

**Women in Corporate America:
Barriers and Breakthroughs on the Way to the Boardroom**

A PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF LIBERAL STUDIES

May 2007

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Gender refers to the way in which meaning and evaluations are associated with sex by members of a culture. In other words, masculinity and femininity have various sets of characteristics associated with them, depending on the culture. The degree to which males and females are expected to behave differently, are treated differently, or are valued differently has little to do with sex (biology) and everything to do with *gender* (learned beliefs). (Indvik 266)

One *USA Today* reporter asked ex-Chief Executive Officer, Carly Fiorina, after being ousted by members of the board of directors at Hewlett Packard: "Is the business world sexist or not" (Former 5b). Her response was not a simple 'yes' or 'no' and despite her best effort to avoid the issue of gender in the executive suite she admitted, "the workplace is not gender blind. We still have different expectations for women." Unlike professional tennis, she went on to say, where there is a track for women and a track for men, the business world forces women to "play with the big boys" (Former 5b).

During my mother's generation, there were no high profile business women like Carly Fiorina. In fact women were omitted from the history of business because of property ownership laws making it illegal for them to own property. So, in actuality it is difficult to say when the first female CEO began running any company. The heads of businesses were listed as men who may have been the brothers, fathers, and sons of women who were actually in charge (Yeager).

While it may be difficult to track the successes of early American women business leaders, the same is not true for tracking women in the workforce where their great strides are well documented. Today, 50.3 % of all managerial and professional jobs are held by women (Catalyst Fact Sheet). In the Minnesota and U.S. House of Representatives the Speaker is addressed as Madam. The *Wall Street Journal* celebrated “The 50 Women to Watch” in its November 20, 2006 issue (R1), most of them high level executives of multi-billion dollar corporations.

Despite impressive gains for women in the workforce, gender balance remains illusive at the highest levels of corporate leadership. The vast majority of Fortune 500 executives are men. Indeed, in these companies, only 16 % of the direct reports to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) are women and only 1.4% of these CEOs are women (Catalyst Fact Sheet). And, female under representation in senior management is widespread regardless of the length of time a company is in business.

A pair of researchers interested in studying the impact of public policy on women’s careers concluded, despite workplace discrimination laws in place since the 1960’s, that there were still a disproportionate number of men in high level corporate leadership even in younger companies. Researchers An-Ju Tai and Randi Sims hypothesized women would be better represented in newer high tech companies birthed in the 1970’s after civil rights laws protecting women and minorities from discrimination were enacted. Their findings indicate no difference in female representation at the highest level of senior leadership in newer high tech companies. The higher up the corporate ladder the fewer women were represented:

Women within the sample have the same levels of education and experience, both of which are related to promotion. Yet, women in the study sample were less likely to hold upper management positions. This study found an interesting phenomenon. Women and men were both being promoted, but the level of promotion achieved was

different. Women only achieved lower level management positions, whereas men achieved upper level positions....This finding was exactly the same within the companies studied, now 17 years later. Women within the sample occupied greater numbers of supervisory positions, but held few upper management positions (4).

The question remains, why so few women in upper management? The answer is not simple and an exploration of gender is in order.

Julie Indvik reminds us: "Gender refers to the way in which meaning and evaluations are associated with sex by members of a culture" (266) and stereotyping refers to the way meaning and evaluations are *incorrectly* associated with sex. When the culture makes broad assumptions about gender women are often denied leadership roles. Simply put, not all women are caregivers and not all men are leaders. A precedent setting gender discrimination is one case in point.

Ann Hopkins, an accountant working for Price Waterhouse in the early 1980's was denied admission as a partner because her gender and behavior did not match the sets of beliefs about gender held by her male associates. In *Price Waterhouse v. Ann Hopkins* 1989, the Supreme Court ordered Price Waterhouse to award Ms. Hopkins partnership after finding gender-based stereotypes were used in their decision to refuse her promotion. Despite bringing millions of dollars in contracts to her firm, the selection committee believed Ms. Hopkins should "walk more femininely, talk more femininely, dress more femininely, wear make-up, have her hair styled, and wear jewelry" in order to improve her chances of making partnership (Bennett 237). Clearly Ms. Hopkins was caught in a double bind. On one hand, she was required to act masculine enough to bring in new business to the firm and on the other hand required to act feminine enough to satisfy the gender expectations of the selection committee.

