

There's more to life than winning a Nobel Prize

You can learn a lot of things from your mailbox.

You may have already won a million dollars. Homes are fetching record prices in your area. Or that when it comes to life, you are a complete and utter failure.

I learned I was worthless from the latest edition of my college alumni magazine.

A classmate of mine just won the Nobel Prize. Looking at his heroic, chiseled profile, he's the quintessential Prometheus, scaling Mt. Olympus and bringing back the fire of scientific knowledge to warm humanity.

Instead of being grateful that his discovery may lead to a cure for cancer, all I can think of is "So, Barry, what have you done lately?"

What is it with men and ambition?

Yes, women can be just as ambitious and achieve fame and fortune comparable to men. But it's obvious to anyone not stuck in the intellectual swamp of political correctness that burning, driving professional ambition is more of a guy thing.

It is men who are more likely to emphasize their professional careers at the expense of other aspects of their lives.

It is men who are more likely to equate personal esteem with professional success. It is men who are more likely to value fame, power and wealth as important life goals.

It is men who are more likely to obsess over how they measure up on those benchmarks compared to others of their gender. And it is men who, like myself, are more likely to see the success of others as evidence of their own inadequacy.

Such thoughts are, of course, stupid. Billions of people never win Nobel Prizes. The success of others doesn't have anything to do with you, whether or not you have anything in common with them.

But there's something primal that kicks in when you hear that your friend wrote a bestseller, that so-and-so's kid got into Yale, or that loser you knew in high school just took his company public.

A lot of it, particularly with men, must be human nature.

Women can bear children. Whatever else they choose to do, it's inherent in who they are. It'd be the height of idiocy to say that raising children is all women care about, but



OPINION
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it would be equally foolish to deny that childbearing significantly affects the choices women find satisfying and how they set up their lives.

Men can't bear children, so we have to do something else. That's typically work, looking for fame, power, and other manly things.

Women can be, but men must do. It makes our days more stressful, causes us to constantly compare ourselves to other men, and shortens our lives.

And yet, a certain amount of ambition is a good thing. It's ambition of one kind or another that's responsible for human progress. It's also very satisfying. Personal achievement of your ambition, whatever it may be, just feels good. So what's a fellow to do?

The trick, I think, is balance. If you're committed to excellence in your job, or in any field of endeavor, you have to accept the fact that there will always be people who are better at it than you are.

That's just a fact of life. It doesn't mean that you're worse. Your brain may make a connection between the success of others and your supposed failure, but it's wrong.

That's the key to a happy life: To realize that sometimes the ideas that bubble up from your brain are simply wrong.

Balance also means that you can strive for more without losing perspective. Men should understand that professional success is important, but it shouldn't be the only thing in your life.

There's also success as a husband, success as a father, success as a contributing and engaged member of society.

So Craig, congratulations on winning the Nobel Prize. Your work is a great thing for mankind.

Me, I'll keep teaching, plugging away at my research, staying involved in the lives of my wife and children (like you), writing my columns, and playing a little jazz on the side. When we men do the things we enjoy, we can all lead lives of quiet honor and dignity.

But could I just hold the medallion for a while?

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