

even the people who “have it all” don’t have it all.

Everyone knows a “Wonder Woman” who has the body, career and hot boyfriend, but have you ever stopped to think if they’ve found contentment? By Candice Chung

Take a look at the works of any self-respecting philosopher and you’ll come across a raft of literature explaining why the world isn’t as happy a place as it could be. Lately, though, I’ve come to suspect that it all boils down to one basic problem: We don’t play enough drinking games.

This minor epiphany occurred to me while hanging out with a group of new workmates. Rather than engage in a little polite ol’ chitchat, we went to a nearby pub for a game of “Never have I ever”*. Within half an hour, we had discovered that most of us, at some point, have cried at work, stalked our ex on Facebook, and Googled each other at least once. And just like that, a solid (if drunken) bond was forged.

the haves and have-nots.

Ironically, while it’s considered socially acceptable to reveal our vulnerabilities to new friends after a drink or three, very few of us actually open up about the private struggles in our day-to-day lives.

At the same time, we continue to look to friends, workmates (and sometimes even strangers) for the key to keeping it all together. How is it that some women seem to effortlessly juggle a great job, jet off on amazing holidays and shack up with intimidatingly perfect men? If

chronic envy weren’t stressful enough, we’ve also been brought up to believe that, “Yes, it’s possible to have it all!”. This has many of us lying awake at night wondering where we’ve fallen short.

what lies beneath.

To avoid spiralling into a cycle of self-doubt, CLEO’s resident psychologist, Jacqui Manning (mindadvantage.com.au), believes it’s useful to reflect on why it is we feel compelled to make these assumptions in the first place.

“We live in a culture that’s so busy and fast-paced that we don’t stop and take the time to look deeply within – both at ourselves and those around us,” Manning explains. “We tend to think we’re the only ones with hang-ups because society, as a whole, isn’t truthful about feelings and insecurities. For instance, if someone asks you how you are, it’s likely that your automatic response would be, ‘Great, thanks!’, when really, deep down, you might be feeling anxious or even depressed.”

Manning reveals that it’s not uncommon for those at the top of their field to suffer from feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy. Yes, even successful women question their abilities. “The outside world would never guess that these people have their own personal issues, but they do because we’re all human.”

chasing “the myth”.

Virginia Haussegger, journalist and author of *Wonder Woman: The Myth Of “Having It All”* (Allen & Unwin, \$26.95), believes we are conditioned to strive for success from an early age. “We encourage young women to believe not only can they ‘have it all’, but that having it all is a good thing, too,” she explains.

“One of the things that has come out of the second wave of the feminism movement is a push for female achievement – which is great. But I think we’ve over-hyped the message at the expense of valuing other important aspects of our lives, such as contentment and wellbeing.”

In her book, Haussegger details the pain and frustration of confronting childlessness in her late thirties – and wonders how much of it was due to “a career woman’s creeping non-choice”. “Unlike many of our [mothers], we could ‘have it all,’” she writes. “We just had to work out how the hell to fit it all in, and make it all work. For the most part, we can’t, but that doesn’t stop us from trying.”

The award-winning journalist has also found that women are more prone than our male counterparts to focus on what we don’t have – no matter how successful we may be. “Women are very good at beating up on themselves ... We’re tough on ourselves and tough on each other.”

“For example, when you look at job interviews, generally, women will often apologise in a meeting for only having 80 per cent of the skill requisites. But when a man is interviewed for a position where he might only have 50 per cent of the qualifications, he’ll often sit there and tell you about how good he is.”

not as well-off as you think.

Our own quests for perfection aside, what’s it like for real women who appear to “have it all”? For Rebecca, 27, running her own online fashion company has always been a lifelong dream, but she admits that few people realise how much hard work goes on behind the scenes.

“People see me loving my job in fashion, but they don’t see me working at 4am in my PJs,” she says. “I’m [at work] from 8am to 8pm every day, and occasionally on the weekend. It’s quite frustrating when people on the outside think of it as an easy and glamorous life.”

Jo, 33, agrees that the concept of having everything in life is a flawed one. Despite travelling around the world three times, owning a home, and running her own successful business, the ambitious young mum has trouble finding time for all the competing priorities in her life.

“I’ve had to come to terms with the fact that I can’t do everything – even though it’s against my core personality.”

In the end, Manning believes it’s helpful to prioritise your goals and remember to put your wellbeing first. And, should you ever come across someone who seemingly has it all, try cornering them with a bottle of tequila and a few rounds of “Never have I ever”. It beats boring chitchat and existential philosophy – Aristotle would be proud. □
*Google game for instructions.

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