For women business leaders, the influence of their gender, for good or for ill, is inescapable. In 1999, when Carly Fiorina took on the top job as Hewlett Packard's CEO she was one of only a handful of female Fortune 500 CEO's. She recalls in her book *Tough Choices* despite a night of preparing for the press conference announcing her new position at Hewlett Packard she was ill-prepared to answer questions about gender. "What about the glass ceiling? How does it feel to have broken it? Does this mean it no longer exists" (169)? Questions about gender followed Fiorina throughout her career as well as the relatively short stint as CEO at Hewlett Packard. She believed gender related issues were a distraction from the work she was doing at the company as well as causing a separation between herself and her male colleagues (171). But the readers of mainstream media were more intrigued by how a woman could perform at this traditionally male job as evidenced by the reporter's questions.

I too was interested in learning more about the path to corporate leadership for women given the fact that there are so few of them at senior executive and CEO levels in America's Fortune 500 companies. I couldn't help but think the answer lies somewhere within the confines of gender itself. Julie Indvik notes: "The degree to which males and females are expected to behave differently, are treated differently, or are valued differently has little to do with *sex* (biology) and everything to do with *gender* (learned beliefs)" (Indvik 266). These learned beliefs about biology and gender are embedded in our workplace policies, our laws, and our social constructs and play an important role in the historical exclusion of women in corporate leadership as well as the present day opportunities. As our culture's learned beliefs about gender change more opportunities for women in corporate leadership unfold.

Motivation

In July, 2005 I attended a conference featuring a panel discussion addressing the shortage of women on corporate boards of directors. Michele Hooper, from Target Corporation's board, Patricia Flynn from American Express Funds' board and Nancy Sennett from various non-profit boards made the case for more women directors both in the corporate and non-profit sectors. The numbers were grim. At the time only 13.6% of the Fortune 500 board seats nationwide were held by women.

During the discussion, Patricia Flynn called attention to her article in the December 2004 issue of the "Directors Monthly" which addresses firm size and regional disparities. The larger the company the more likely women were represented on its board of directors. But there were many Fortune 500 and Fortune 501 - 1000 companies that had no women on their boards. The worse state in the study was Texas where 20 % of the Fortune 500 companies and 62 % of its Fortune 501-1000 firms had no women (Flynn 16).

I was intrigued by this phenomenon and set out to determine how many women were on corporate boards as well as in senior executive positions in Minnesota. I assumed Minnesota was ahead of the rest of the nation as far as promoting women leaders. After all, according to The State of Minnesota Office of the Economic Status of Women, Minnesota had the highest labor force participation in the union at 66% of women 16 years and over compared to 57.5% of U.S. ("Labor"). In 2000 Minnesota had the 11th highest percentage of women elected officials ("Newsletter" 9), and a new woman Dean was just hired at the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota. But, the numbers turned out to be as unremarkable as those of the nation. In the U.S. women hold 13.6% ("Catalyst 2003 Census") of the board of director seats while the state of Minnesota's female board representation is slightly higher at 13.87% (Appendix A). Nationally women hold 15.7% of the senior executive positions ("Catalyst Census Marks") while in Minnesota women hold

16.27% (Appendix A). So, this research set out to answer the question: Why do so few women lead our largest corporations and what's it going to take to improve these numbers?

Methodology

A national literature search from areas of sociology, psychology, public policy, and business created a framework from which to gain perspective of women in corporate leadership. Minnesota executives, six in total, were interviewed in order to glean their insights into the under representation of women as senior corporate leaders. Their brief biographies', generically described in order to protect their identities, are included in Appendix B. Minnesota's Fortune 500 list consisted of only 18 companies so I expanded my base of interviewees to come from the larger list of Fortune 1000 Minnesota companies (Fortune.com). Subjects are either senior level managers or directors on boards of a Minnesota Fortune 1000 company. Excerpts from interviews of Minnesota corporate executives are interspersed throughout the paper and added for argument.

