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## Head's Message: American Women: Unhappy, part 2

by Susanna A. Jones



My column last week focused on the annual United States General Social Survey along with numerous other surveys which indicate that, on the whole, women are less happy than men. I promised that I would continue the discussion of Marcus Buckingham's research on women who bucked the unhappiness trend to find happiness, success, and satisfaction in their lives. You may recall that in his book, *Find Your Strongest Life: What the Happiest and Most Successful Women Do Differently*, Buckingham makes four recommendations based on his research. Last week, I discussed the first two:

1. **Focus on moments, more than goals, plans or dreams**
2. **Accept what we find**

This week, I will turn my attention to the second two:

3. **Strive for Imbalance and**
4. **Learn to say "Yes"**

Of all Buckingham's points, #3, "Strive for Imbalance" is my favorite. People tell us all the time to find balance in our lives, an admonition that prompts a reaction of, *pplleeease*. . . Speaking only for myself, balance is realistically impossible. Buckingham's point, though, is that balance should not be our goal; in fact, satisfaction and fulfillment – happiness – comes from, yes, imbalance. What a liberating notion!

The idea here is to focus on those strong moments, the moments that reveal your true self, and then turn your energies in those directions. When you are living a life full of the strong moments you will be fulfilled and happy. As Buckingham says, "Pinpoint the strong-moments in each aspect of your life and then gradually target or tilt your life toward them. This means being as deliberate as you can about making them happen." [HuffingtonPost](#), Sept. 28, 2009

By definition this means not trying to do everything, not trying to be all things to all people. If making homemade cookies for that event only stresses you out, don't make cookies. However, if making homemade cookies is fun and feeds your creative spirit, then, by all means bake away. If having a full-time career keeps you energized while staying at home might leave you at loose ends (recognizing, of course, that being a stay-at-home-mother may not be an option for many of us), then I believe you should work. I know my son benefits from my working – I would not make a good full-time mom. Though I immensely admire people who do that well (for example, my sister-in-law who is an outstanding full-time parent of no fewer than five children), I am at peace with the fact that's not me.

I'm sure you can see how the fourth recommendation, Learn to say "Yes" reinforces "striving for imbalance." Just as we're always told to say "no," by contrast, these strong, successful, happy women actually say "yes" to those activities that generate strong moments. If we're going to find the right imbalance, we need to say yes, not no. But not yes, to everything; yes to the right opportunities and the right people. I actually love that this recommendation orients us towards the positive rather than negative, but I'll pursue that line of thinking in another column.

For our girls, this means, again, helping them to identify those strong moments and encouraging them to direct their energies toward what those strong moments reveal about them, and then pursuing activities that engender those strong moments. Saying yes so that they find the right imbalance in their lives. Because they're young, and still have much to explore about the world and about themselves, they should have some trial and error in terms of finding the right imbalance. If we can help them now, as they contemplate their adult lives, think along these lines – in terms of imbalance – hopefully they can get a head start on a happy and fulfilling life.