

An ALTERnative Christmas for Women in Glasgow

You know, if there is one group who are well within their rights to give a big bah humbug to Christmas it has to be women. For as long as there has been a Christmas, there has been pressure on women to ensure it all goes smoothly.

Even the very first Christmas, as told in the Nativity, put a tremendous burden on Mary. As if trekking across the unforgiving terrain towards Bethlehem while heavily pregnant wasn't bad enough, the mother of the son of God had to give birth in a stable. And with epidurals more than two thousand years away from being invented, the holidays were far less than magical for the first lady of Christmas.

And despite giving such a brave display for her sex, who is it that takes centre – stage? The men. Think about it, the shepherds and the three wise men are the second most prominent characters in the story after Jesus. And why? Because they brought presents? Who knows?

And now, in this new millennium where men and women supposedly live in equality you would imagine that Christmas responsibilities would be far more evenly shared. Sadly however, that does not appear to be the case.

Without a doubt Christmas is seen as a male orientated holiday. We tell our children that Father Christmas delivers presents to boys and girls across the world spreading joy, while mothers across the Western world run themselves ragged ensuring that he gets it right.

According to surveys by Deloitte, and Touche, it is men who will spend 6% more than woman at Christmas. In the eyes of children, the parent who provides the presents gets to play the role of Santa. With the statistics showing that the parent normally responsible for at least funding the presents is dad, it gets left to mum to take a back seat and play Santa's little helper.

This was certainly the case in my house growing up. Dad would splash the cash for the latest Buzz Lightyear or Barbie. But it was mum who had spent the best part of the year carefully listening to my sister and I, and finding out that these were the gifts we so desperately craved. She would also be the one who would then go brave the crowds as the season approached to guarantee we got exactly what we wanted.

And when it was time to decorate the tree or prepare a Christmas dinner that would make the whole family proud, the parent doing all the hard work was always mum.

But on the big day who was the one sat at the head of the table; leading the ceremony and carving the turkey that mum spent all day cooking? Dad, of course.

And I do not believe that my family are unique. Indeed, it would appear that the burden of responsibility at Christmas is not equally, nor fairly split.

Women constantly seem to find themselves doing the thankless jobs that take them out of the way during Christmas. Whether that means being stuck in a kitchen or standing in a queue for hours desperately trying to get the perfect present for the kids; the onus for ensuring a great Christmas lies solely with women.

However, this is the 21st Century and women have come a long way since Mary's day, so why is it that men are still in the background of preparation? It would be fair to say that there are plenty of men out there who do don the apron and take to the kitchen during the holiday season. There must be a reason why, more often than not, Christmas becomes a woman's responsibility.

They feel under huge pressure in the run up to Christmas and beyond and the pressures are emotional as well as financial. Glasgow-based charity ALTERnativity has been working with women to look at these issues and are finding that when they work together women feel more confident in resisting the pressure put on them by the advertisers, the family or the traditions they have inherited. Sammy from Whiteich proudly announced at the launch of the Women's resource pack in October "this is the first year I am approaching Christmas debt-free and I'm fair chuffed with myself." She was part of a group which met to look at Christmas last year and she felt that the group was almost like a counselling forum. Stacey from Drumchapel added – "I've come to realize that Christmas is about happiness and not just about presents".

It seems that behind every great Christmas there is a great woman put under too much pressure. Surely it's time to find an alternative?

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Further Information

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Notes to editors

ALTERnativity

ALTERnativity helps people look at Christmas with new eyes. It enables people to make choices around the celebration which are fun, challenge the pressures of commercialisation and make life easier for themselves. It hopes to take the stress out of Christmas! Underlying this are questions of injustice, exclusion and inequality both locally and globally and these are the serious issues it tries to address in a light-hearted and accessible way.

Full details of resources for women, families, schools and faith groups are available on www.alternativity.org.uk