Appendix A is a quantitative analysis of Minnesota's Fortune 1000 companies to determine the number of women on boards of directors and in senior management positions. The information was gleaned from online annual reports published in 2004 and 2005. Each annual report lists the boards of director members and the senior management team. The gender of the person was determined by the name, the photograph, the biographical information found in the report, or from public sources, the result of an internet search.

Chapter 2

GENDER MATTERS

Ruth, a female Minnesota executive of a Fortune 500 company learned quickly in the grocery supply business that gender is not neutral. She believed gender had a huge impact in her climb to senior levels of management in both positive and negative ways. In the 1980's and early 1990's when societal change, in the form of affirmative action plans made it possible for her to move into management, she was grateful for the opportunity. First, she had to prove to herself, and to the men she worked with, that her new job was earned and not given to her on account of her gender. Second, all units of business she dealt with in the early days of her career were run by men, and she seemed to cause a sense of unease with men who were clearly uncomfortable communicating with her. As a result, she changed her communication style to avoid eye contact (Tanji, personal interview). Such gender effects that impede women's progress to the boardroom are explored in this chapter.

The set of meanings and evaluations attributed to gender by the culture, as alluded to by Julie Indvik at the beginning this paper, means we must look beyond physical sex to determine a culture's rules for acceptable behavior by a specific gender. But how are these rules determined by the culture? Biology plays a role for sure. There is no escaping mother nature when it comes to determining which sex bears and nurses new born infants. But stay-at-home dads, male elementary school children, and involved fathers everywhere challenge the belief that only women can nurture children. Rules of behavior are also forced onto a culture by the powerful elite.

A brief history

In 1776, Adam Smith (1723 – 1790), a Scottish philosopher and political economist, whose opinions formed the foundation for commerce and industry in the western world, had

something to say about the roles of men and women in the new market economies. In *An Inquiry Into The Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* he relays his ideas for nation wealth creation fueled by the labor of men and not women. He believed a woman's place in the emerging capitalist society was confined to the domestic sphere to improve "the natural attractions of their person, or to form their mind to reserve, to modesty, to chastity" (734). However, women in working class society, were already contributing to the dairy and textile industries as laborers. Women kept and milked cows and goats, and made butter and cheese for market. The cloth industry was dependent on women to spin wool (Hanawalt 11). The contributions of working class women were dismissed by Smith. His ideals separated the world of commerce from the domestic sphere and placed women outside the domain of economic decision makers.

Jean Gardiner, in her book *Gender, Care and Economics* describes the concerns of Smith which were not equal opportunity for all citizens but rather the expansion of wealth and the distribution of income between major social classes like landowners, capitalists and laborers. Smith believed the specialized division of labor and the exchange of the goods that resulted from their production were extremely important in the emerging patriarchic capitalist society. Gardiner sums up Smith's view of women in the new economy:

"Household-based economic activity was interpreted either as irrelevant and anachronistic or was taken for granted as an unchanging given. Industrial capitalism produced a redefinition of public and private spheres. The commercial world of the market economy was detached from domestic morality and the family." (22)

During the second wave of the women's movement in the 1960's, motivated by the ever increasing number of women in the paid labor force (Freedman 176), feminist economists began exploring the place women held in current and historic economic theory.

It became evident that women were not a consideration. Michelle Pujol in *Feminism and Anti-Feminism in Early Economic Thought* wrote:

Women do not figure prominently in the writings of economists. They are often not mentioned at all, or only in the odd example or footnote. It is not clear whether the 'economic laws', declared universal, apply to them. (1)

The sets of beliefs that excluded women from market work are the predecessors to those that exclude women from the executive suites today. These assumptions overlooked the realities of women's lives and their economic contributions during Smith's time and to a lesser degree still apply. Michelle Pujol's paper "Into the Margins" articulates these mischaracterizations:

1. All women are married or will be and all women will have children.
2. All women are economically dependent on a male relative, father, husband.
3. Women are housewives, their reproductive capacities specialize them for that function.
4. Women are unproductive in the industrial workforce because of their care giving responsibilities.
5. Women are irrational and cannot be trusted to make the right economic decisions. (22)

Today's workplaces reinforce these beliefs in the very structure of work. The executive schedule, comprising 60 hour work weeks, could have only evolved if one parent were home taking care of children and running the household usually a woman. Paths to promotion that disrupt lives by sending potential executives and their families across the country assume one parent, usually the mother, will be able to take care of rebuilding the home while

the working parent gets acquainted to his new responsibilities at the new job (Williams 70). Further examination of rigid workplace policies and their negative impact on women's careers are found in Chapter 3.

