

Reading Group Questions

Here are some of the many questions that came up for me when I was writing *The Handbag and Wellies Yoga Club*.

I'd love to hear your point of view. Please post your feedback on my blog so we can start a debate.

Choices:

Can a woman really have it all? What does 'all' look like? Do you want a full time job? Do you want to run your own business? Do you want children? Do you have trouble finding the time for friends and fun?

What could be done differently to help women have it all?

Government legislation?

Employer policy?

Changes in attitudes towards working women or perhaps stay at home fathers?

Here's what I'd say to a woman in her early twenties.

Do you agree? Disagree? What would you add or takeaway?

1. Do a Four Corners collage – get really clear about where you want to be at forty or fifty– what does your life look like in terms of children, work, your relationship and home?
2. You stand a much better chance of finding a good man when you are young – there are more of them around! Make finding him your priority, not staying in the office every night.
3. When you find him have kids ASAP, ideally before you hit 35.
4. If you haven't found Him yet have a fertility test (day three oestrogen and FSH and an ultrasound). Freeze your eggs if necessary (the younger you are when you freeze them the better.)
5. If time is running out then consider whether children are so important to you that you'd be prepared to be a single mum (using sperm donation/a friend.)
6. If you want children choose a career that doesn't require you to be in the office all night or take you away from home all the time. Ideally find something where you can work part time/from home/flexi hours.
7. Consider being self employed – that way no one can tell you that you need to stay late in the office except yourself and baby. If that's not possible look for an employer who values their employees' life outside work as much as their life inside work.

Fertility:

According to Sylvia Ann Hewlett's research 89% of women think that they can get pregnant well into their forties.

Did you also believe that getting pregnant in your forties was not going to be a problem? What do you think gave rise to those beliefs?

Do you think anything should be done to make women aware of the decline in fertility over time, or is it the responsibility of the individual to educate themselves? If you do think something should be done, what should it be and what form should it take?

A government television campaign?

Posters in doctors' surgeries?

Magazine editorial?

Website?

Try designing an advertising campaign!

Were you aware that men also experience a decline in their fertility? Do you think that anything should be done to make them more aware of this?

Egg donation

What's your view of women who use egg donation? Are they to be admired as the Che Guevaras of Wombs or are they in a troublesome moral maze?

Do you think women, especially celebrities, should go public about their use of donated eggs?

Given that there's a 3 year wait in the UK for eggs, should the government encourage more women to donate? How could they do this?

Do you think parents should be open about using egg donation? Should they tell the child? When should they tell? Who should they tell? Friends? Family?

Egg freezing

Should single women freeze their eggs when they are young so that they can have a baby when they've met the right man?

What about women with a partner – is it ok for them to use egg freezing to maximise their career years?

Childlessness

I suggest that there be a reinvention of what it means to be childless. To recap on my proposals:

1. *Acceptance*: We can choose our response to infertility – we can make our lives about how we can't have kids, or we can accept our position and make our lives about who we *are* and what we *can* bring to the world.

2. *Universal motherhood*: Being without children of our own gives us the freedom, time and enthusiasm to support other women who do have children, and to form loving relationships with those children.

3. *'I'm every woman'*: In this age of independent city living we bitch about what we do and don't have: 'why shouldn't I take a year off to bond with my baby?', 'why should she get maternity leave when I, a childless woman, am left running the office?' Viewing our female friends as manifestations of ourselves, of other choices we could make – to have children, to not have children, to succeed in business, to teach yoga, to write – means that we get to achieve anything and everything we desire.

What do you think of these suggestions?

Perhaps you find them idealistic?

Do you have any other ideas?

What would be the practical ways in which these ideas could be put into play?

What's your view of women who have chosen not to have children? Is it simply a natural evolution of society? What might be the consequences?

Being single over forty

Why are so many forty something women still single? Is it us or is it the men?

Is it that we think we don't need a man?

Is it that our expectations are too high?

Are we self important/selfish/emotionally immature, putting our own needs before others?

Are we 'too' independent?

Are men scared of economically independent women?

Have we women got our priorities wrong?