women can have it all, they cannot have it all with the way the world’s society and economy are currently structured. Due to her belief that social and economic pressures prevent women from having it all, Slaughter advocated that women should recognize that while they are making tremendous progress in the professional field, many are reinforcing the idea that having it all can be accomplished solely through personal determination (Slaughter, 2).

Furthering the notion that women cannot have it all, researchers Carol Emslie and Kate Hunt conducted a study to determine how gender impacts a person’s work-life balance. In their work titled, “‘Live to Work’ or ‘Work to Live’? A Qualitative Study of Gender and Work-life Balance among Men and Women in Mid-life,” the researchers analyzed men and women between the ages of 50 to 52 in terms of how they balanced their personal and work lives. They concluded that almost all women experienced difficulties while coordinating different areas of their lives, while men did not. One woman, however, experienced very few problems, as she did not have kids, lacked many commitments, and worked standard office hours. The other women struggled to
combine their roles as employees, partners, mothers, friends, and daughters. They also expressed these difficulties by saying they ‘couldn’t keep all the balls in the air,’ ‘needed more of a balance,’ or felt their lives were a ‘juggling match.’ (Emslie and Hunt, 159).

Women also struggled with balancing caring for their ageing parents and spending time with their children, an issue men did not face. One woman stated, ‘When my father was in hospital… I [used to] come home from work, stay with my son for a couple hours… and then go straight to the hospital and stay there overnight… Well that was interfering with my family life… but it was just what you had to do’ (Emslie and Hunt, 160). Another woman acknowledged her discontentment with a similar situation in which she cared for her mother but felt she did not spend enough time with her children. She claimed, ‘You sit back and think ‘Oh, maybe I should have done it differently.’ But it’s too late you know?’ (160).

Many women also emphasized how paid work largely and negatively impacted their personal lives. They discussed how they worried about work tasks while at home. For example, some claimed they would wake up at night worrying about phone calls they needed to make and would dream about work situations. They stated that oftentimes their work left them too exhausted to participate in other activities and that the stress of balancing their personal and professional lives negatively impacted their health. In fact, two women in the study had recently been prescribed anti-depressants due to workplace stresses. In contrast, some women stated that the workplace served as a place of refuge and escape from their personal lives. They described work as ‘therapeutic’ and claimed that it played a large role in preventing them from becoming depressed and served to mitigate stress in other areas of their lives (Emslie and Hunt,
Socioeconomic circumstances largely impacted how women conducted different roles in their lives. For example, middle-class women both with and without children eagerly detailed their active lives and expressed the desire for more ‘time for themselves.’ According to one study participant, “I’m doing a course at the moment which takes up two night a week, I go to my mother’s one night a week… My son still stays with me… I have to spend a lot of time listening to him… I thought by this time I would have more time for me, to do really what I wanted” (Emslie and Hunt, 160).

Contrastingly, working-class women understated their frustration of effectively balancing their personal and professional lives. They simply said that they were coping with and managing the tension between their careers and home lives. They normalized the conflicting demands by stating ‘you just get on with it.’ One such woman stated, ‘I never, ever found it difficult… anything I have wanted to do I have planned ahead and got it sorted but I could do what I wanted to do really… There was a wee while when my mom and day were both ill… I was running up and down there, but again that didn’t stop me from doing anything,’ (Emslie and Hunt, 161).

Men’s accounts of balancing their personal and professional lives differed from women’s in two ways. First, most of the men stressed that paid work dominated their lives. Women, however, discussed the difficulties of balancing many roles at home, as well as reconciling their home and work lives. Secondly, many men indicated that they had a good balance between paid work and other aspects of their lives. While women discussed current issues balancing their various roles, any issues men had experienced were in the past and no longer impacted them. For example, one male participant said,
‘I’ve got quite a healthy balance. When I worked for the Council I was going home and working at weekends, working at night… and no, I don’t do that now’ (Emslie and Hunt, 161).

Many men with children stated that they experienced the most conflict between their personal and professional lives when their children were young. They claimed to experience problems when “working long hours, weekends, overtime, and working away from home” (Emslie and Hunt, 161). The majority of the men believed the struggles they faced balancing their work and home lives could be solved within the family. Only one man observed that the issue was structural and claimed that there have “‘to be better ways of organizing family life’ (161).