Many women rejected some, but not all, of the gendered assumptions made on their behalf, specifically, their exclusion from the market economy. They made the claim that work and education would make them better mothers and wives. Barbara Smith Bodichon (1827 – 1891), a British feminist economist, in 1859, believed women would become better wives after receiving an education and firmly believed “work—not drudgery, but work – is the great beautifier. Activity of the brain, heart, and limb, gives health and beauty, and makes women fit to be mothers of children” (Pujol “Feminism and Anti-Feminism” 39). Bodichon challenged the patriarchal norm of the male breadwinner and declared that “adult women must not be supported by men if they are to stand as dignified, rational beings before God” (Pujol “Feminism and Anti-Feminism” 39). Years later, in America, writer/economist Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860 – 1935) described her vision for women in the economy. “When women stand free as economic agents, they will lift and free their arrested functions, to the much better fulfillment of their duties as wives and mothers and to the vast improvement in health and happiness of the human race”. Gilman also believed the efficiency of housewives would result from proper education. (Van Staveren 60).

Psycho-Social Affects on Gender and Leadership

Imagining leaders. Best selling author and cultural observer, Malcolm Gladwell talked to Charlie Rose in a television interview about the physical appearances of one American leader. Gladwell describes what a leader should like when describing President Warren Harding (1865 – 1923) in his interview with Charlie Rose:

He was our best looking president by far. He was Charleton Heston. Wow, that's what a leader's suppose to be -- gruff voice, broad shoulders, the barrel chest -- yet

this guy was a moron! He was a skirt chasing, whiskey swilling, card playing nincompoop” (Rose 1 Feb 2005).

Gladwell’s book, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* points to our cultural tendency to prejudge human potential without taking into consideration much more than a person’s outward appearance. He believes as a culture we associate leadership ability with “imposing physical stature. [T]hat stereotype is so powerful that when someone fits it, we simply become blind to other considerations” (Blink 88). His own statistics show that a disproportionate number of tall men become CEO’s. While at times our instincts may lead us to correct conclusions, often times the opposite is the case as in the Harding example. Snap judgements, based on physical characteristics, allow for incompetent people like President Harding to lead despite the fact that, according to Gladwell, Harding was “our worse U.S. President ever” (Rose 1 Feb 2005). Further discussion about the pitfalls of prejudgment is included in the section entitled *Stereotypes*.

Today, masculine perceptions of leadership are deeply entrenched in the psyche of men and women. One study by researchers Killeen, L’opez-Zafra, and Eagly showed how difficult it is for women to imagine themselves as corporate leaders simply because there are so few to emulate. When a group of male and female students were asked to envision themselves as chief executive, vice president and mid-level manager of companies in both masculine and feminine industries women had a tougher time than men believing this possible. However, this same study noted women did react more favorably to the idea of leadership in feminine companies such as those in the cosmetic or retail industries (312) which are more aligned with their own experiences. The fact that the top two executive positions at Avon Products, a cosmetic company, are held by women, attest to this notion. Andrea Jung, CEO, and Geralyn Breig, Senior Vice President, lead Avon, a Fortune 500 company with \$8 billion in revenue according to CNNMoney.com.

Findings from the Killeen et al study also indicate a resistance for women to look favorably at top corporate leadership jobs because of the perceived negative effects on close personal relationships. Specifically, the women in this study did not feel the attainment of corporate executive was worth the impact on family (319). Given the unequal division of labor at home (Hewlett “Addressing” 162) it is realistic to believe the demands of the executive job would indeed have negative effects on home life.

