

Jacinda Ardern and Whether Women Can Really 'Have It All'

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern certainly hasn't been on my list of favorite people for the last several years, largely due to her draconian COVID policies on masks, vaccines, and quarantines, and her "government knows best" attitude. But I finally had something to applaud her for the other day when she announced her resignation, effective Feb. 7.

"I know what this job takes, and I know that I no longer have enough in the tank to do it justice. It is that simple," [Ardern said](#). "I am leaving because with such a privileged role comes responsibility. The responsibility to know when you are the right person to lead, and also, when you are not," Ardern continued, explaining that she was now planning on spending more time with her young daughter, as well as finally getting married to her long-time fiancé, Clarke Gayford.

Talking heads, [such as Tucker Carlson](#), suggest that Ardern realizes her approval is in fast decline, and decided to quit rather than lose an election. There's likely a strong element of truth to that assessment, but I happen to like the BBC's analysis a little better. "Jacinda Ardern resigns," the BBC headline ran, continuing with "Can women really have it all?"

Although some women threw back their heads and howled at such a question, I think it's a worthy one to consider.

Can women hold down a fulltime job, even a high-profile, demanding one like prime minister? Sure.

Can they do it while raising children—orchestrating their

schedules, ensuring they get a proper education—maintaining a home, and nurturing a strong marriage? Of course.

But will they be able to become that superwoman without burning out, feeling like they're always behind, and never feeling like they're doing a good job, that they're raising their children right or spending enough time with them? Probably not.

Unfortunately, we make women these days feel like they *have* to do it all, that they have to be a success and go to college, that they're failures if they can't juggle two jobs: wife/mother and fulltime working woman. That's unfair and unhealthy, not only for women, but for their children as well.

In Louisa May Alcott's book, *An Old-fashioned Girl*, the main character, Polly gets a glimpse of two mothers. The first is her friend's mother, Mrs. Shaw, an elegant, worldly-wise woman who is more concerned with keeping up with appearances than with caring for her children:

Polly was remembering how, when Mrs. Shaw came home that day in her fine visiting costume, and Maud ran to welcome her with unusual affection, she gathered up her lustrous silk and pushed the little girl away saying, impatiently, 'Don't touch me, child, your hands are dirty.' Then the thought had come to Polly that the velvet cloak didn't cover a right motherly heart, that the fretful face under the nodding purple plumes was not a tender motherly face, and that the hands in the delicate primrose gloves had put away something very sweet and precious.

The second woman was her own mother, a simple lady, not wealthy in material goods, but one focused on her children at home, ever-ready to tend to their needs and cares:

She thought of another woman, whose dress never was too fine for little wet cheeks to lie against, or loving little arms

to press; whose face, in spite of many lines and the gray hairs above it, was never sour or unsympathetic when children's eyes turned towards it; and whose hands never were too busy, too full or too nice to welcome and serve the little sons and daughters who freely brought their small hopes and fears, sins and sorrows, to her, who dealt out justice and mercy with such wise love. 'Ah, that's a mother!' thought Polly, as the memory came warm into her heart, making her feel very rich, and pity Maud for being so poor.

Today's women aren't necessarily delineated as the rich and poor mothers that this old-fashioned story depicts, but in many ways, they mirror these women perfectly. Society praises the women like Jacinda Ardern who daily run out the door in crisp, expensive business suits, pulling away from the sticky fingers that reach for a hug, because they are doing something useful, something powerful, something needed in the business world.

Society looks down their noses at the women who stay home, however, living on the single income their husbands bring home, getting gray hairs, not wearing professional clothes, surrounded by children all day.

But if we were to look at these two women through the eyes of their children, such as little Polly, which would receive the greater praise?

Jacinda Ardern may not be coming home because she genuinely wants to spend time with her (hopefully soon) husband and child, but I hope that in doing so, she comes to realize what a gift such focused motherhood is. Would that more women would do the same, shunning the praise of the world to become the focused, loving, caring confidants to their children at home.

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This [article](#) was originally published by [Annie Holmquist](#) on

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