Middle-class men detailed the desire to work long hours in order to establish themselves in their professions or to meet specific job qualifications. Working-class men, contrastingly indicated that they needed to work longer hours in order to bring home more money for their household. One working-class man commented that working longer hours restricted him from participating in some of his children’s activities. Though the researchers noted that men did regret missing important parts of their children’s early lives, middle-class men stated that the financial gain from working long hours had been necessary and important. Some testimonies from the men suggested that their time spent working placed a significant strain on their relationships with their wives. For example, one man said, ‘At that time, the kids were young, so [my wife] had to look after [the children] all herself at night. I was working till 10 or 11 o’clock at night. She obviously had a problem doing it. I didn’t realize the full extent at the time’ (Emslie and Hunt, 162).
Though many men claimed to experience difficulties balancing their lives, not all did. One male participant in particular had no problems coordinating his different roles, as his job only required him to work until lunchtime. This arrangement allowed him to spend time with his family and to have a social life (Emslie and Hunt, 162). This man’s situation suggests that a structural problem exists for both men and women professionals. Work hours are such that both genders struggle to successfully balance their personal and professional lives (162).

In attempting to have it all by balancing their work and home lives, women may struggle with “the catch-22 of female ambition,” which ensnares women who attempt to gain success in powerful positions. Sheryl Sandberg claimed that in order to advance at work, women should abandon their likeability. However, this insistence is unsubstantiated and futile. Sandberg fails to account for the “catch-22 of female ambition, [which says that] to succeed, [women] need to be liked, but to be liked, [women] need to temper their success” (Friedman, 1). Therefore, it is impractical for women to disregard their likeability, as the ability for women to gain positions in power largely depends on their likeability. This catch-22 presents a dangerous trap for women who are assertive and dominant in the workplace, while being advantageous to men who can succeed without fear of how they are perceived. Hillary Clinton perfectly illuminates this double bind women face, as she has been viewed more favorably only when she has been unsuccessful.

When she has been active in Congress, her favorability ratings have been low. During the 1992 Democratic primary, Clinton’s approval ratings were low; however, when she stood by her husband, President Bill Clinton, amid rumors of an affair with
Monica Lewinski, her approval ratings rose above 50 percent. As she became more invested in social events and family-friendly issues, Hillary Clinton’s likeability increased. Then, she announced her desire to run for Senate for the state of New York and her ratings plummeted. After her election, she behaved as if she were unknown, as opposed to other male senators who acted as if they were global celebrities. She poured coffee for male senior senators, and her approval ratings increased again. Her appointment as Secretary of State under the Obama administration was met with applause, and many are now anticipating her run for presidential office in 2016 (Friedman, 1).

Clinton’s relationship with the American public has spurred many female politicians to realize that, in order to be successful and not be labeled as bossy or commanding, they must present themselves as underdogs. In acknowledgement of the population’s swaying opinion of her, Clinton said, ‘I choose my cards. I play them to the best of my ability. Move on to the next hand’ (Friedman, 2). While many politicians do indeed use a careful strategy to be elected, Clinton’s strongest critics claim she is a “conniving, nepotistic, carpetbragging chameleon” in being elected for something she is not. Indeed, they are right (Friedman, 2).

As a powerful and successful woman, Clinton has been forced to play into the commonly held stereotypes that women are docile, fragile, and powerless. While a successful political strategy, this method suggests to Clinton’s followers that women are not strong or authoritative, but are simply in high power positions out of sheer luck and through the help of others, generally men. This strategy contributes to the confidence gap between men and women and impacts the amount of women who seek high power
jobs (Friedman, 2).

The confidence gap refers to evidence that suggests women are significantly less assured than men and that they lack the confidence required to succeed in their professions. Though women have made progress and their competence in professional settings is very apparent, men have continued to be promoted more rapidly and paid more. Though having children has been proven to alter a woman’s career trajectory, as was shown by Ann Marie Slaughter, cultural and institutional barriers largely contribute to obstacles to women’s success.

One barrier to success, though, that many fail to acknowledge is women’s lack of confidence. Many incredibly successful women, such as investment bankers and journalists, have indicated tremendous self-doubt in how they achieved their professional standing. The vast confidence gap separates men from women and causes women to view themselves as unprepared for promotions or exams and to generally underestimate their capabilities. For example, Sheryl Sandberg said, ‘There are still days I wake up feeling like a fraud, not sure I should be where I am’ (Kay and Shipman, 6).