Attitudes Toward Risk. Another preconceived notion about women on the job is their attitude toward risk. Jane, a Minnesota Fortune 500 healthcare industry executive offered her insights. She believes, in general, men are willing to take risk, to work outside their comfort zones, while many women are less likely to do the same. According to Jane, women have a different approach to taking on responsibilities so men move up the ranks faster. For instance, men will take on responsibility whether or not they are prepared for it. If there is an opening, women won't apply, even if deemed ready by their peers, because they don't think they have the appropriate training according to Jane. As an exception to the rule Jane offered her story about a female executive who moved into sales, an assignment for which she had no experience due to her medical director background. “She was willing to take a risk and work outside her comfort zone. Her learning and experience were phenomenal. This was a two year tour of duty” (Tanji, personal interview). Despite Jane's belief that many women are risk averse she concedes others are debunking the myth.

Stereotypes. Gender discrimination can be very subtle and legal. An Oxford Dictionary definition states a stereotype is “a preconceived, standardized, and oversimplified impression of the characteristics which typify a person” (“Stereotype”). Catalyst, a research organization focusing on women in business, notes in its study “Women ‘Take Care’, Men ‘Take Charge’: Stereotyping of U.S. Business Leaders Exposed” that stereotyping of women's abilities holds them from top jobs. One such stereotype claims women are ineffective problem solvers. Problem solving is key to successful leadership. The study noted male respondents mostly held the belief that women were ineffective problem solvers

while women respondents did not. According to Catalyst, problem solving is a “stereotypically masculine take charge trait” (“Women Take Care” 16). Since men hold most of the highest executive positions in our country’s largest corporations (98% of Fortune 1000 are male CEOs), this widely held belief by men, that women are unable to solve problems, is a huge barrier to the boardroom (Catalyst “Fact Sheet”).

The Catalyst study looks at other commonly held stereotypes. When the dominant culture believes leaders must exhibit male traits, while mistakenly believing women cannot hold such characteristics, men and not women are promoted. The stereotypes include (Catalyst “Women Take Care 7):

Women’s Traits	Men’s Traits
Affectionate	Dominant
Appreciative	Achievement-oriented
Emotional	Active
Friendly	Ambitious
Sympathetic	Coarse
Mild	Forceful
Pleasant	Aggressive
Sensitive	Self-confident
Sentimental	Rational
Warm	Tough
Whiny	Unemotional

The experience of Jane, a female executive in the healthcare industry and once named one of *Fortune Magazine’s* Top 50 Women in Business, follows in step with the Catalyst study. Having arrived in management from the ranks of nurse she had to prove she was results oriented and not just process oriented (often attributed to the female gender). Also, in the healthcare industry, jobs tend to be gendered, with women working as nurses

and men workings as surgeons. In her company they are trying to shift the stereotypical thinking by taking time to recognize the contributions of male nurses (Tanji, personal interview).

Our culture attributes certain characteristics to father and mother. When professional women become mothers their careers are negatively affected while the same is not true for men. Shelley Correll, an associate professor of sociology at Cornell University, notes that men who become fathers may be seen as more committed to their work because they are viewed as the provider, which is not the same as the caregiver often attributed to mother. The role of mother, according to Correll, holds less status in our culture than father (695). This diminished status often leads to fewer offers of promotion to executive pipeline jobs.

Alice Eagly's research sets out to determine how judging the behaviors and abilities of women and men as corporate leaders, based on standards mired in stereotypical thinking, impacts their chances of succeeding. Specifically her findings show women are judged less favorably when their leadership ability is more stereotypical of men than women. When masculine abilities are required for the job, male leaders are perceived as more successful. When the perception of a successful manager depends on feminine abilities, women are perceived as more able leaders. However, when masculine qualities like courage, resilience, results oriented, proactive, and strategic are, according to Eagly, more important for higher level offices, women are denied access to corporate upper echelons. In contrast, middle level managers require feminine skills more suited to solve socially complex problems such as conflict resolution and subordinate development (Eagly and Karau 578).

Summation

From the time my daughters were toddlers, they engaged in activity that fell along the lines of stereotypical girl play like arts and crafts and Barbies. My neighbor's son, on the other hand, was more inclined to play "like a boy" often smashing objects with whatever sticklike weapon he could find. Whether their behavioral patterns are determined biologically

or socially there are differing expectations for males and females from an early age. As we get older these pre-determined expectations are found in workplaces and often blind us to employees' talents when, at times, their behavior does not match some stereotypical pattern. And, if Malcolm Gladwell's observations are true, our abilities are determined upon first glance (Blink 88).

