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In pursuit of true equality

Society should value caregiving as much as breadwinning for both men and women, says Anne-Marie Slaughter who made waves with her 2012 *Atlantic* article on women's worklife balance. **By Anna Teo**

ANNE-MARIE Slaughter mixed things up a bit in her commencement address in May to the graduating classes of Tufts University. She started out giving the young men in the audience advice that's typically given to young women. "I told the young men – think now about how to fit your career and your family together, and think now about how you're going to need flexibility; ask the older men in your life whether they had enough time with you, whether they are satisfied with the amount of time that they had for family, and don't make the same mistakes, because most of them, toward the end of their lives, wished they had more time with their families; they really wished they had that close relationship that you get from being a caregiver, that you get from being actively engaged in your children's lives," she tells BT during a trip here.

"And then I told the young women to be prepared to think about their mates differently and to rethink their vision of masculinity, and I told the parents and grandparents that if their sons supported their wives differently... and that for their daughters, it would be supportive husbands who'd enable their daughters to have their careers."

It was very well received, she says, smiling. "I got a long, standing ovation."

A retired Princeton professor of politics and international relations at 55, Dr Slaughter is president and CEO of New America Foundation, a think tank and civic enterprise

focusing on a wide range of public policy issues, including national security, technology, asset building and energy. She had been director of policy planning for the US Department of State from 2009-2011 under Hillary Clinton and before that, Dean of Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs for seven years. In both posts, she was the first woman in the job. But outside academia and foreign policy circles, she's best known for her July/August 2012 piece in *The Atlantic*, headlined *Why Women Still Can't Have It All*. The article, which quickly became the magazine's most read in its history, went viral worldwide and reignited a debate beyond America about work-family balance and gender roles, that's still ongoing.

Her views have changed

In the article, she talked about why – after two years of commuting between her Washington, DC, workplace and Princeton, where she'd left her husband and two adolescent sons during the week – she gave up her high-powered State Department job when she could have advanced as a top foreign policy official: She found she "could no longer be both the parent and the professional she wanted to be".

Two years since the article, after "a tsunami" of response and more than 150 speeches on the subject, her views have changed. "My own thinking has evolved a great deal since," she told a Singapore audience at a talk organised by the Singapore Management

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER

**President and CEO
New America Foundation**

**Bert G Kerstetter '66 University
Professor Emerita of Politics and Int'l
Affairs, Princeton University**

1958 Born in the US on Sept 27

EDUCATION

**1992 D Phil in Int'l Relations,
Oxford University**
**1985 JD cum laude, Harvard Law
School**
**1982 M Phil in Int'l Relations,
Oxford University**
**1980 AB magna cum laude,
Princeton University**

EMPLOYMENT

**Since Sept 2013: President and CEO
New America Foundation**

2003-2013

**Bert G. Kerstetter '66 University
Professor of Politics and Int'l Affairs,
Princeton**

2009-2011

**Director of Policy Planning,
US Dept of State**

2002-2009

**Dean, Woodrow Wilson School of
Public and Int'l Affairs, Princeton**

2007-2008

**Visiting Fellow, Shanghai Institute for
Int'l Studies**

2002-2004

**President, American Society of Int'l
Law**

1994-2002

**J Sinclair Armstrong Professor of
International, Foreign and Comparative
Law, Harvard Law School**

1997-2002

**Director, Graduate and International
Legal Studies, Harvard Law School**

1993-94

**Professor of Law and Int'l Relations
Univ of Chicago Law School**

1989-93

**Asst Professor of Law and Int'l
Relations,
Univ of Chicago Law School**

1988-89

**Fellow in International Law,
Harvard Law School**

University titled *The Next Phase of the Women's Movement Must be a Men's Movement*.

She now sees it "much more in terms of not of discrimination against women but rather of not valuing the work that women have traditionally done, not valuing the work of care" – and frames the issue as one of "balancing competition and care in our life, in the workplace", for both men and women. In other words, just as women know fully well that their place is now no longer only in the home, and are to be encouraged and supported in their career aspirations, men (and women) must see that it's every bit as important and desirable for Dads to be caregiver or breadwinner.

Speaking to BT, she says: "I would not have written the (*Atlantic*) article today, and I certainly won't use that headline again. It's been a lot of thinking, and a lot of talking and a lot of listening to many men and women, many women who didn't like the article; a lot of letters that

came to me, from men saying, 'You say women don't have it all but we don't have it all because we may have the work side but we don't have the close relationship with our children', and they want it."

She wasn't quite prepared for the deluge of responses to the article that she had written on the premise that feminism had stalled, she says.

"I'd say it was a tsunami; it was just this massive tidal wave of response and conversation so that I don't go anywhere now that people do not come up and talk to me about the article. It really was something that was talked about all over the country and around the world," she says, citing "email, letters, requests for interviews, invitations" from not just across the United States but also Europe, Asia, Africa, even the Middle East.

"I think what happened was – it was very personal, and that meant it was very accessible, so lots of people who might not have read another article on statistics about women related to my circumstances read it... it helped ignite an inter-generational conversation that was just waiting to happen."

Bigger question

And now, "many, many, many more people know me for this than will ever know me for my foreign policy writing", she quips. "I wish I could get people so passionate about foreign policy as well," she adds, laughing. Dr Slaughter, who had "always known", since college, that she wanted to do foreign policy, has received several awards for her policy work, including the Distinguished Service Award for her work leading the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review upon leaving the US State Department.

She's also come to see the gender issue as a much bigger question than why aren't there enough women at the top, she says. The question she would ask now is – Why are there too few women at the top and too many women at the bottom?

