

Women and their role in society: what has femininity got to do with it?

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I always thought ballet was the epitome of feminine expression: the gracefulness, elegance, and beauty of it all. I myself have done ballet for 12 years. During that time though, I discovered that ballet is the apex of femininity in yet another way: it requires enormous stamina, self-control, willpower and strength—all the while making it look absolutely effortless. I think that innate aesthetic athleticism makes ballet not only beautiful, but incredibly impressive to watch. I believe that at the heart of ballet is the essence of who women are and what our role in society is.

I've just finished university, and am now preparing to enter the career jungle. During this time, I've begun to ask myself, what is my role in society? Indeed, what is my role as a woman in this modern world? What is my life dance going to be?

To be honest, I feel daunted when I think about a woman's role in society. Partly because I feel I don't know the answer, partly because I feel as though there is only one right answer—one that I might get wrong. However, when I think more deeply about it, I know I feel daunted by it because of the hefty responsibility it poses for me as a woman—something I need to live up to that I might not yet be ready for.

Women have not had a real role in society for much of history—aside from being designated family-raisers and homemakers. Just as there are stereotypes of what women should do in society, there is a lack of guidance as to what our role and potential really are. This is the problem; we don't know our value and true role as women.

Even with our newfound rights, I realized that our title or profession is not the end all, be all, of how we are meant to contribute to this modern world. It's how we think, how we act, how we relate to people, improve, and inspire. It's actually a much more empowering thought than I had imagined.

But towards what are we contributing? Since the goal of history, and of all advocates for positive change, has been to bring about a world of peace and happiness, we need to know what that is, and what our role is in creating it.

I would say that a peaceful, happy world is one made up of great relationships—beautiful, fulfilling, uplifting, wholesome relationships. We can see how our world largely displays the opposite of great relationships, resulting in a tormented global society. Well, with women representing half of the world's population, we women need to take 50 percent, if not more, of the responsibility to accomplish that mission to create loving, lasting relationships.

I believe women can take center stage and accomplish this major goal of creating a peaceful society by

doing three main things: owning our femininity, honing our abilities, and giving back to our communities.

The first thing we have to do is own our femininity. How do we accomplish that?

For me, being a woman means to know who I am, create myself each day, and be strong in not only my feminine qualities but in my characteristics as a person and to share that with the world. In that sense, I want to be a ballerina in all my feminine glory (and that “feminine glory” is unique to each person).

It’s not so much about what our role in society is as it is in the clarity we bring to it. Whatever we’re doing, be it staying at home with children, working part time, focusing on a career, juggling several responsibilities at once, or just facing difficulties each day, we can make a huge impact just by being clear with who we are.

My main source of clarity growing up was my mom. Maybe not for all of us, but often it is our mothers who can be so clear about things. One time I struggled with a big crush on someone at school. When I finally gathered the courage to tell my mom about it, the first thing she asked me was, “do you want to marry him?” She wasn’t serious of course, and I answered “of course not!” with a scoff. But the way she said it was with a knife-like urgency, cutting through the confusion I was swimming in, imploring me to consider my future more carefully: that if I don’t see this boy in my future, then all this fuss is a waste of time. I needed to remember my value system, which was the commitment to my future spouse and honesty to my loved ones.

Another example of that cutting clarity in women is when the recent riots in Baltimore occurred. A mother saw her son on TV rioting, she marched over to where he was, and dragged him home. Generally, it is a mother’s instinct to remind children of who they are.

Of course, not all mothers or women are clear enough in themselves to guide others. I want to point out though that each woman, mother or not, has the potential to be that motherly figure for herself and for others—to be the clear light in the dark corners of our families, workplaces, and society. It’s all about knowing our unique selves, owning our true femininity, and being clear in our values and actions.

The second thing is honing our abilities.

I feel women have a great capacity for passion and compassion. This particularly comes out in making connections with people. However, I’m not only talking about women connecting with people, but women being the facilitators of that connection—to help others make connections within their own minds and to inspire and help them make sense of the world. This ability to connect the dots in one’s own heart drives passion.

When we talk about women being natural leaders, I think the best kind of leader creates a diplomatic environment for each person to discover their own passion along with an understanding of whatever their vision is. Women are, in my view, particularly able to do this.

I really admire my mom, as you might gather. I admire her passion, compassion, perseverance, and strength, and her ability to make it look effortless. Observing my mom as my homeschool teacher and a leader, I find she has become the best juggler of things—being the educator, harmonizer, and overall breadwinner. Women need to hone their unique abilities—be it a particular passion, hobby, skill or particular character. Then such women can be better equipped to offer something truly beautiful and seemingly effortless to society.

The third thing is giving back to our community.

Women have amazing abilities that can be honed and ultimately shared. I believe that women’s role in society is to bring harmony, balance, care, the bigger picture, and a higher perspective in all areas of society. This is already happening in the social enterprise industry.

My husband, Chris, works with social enterprises, which are basically social-minded businesses. It is a different way of approaching business where care, conscientiousness, sustainability, and the wellbeing of the community take precedence, not just the CEO’s wallet.

Interestingly enough, there are more women than men in executive positions in this industry; whereas, the opposite tends to be true in all other areas of business. The general state of business up to now has been solely that of profit-driven businesses, which I think we can all agree has been relatively unsustainable, breeding greed, selfishness, and depression.

The business world, like all other aspects of society, calls for a more diplomatic, vision-oriented way of building the economy, leading and working with people. And I would call this fluid, peace-making, win-win style of leadership based on more feminine qualities.

Those three things: owning our femininity, honing our abilities, and giving back to our community, will ultimately help us reach the goal of fulfilling, peaceful relationships, because we will be more secure, graceful, selfless individuals.

However, by far the most important, peace-making effort I've seen my mom and many other well-adjusted and successful women make is to nurture their relationships with their husbands and families. Without their husbands and the relationships they have cultivated, they would probably not have been as fulfilled or successful as they are now. They have shown me that you can balance and care for not only your dreams or jobs, but all your relationships as well—that each can thrive with the proper care and investment.

I believe women can make a splash in society simply by being instigators of a higher vision for positive change through sharing their deepest passions and strongest values.

I implore you today to listen to and own your hearts and intuition. Listen, nurture, care for, and be kind to others. Be wise and lead in each of your circles of life with love and respect. Let's keep practicing these things so that one day, having amazing relationships with each other can actually be effortless.