



# A WOMAN'S WORLD

*How does it feel to be FEMALE in 2011? We wanted to know what what gets YOU, the ELLE reader, out of bed in the morning and what keeps you up at night. So we posed the questions, in survey form. The results? Nothing short of INSPIRATIONAL, says Annabel Brog*

ELLE is a state of mind, an interest, an expression of intent, not an age or a postcode or a designer-shoe collection. We are, inevitably, an office of ELLE women. Nonetheless, every day I sit opposite ELLE's junior commissioning editor, Hannah Swerling, and think that if I were to condense brand ELLE down into one woman, Hannah would be it. Smart, darkly funny, socially skilled, she's effortlessly stylish, confident, self-deprecating, interested in fashion, art, literature and culture. She works very hard doing something she loves (for not enough money) and feels blessed to have the opportunity to do so. She is ambitious for the future yet happy in the present, with many goals still to achieve at work, in love and in life.

And, it appears, on analysis of our 2011 survey, that Hannah is indeed typical. That is not to say that we (and Hannah) do not feel fear, insecurity and frustration. Some of us are stuck in career ruts, some are still searching for the right relationship or an escape from the wrong one, but in terms ►

# 69%

## OF YOU CITE THE HAPPINESS OF FRIENDS AND FAMILY AS A PRIORITY

of priorities, dreams and experience, our collective greatest achievement, the one to celebrate, is that we are the first generation of women to strive for, and to achieve, balance.

Just a year ago, the ELLE survey 2010 showed that you were prioritising love and romance. But in just one year, the whole world's social, cultural and financial landscape has changed – and ELLE women with it. As Courtney E Martin explains in *Feminism: Did We Really Get it All?* (page 73), we are not women who are driven to smash through the glass ceiling at huge cost, like our mothers' generation, but nor are we women who value love over independence. In our study, over half of you say being in a relationship is 'important, but not essential' to your happiness, and nearly half (47 per cent) feel the same about work.

We have not lost our ambition. Far from it. We just have different ambitions, more balanced ones. Happiness and wellbeing – our own and that of the people we love – is our priority; professional and romantic fulfilment, the means of achieving it. Close friendships and

Balance doesn't mean a lack of commitment to work – it just means a different, healthier and happier approach to it. Sixty per cent of you say that work is a career, not just a job. We still have professional dreams and aspirations – many women are looking for a change or promotion – yet 44 per cent still say job satisfaction is more important than salary. Dr Power is intrigued that professional status drives just four per cent of us. 'It lends credence to the idea that the financial crash would have been a lot less likely had there been

# 44%

## SAY JOB SATISFACTION IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN SALARY

women to function in these structures' – 71 per cent say it's getting better.

There is a feeling of acceptance about this lingering inequality, which is not to be confused with complacency. 'The glass ceiling does exist; it's just less of an obstacle than it once was,' says Dr Sullivan. We have found that attempting to adopt male attitudes and behaviour in a male-directed system is not the correct route to equality or, more crucially, happiness. Reporter and *Newsnight* presenter Kirsty Wark, a woman who works at the frontline of social commentary and liaises regularly with social leaders, agrees: 'There was a time when women felt they had to behave like a stereotypical male to be equal, and I hope

we are moving away from a ladette culture, which is a different thing [from equality],' she says. 'Women are assertive in different ways. Yes, today we are treated more as equals, but the fundamental fact is – and this isn't an excuse, it's a fact – women are always going to be at

a disadvantage by virtue of their gender. This is a hurdle. It is unfair. But a hurdle is just that. It's something you can, and should, get over.'

The feeling among you is that ►

*'In just one year, the whole world has changed – and the ELLE woman with it'*

a strong support network are essential. In fact, 69 per cent of you cited the happiness of friends and family as a priority in life.

'While it might look like the 1980s "career girl" image has softened, what we are really seeing here is a much more balanced approach to life,' says Dr Nina Power, senior lecturer in philosophy at the University of Roehampton and author of *One Dimensional Woman* (Zero Books).

more women involved in ego-centric jobs such as finance, banking and government.'

And on the subject of male/female balance, while three-quarters of you feel that men and women are not yet equal – unsurprising, says Dr Oriol Sullivan, research reader at Oxford University's Department of Sociology, as 'the [corporate] world is still set up for men to be primary earners and it's difficult for



# ELLEsurvey

‘equality’ in the traditional sense remains out of reach, as goalposts keep moving. But we are creating a world we are happy in. We, as women, should not be judged as if we are men, and should not feel the need to make men operate within *our* criteria. ‘There is another side to this whole equality thing that we don’t really consider,’ agrees Wark, ‘which is that men are not equal to us. They can’t have children, they can’t have the same relationship with a child that a woman can. They are different and so they are not equal.’

Even when it comes to love, the feeling of independence is consistent. Marriage is not the be-all and end-all: most like to feel it will happen for them, but 28 per cent have never even thought about whether they want it, and 13 per cent actively don’t see the need. And although nearly two-thirds want children (in your thirties, ideally), a fifth are not sure. ‘It’s encouraging that family is important,’ says Wark. ‘It shows we are not afraid to be nurturing. The ELLE woman is youthful, she’s up-and-coming and

## 66%

### OF YOU ARE OPTIMISTIC YOU WILL FILL THE GAPS IN YOUR LIFE

want love, romance and babies (if we do). ‘A happy family is important and a lot of men don’t realise this because their work life has alienated them from it.’

It would be naive to think that negotiating our way through our aspirations while striving for balance is stress-free. We are not superwomen. Nearly half of you sleep very well, but that leaves just over half finding it hard to switch off and a tenth using alcohol and pills to help you nod off. The primary cause of worry is money (37 per cent), followed by an anxiety about the impression you make on other people (22

reading your survey responses, we are enjoying the journey and not just waiting for a mythical ‘perfect’ ending. Contentment is an acceptance of the moment and, when asked if you were content professionally, a fifth of you simply said yes, with just over half of women saying ‘Yes, albeit with room for improvement.’ Similarly, 45 per cent are ‘perfectly happy’ with their relationship status – be it single or attached – with 35 per cent feeling happy, but looking for improvement. ELLE women, I salute you. You never fail to impress. ■



*‘There is another side to equality we don’t consider, which is men are not equal to us’*

nothing is stopping her doing what she wants. Work, promotion, children – you can want all of them.’

Dr Sullivan acknowledges this more modern approach to balance – not the high-pressure ideal of ‘having it all’, which only seemed to make women fragment in the attempt to achieve it, but each having what we want and creating a new opportunity to get it. ‘Women do care about their careers and doing well,’ she says. ‘But always putting your work first is a very male thing.’ It’s a relief to know it’s OK not to feel compelled to prove ourselves until we are drained, to hold our heads high and tell the world that, yes, we

per cent) and work stresses (14 per cent). But when asked if you feel you will manage to fill the gap of what you feel is missing in your life, 66 per cent are confident they will. ‘The feeling of optimism comes partly from understanding so many of the things that negatively affected women and used to be common – from casual workplace sexism to domestic violence – which are not tolerated any more,’ says Dr Power. ‘And partly it is more personal and future-oriented, based on the idea that women won’t be held back any more.’

I am proud to be an ELLE woman on this journey. And even prouder that, after

## 75%

### OF YOU FEEL THAT MEN AND WOMEN ARE NOT YET EQUAL