

Superwoman

Getting her priorities straight

"The superwoman seems quite extraordinary as she manages the multiple roles of wife, mother, career woman, homemaker, daughter and friend," observes Nicki Roth Atwood, senior counselor at the University of Michigan Counseling Services.

"But it's not just the media that promotes her image. Consciously or unconsciously, many women hold up the superwoman as an ideal, even though they recognize that she is often stressed and overcommitted."

"A superwoman is not a 'new-age' phenomenon," Ms. Atwood asserts. "She is a blend of the old and new, a woman who was brought up on traditional values of home and motherhood and is now confronted with modern ideas about the limitlessness of her life choices."

"When a television commercial shows a woman breezing in from her job to sort the laundry or pop a roast in the oven, it reinforces the notion that it's all right for a woman to pursue a career, as long as she can still handle the household."

"Her mothering abilities are always called in question. Consequently, the superwoman tends to overcompensate with her children. She feels overly responsible for the job, the house, the kids and more reluctant than ever to ask for help."

FOR THE WOMAN caught in the superwoman syndrome, Ms. Atwood notes, people who could provide help often represent new sources of conflict. These include parents, husbands and women friends.

"If the daughter veers toward academic or professional achievement, if she postpones having children, she and her mother may find they have little in common," she says. "Tension develops and at a time when she really needs familial support, the superwoman feels estranged and resentful. She may feel insecure about her competence as a woman because she plays the role differently than she was brought up to."

The superwoman also has problems with the men in her life.

"The consensus I get is that men in general have not figured out if they are intrigued by the independent goal-oriented woman or threatened by her," she says. "For most women the egalitarian two-career marriage is more an ideal than reality. Relationships evolve and there is still much uncertainty and ambiguity in the expectations of both sexes. Do they want to throw out the old rules, create new ones or play both sets?"

"Finding a compatible, supportive partner to share responsibilities is difficult. And until she does, the superwoman remains overcommitted and frustrated."

Finally, women friends, once a source of support and camaraderie, are becoming scarce, Ms. Atwood notes. For the superwoman, they are a luxury.

"In the past, groups of women formed because of similarity of life choices such as the neighborhood coffee klatch or women's auxiliaries to men's groups. Now women's groups tend to be more task oriented than social functions," she remarks.

HOW DOES ONE escape the superwoman trap? Not by limiting life choices but by putting them in perspective, Ms. Atwood says. The key is to set priorities and avoid trying to do it all perfectly. Her recommendations:

- Be clear about your priorities and accomplish things in order of their importance. Don't overcommit yourself. Learn to say "no" and to say "help." Be flexible and change your priorities as necessary.

- Negotiate with other busy people and pool your resources. Exchange services with neighbors and friends.

- Build in time for rest and relaxation. Take a break when you're under stress — a morning off work or a mini weekend vacation.

- Avoid articles like "10 minutes a day to keep the house spotless" and "five easy steps to gourmet cooking."

They tend to reinforce the superwoman syndrome and make you feel inadequate to boot.



Pat Bordman

Know what your kids are watching?

If you want your children to see a kangaroo, you'll soon have to take them to the zoo. After April 20, "Captain Kangaroo," the longest-running children's television show, will no longer be seen in the metropolitan Detroit area.

TV is a fact of life. In the United States, more homes have televisions than have indoor plumbing.

Our children have never known life without television. In fact, the average child watches more than 24 hours of TV per week.

Since it is so much a part of their lives, children should have available to them entertaining, consistent, responsible programs. Networks should be providing this as part of their programming package.

But, ABC, NBC, CBS and our local affiliates hear only one sound — the click of the knob as it tunes into commercials.

Some 6.2 million children nationwide watch "Captain Kangaroo." But their needs take second place to ratings. And the Captain's ratings haven't been high enough.

The fault is not entirely the station's. "Captain Kangaroo" has not changed significantly in the 25 years it has been on the air. It is still the same sweet, low-key, high-quality, thoughtful show it always was.

But the children it tries to reach have changed. They have become used to razzle-dazzle, lots of fantasy and a pace that would tire even a baby roo.

So we find that in the Detroit viewing area, "Captain Kangaroo" is being watched by a scant 16,000 households. In that time period, more televisions are tuned into "Casper," a cartoon rerun on independent Channel 50.

IT IS NOT in the child's best interest to allow him to watch any program and as many programs as he may please. Nor is it realistic to unplug the set permanently as some advocate.

The parent can, however, use the television to enrich the child's cultural,



PAT BORDMAN

emotional and experiential background. Shows must be selected and approved because they meet parents' standards.

Rely on your judgments and stick to them. If a program is nonsense, tell your child so and insist he either watch something better or turn off the set.

If you care about the programs available to your children, write to Bob McBride, Channel 2's general manager. The decision his station reached concerning "Captain Kangaroo" could be modified in the fall when other scheduling changes will be made.

Write: Bob McBride, Channel 2, P.O. Box 2000, Southfield 48037.

Patricia Bordman, a freelance writer and photographer, has a master's degree in early childhood education. She has taught elementary school and conducted workshops and lectures. Mrs. Bordman welcomes suggestions and comments. Please write her c/o the Observer & Eccentric Newspaper, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150. © PATRICIA BORDMAN

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