"And that's a different question. And once you ask the question that way, you start focusing on something that's going on in society that again is holding women back at the top, but is also pushing too many women to the bottom. Again, that may be a particularly US focus because I doubt Singapore has anything like the rate of poverty we do in terms of single motherhood at the bottom but that's the question I'd ask today. In the United States, those two questions have the same answer."

Real or full equality, she has said elsewhere, is not just about how many women are in top or powerful positions, which is "valuing women on male terms". Rather, true equality will come only when both men and women value caregiving as much as breadwinning or professional success.

"When you say caregiving, the image that comes to mind is, well, why should men want to be doing the housework? But that's not the issue. The issue is – the way we build close bonds with those we love is to care for each other, it's to be the person who's there when the other person needs you, and to be the person who guides the other person... and I'm convinced men want those relationships just as much as women do. Men have been socialised to deny that side of themselves, in the same way that women used to be socialised to deny our competitive sides. Of course,

they (men) take satisfaction providing for the family but providing for your family is not the same as having close relationships with family members."

While there is room for improvement, "in terms of getting women to the top, we've got as far as we can get with women being both, trying to do all the caregiving and also the breadwinning", she says. "It really does have to change, and for men to really step up, then you'll need much bigger changes. The minute men try to step up they're subject to all these same constraints as women – or worse because of the masculinity issue."

For this revolution in "human equality" to happen, changes at the workplace and across society are needed. One change she advocates is the idea of "intervals" – from the world of athletic training, where a series of high-intensity workouts are interspersed with recovery or rest periods.

"Given demographics and economics, we are pushing in the direction of much longer work lives, and it may be feasible to think you could work flat out between (the ages of) 25 and 65, (but) it's not feasible to think you're going to work at the same jobs – for sure not – from 25 to 85. People are going to hold multiple jobs, many more than they used to, that's already happening. And so the only way to do that is to build flexibility, not only into the workplace itself but into the arc of the career and to let people have these periods of intense work and then these periods when they slow down. And as work and careers evolve that way, then it's much easier for men and women to have what Hanna Rosin called the 'seesaw marriage'."

That's where the roles of breadwinner and childcare provider are fluid between husband and wife. "The workplace that understands this and enables it will get much higher quality talent, they will retain these people much better, they will find that they're more productive, and there's a raft of benefits that come with this," says Dr Slaughter, whose husband, a Princeton professor of politics, took care of their two boys during her State Department stint when she saw them only on weekends.

In a "seesaw marriage", one parent actually stays home, or works only part-time, to do most of the childcare duties. Dr Slaughter's husband could do it as a full-time professor because of a flexible work schedule.

"Oh, academia is the best – if you're tenured!" she laughs. "Academia is wonderful, because it's pretty flexible. And I did know, that's what I wrote in my article, I knew that it made a big difference that I was a tenured professor (before joining the State Department), I knew that made it easier. I didn't know how much that made it easier until I experienced what it was like not to have the flexibility."

She cites one statistic she's seen that says that 75 per cent of women CEOs have stay-at-home husbands for at least a period.

"This is not a subject that's talked about; women don't talk about it, men don't talk about it. Women don't get up there and tell other women, 'I made it because of my husband'. I mean, they do in the Sheryl Sandberg sense, where they say, let's have an equal marriage. But the fact is, at the top, it's not an equal marriage. If an equal marriage, it's not an equal division of child(care) and work labour. At the

top, for most people – for the vast majority of women, like the vast majority of men – they have a 'flexible parent' at home. Nobody expects male CEOs to be the lead parent and be CEO; why would you expect female CEOs doing that? Look at what a CEO job requires. It's true, that (among) women who make it to the top, the vast majority actually have a husband who is what I call the lead parent."

On her part, she's always had a family-first mantra as a leader and manager, starting when she became Dean of Woodrow Wilson School at the age of 42. "My policy is – if family comes first, work will not come second, life will come together. In the State Department, I did the same thing, now I do that in New America, and I've never found it not to be true."

It means not only flexible hours but also that "if you write me as an employee and tell me there's a family problem, my response would be – go and take care of it, do whatever you need to do, take care of your family first, make sure that other people can cover for you, of course". And "I've just always found that managing that way, I get very loyal and very high quality employees", she says. "It's easier to recruit people, they stay and they always get the work done. That's what it means in practice, and I've always been repaid a thousand-fold."

Women have come a long way in the drive for equality since the 1960s and 1970s when, growing up in Charlottesville, Virginia, "it was still a heavily sexist society in which being smart was discouraged", says the woman with four top-notch degrees from Princeton, Harvard and Oxford. "Not in my immediate family – my father raised me to have a career, my mother was always very supportive, and that was something I always wanted – but I'd say definitely it took me a long time to be as confident as I am now," she says. "We've made extraordinary progress over my lifetime, I mean, just unimaginable progress, (compared) to my grandmother, for instance, so I have every reason to think that it will continue."

Wanting more

Yet women won't become more equal until men are more equal too, she says.

"And we do not see it that way because we see equality only in terms of one sphere of human activity, and yet that other sphere (care) is essential – to our survival, to our nature; it is absolutely as important, and it's a legacy of traditional gender discrimination to see it as not important because it was women's work, so we devalue it. But if we're equal, then the work that women did is just as important as the work men did, and both men and women should be able to do both. As I said, men need to be more equal. I'd say that – great, so you can be Prime Minister, (but) to not have a close relationship with your own children, with the people who are close to you, that's a real cost, and many men would like a much greater flexibility to have both. They won't want to give up their career aspirations but they deeply want more, and it's the 'more' that women have always had, but wanted the competitive side too."

As she told the young male Tufts graduates in her commencement speech: "Providing care is every bit as important as providing cash."

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