This study explores how career-minded Japanese women experience and respond to identity conflict. Our findings are based on 125 in-depth interviews with Japanese women who face incompatible expectations for their roles in their professional and private lives. We show how this dilemma leads to an identity conflict to which the women react with different identity work strategies: Individuals may either sacrifice their career ambitions or forego starting a family; alternatively, they might attempt to reconcile professional and personal role expectations by relinquishing perfectionism in both spheres, or seek partners whose personal expectations align more closely with their career objectives. While these strategies may resolve incompatible external role expectations, our study reveals that they do not effectively diminish internalized dilemmas. As a result of these persisting dilemma situations, many Japanese women experience increasingly entrenched negative emotions such as regret, guilt, frustration and disempowerment. Possible solutions to resolve the dilemma will be discussed.

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