

By Jyoti Mishra

Having it all

I grew up in urban India in a middle-class family, the daughter of two hard-working professionals. They always encouraged me. They never objected when I did mostly what boys did, like be the only girl in astronomy camp. My closest friends were boys, and we formed study groups and competed for the best grades. When I pursued graduate school in the United States for computational neurobiology, I was the only woman in my international class. A decade later, I'm a happy academic at a time when many leave this field.

Can women have it all? I'm a scientist and university faculty member. I aspire for more, yet I don't feel I've made any sacrifices in my career or family life to get here. In that sense, I *do* have it all. This is my perspective.

My all is different from your all. Genetic and life histories have shaped our brains to be unique, so why should our objectives be the same? Identify *your* all and work hard to achieve it. Follow *your* dream.

All changes over time. I am in my vigorous 30s, and I perceive life as long. Yes, the career clock and biological clock clash now, but there is time to achieve what I want in both my work and family. At my university, there are impressive women leaders who are older, with fewer family responsibilities. They illustrate that women lead ambitious lives after the children are grown. I expect a time to come when I immerse myself in my career even more deeply than I do now. For now, I am content with no internal dilemmas and no mental resources wasted on guilt, yet I am also eager to surge ahead.

"Lean in" to every moment. I interpret Sheryl Sandberg's message to apply to every demand of daily life, at work and at home. Be attentive in the present and make sound decisions on the issue at hand. Don't let yourself be distracted by the day's other tasks. When parenting, parent. When working, work.

Climbing small mountains makes big ones easier. Challenging research projects can take 5 years or more to complete. Raising a child takes far longer. Our brains generate the same reward signals when we conquer any challenge, big or small, so I take on smaller challenges outside work. My daily physical workouts are diverse—running, yoga, Pilates, strength training—and I progress by focusing on today's form and peak performance. Time spent on



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My in-laws cheer my successes. Bosses and mentors express confidence in me. I love to see my son look forward to day care, which is right next to my work. We hire help for mundane house chores, liberating time to focus on what really matters. It takes a village!

It makes a village. Enabled by their villages, women and men of my generation are finding success and contentment, reaping the benefits of hard work sown by previous generations of village makers. Now it is our time to sprout new villages—to become confident role models for junior colleagues and students, the best parents we can be to our children, and supportive members of our broader families. Women need women to show how it can be done—how not to succumb to multitasking demands or be overcome by guilt, how to instead take delight in the diverse experiences and challenges life brings and feel that we do have it all. ■

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