Specific figures suggest that men initiate salary negotiations four times more frequently than women. When women do ask for raises, they ask for approximately 30 percent less money than men. In studies conducted to research why this is, men have been found to overestimate their abilities, while women underestimate them. Performances for both men and women do not differ in quality, however. Women were shown to ask for promotions only when they thought they met 100 percent of the qualifications, whereas men apply when they feel they possess 60 percent of the
qualifications. This research suggests that men do not hesitate to lean in, whereas women only do so when they feel perfectly qualified.

As women observe men receiving promotions more often than women, women begin to feel that they will not get the job, so they fail to even apply. Victoria Brescoll, of Yale’s School of Management said, ‘Women think they are not totally competent in the area, so they’re not going to go for it. They end up going into less competitive fields, like human resources or marketing. They don’t go for finance, investment banks, or senior-track faculty positions’ (Kay and Shipman, 6).

These significant differences among confidence between men and women can be attributed to both nature and nurture. While male and female brains are more alike than different, there is a difference in structure and chemistry between the sexes. These differences may encourage patterns of thinking and behavior, which could impact confidence. The amygdalae, the source for the brain’s primitive fear centers, differ between men and women. The amygdalae are responsible for emotional memory and response to stressful situations. According to recent studies, women activate the amygdalae more often than men in reaction to negative emotional stimuli. This response suggests that women are more likely than men to develop strong emotional attachments to negative events. This observation can be applied to studies of behavioral sciences, in which women have been shown to dwell on things that have previously gone wrong. The anterior cingulate cortex also displays key differences between men and women. This area of the brain enables humans to understand errors and weigh options. It is larger in women than in men. Though evolutionarily these differences seem to be beneficial to women, they may negatively impact women in the
workplace (Kay and Shipman, 16).

Hormonal influences on cognition and behavior also account for differences between men and women. Estrogen, the main hormone for women, encourages bonding and connection, while discouraging conflict and risk taking ventures, which can serve to hinder confidence in the work place. Contrastingly, testosterone impacts speed, strength, muscle size, and competitiveness. It also encourages risk taking and demonstrating one’s power. A research study conducted at Cambridge University followed male traders with an average income greater than 5 million dollars at a London hedge fund. Using saliva samples, researchers measured male testosterone levels at the start and completion of each workday. On days when traders had higher levels of testosterone, they made riskier decisions. When these decisions were successful, testosterone levels spiked. Following a six-day winning streak, one trader's testosterone level increased by 74 percent. Testosterone fuels confidence for men that women seem to lack (Kay and Shipman, 17).

Nurture also has a significant impact on the confidence gap and can be observed in elementary school classrooms, playgrounds, and sports fields. In school, many girls are rewarded for behaving with docility, as opposed to the rambunctiousness and enthusiasm of boys. According to Carol Dweck, a psychology professor at Stanford University, girls are more easily socialized and receive a large amount of praise for being perfect. Once they receive approval for behaving well, girls begin to crave praise for their good behavior. However, when the praise occurs, girls learn to avoid risks and errors. This failure to take risks or make mistakes is detrimental to these girl’s future careers, as psychologists now claim that risk taking, failure, and perseverance are
critical to confidence building. Dweck’s research on the issue concluded that boys received 8 times more criticism for their behavior than girls. This scolding leads boys to take failure in stride. She says, ‘Boys’ mistakes are attributed to a lack of effort, while girls come to see mistakes as a reflection of their deeper qualities’ (Kay and Shipman, 18). Due to this socialization, boys grow up being encouraged to take risks, which then encourages them to seek more opportunities in their professional lives.

In this paper, I analyzed the “have it all” mentality to evaluate whether women can indeed be successful in their personal and professional lives. I began by evaluating Hillary Clinton’s potential run for presidential office in 2016 and suggested that it is imperative to the feminist movement that she run. I then discussed Sheryl Sandberg’s lean in theory and introduced arguments as to how simply leaning in will not suffice in helping women find success personally and professionally. These counterarguments centered on the “catch-22 of female ambition” and the confidence gap between men and women. Unfortunately it appears that women cannot have it all with the way society is currently structured, as women must constantly struggle to advance in their professions while being present in their children’s lives.
Works Cited