When gendered assumptions about masculinity and femininity are incorrectly attributed to employees, opportunities are missed because the wrong people are placed in the wrong jobs. In fact, the glass ceiling report published by the federal government notes "Of all the barriers to corporate advancement identified, it is prejudice that tops the list, or the prejudgment that someone 'different,' such as a female executive, is less able to do the job" (United States "Good For Business" 28). For women seeking executive positions the results of gender trait misjudgment often means leadership opportunities are passed on to men who incorporate a more masculine style. Women are more inclined to receive middle management jobs where the problems that arise are more social in nature. (Eagly and Karau 578)

Chapter 3

WORKPLACE POLICIES AND PRACTICES THAT IMPEDE

Our culture's collective and individual psyche develops images of the ideal corporate leader based on stereotypes, prejudice, personal preference, and behavior observation. The next section of this research examines who can and who cannot be considered the ideal worker worthy of promotion. In business, the rules for promotion are often unspoken because they involve illegal discriminatory practices or they put one group, namely caregivers, at a distinct disadvantage over another.

Ideal Worker Norm

Joan Williams describes in her book *Unbending Gender* her theory involving the ideal worker norm. The ideal worker is available 50-70 hours per week, is unimpeded by outside distractions like family commitments, and is available to move across country as part of the executive career path training. The market economy was not structured around the realities of women's lives but rather the availability of men unencumbered by care giving responsibilities. Men became the ideal workers (71-75).

Today, care giving responsibilities are shared by both men and women albeit not quite equally. As a result, women, and some men, are not able to fit the ideal worker profile and are denied promotions accordingly. Sylvia's Hewlett's survey of high-achieving women indicated they, not their husbands, were more likely to help with homework and take time off from work for a sick child ("Addressing" 162). This leaves women at a disadvantage when it comes to their chances for promotion. Companies, at the executive level, are looking for candidates who can give them 100% of their attention. Women, with the bulk of care giving responsibilities at home are often left out of promotion decisions.

For men with care giving responsibilities the results may be similar. According to the Work Life Law Center at the University of California at Hastings, it is not uncommon for men to be denied jobs because of a manager's preconceived ideas that workers with care giving responsibilities are less committed to their jobs. In fact a new area of law called Family Responsibility Discrimination addresses the illegal practice of discriminating against employees who must care for their children or elderly parents regardless of whether the employee is male or female. In *Schultz v. Advocate Health and Hospitals Corp*:

A male maintenance worker who had been employed for more than 25 years, sued his employer alleging interference with FMLA leave and retaliation. Plaintiff was responsible for the care of his father who suffered from Alzheimer's and his sick mother, who later died. While Plaintiff was on intermittent FMLA leave to care for his parents, the employer instituted a policy of grading employees based on the amount of work completed in a set period of time. Plaintiff alleged that the new policy was designed to create grounds for terminating him. The employee won \$11.65 million verdict; the case later settled before an appeal for an undisclosed amount. (Work Life Law Center)

When employees become less than ideal workers they may be denied promotions or worse yet, lose their jobs. While this example demonstrates how women and men who are distracted from their work by care giving responsibilities may be denied promotion, other workplace practices deter women from the executive path.

Many employees on the executive track must relocate in order to obtain: "broad and varied experience in the core areas of the business...[and] high job mobility" (Glass Ceiling Commission 15). Indeed, this is the practice of many of the companies of executives I interviewed for this paper who stated executive track candidates are moved around so they

gain as much experience as possible. Unfortunately, for many women relocation is not an option since their husband's careers are often given priority. (Williams 70).

Jane, a female Minnesota executive from the healthcare industry, reiterated the gender bias in her words by blaming the lack of women executives on women's choices. Executives, according to Jane, "don't work eight hour days and don't have the luxury of flexibility". She went on to say women elect not to take jobs that require travel, evening or weekend work (Tanji, personal interview). Joan Williams would argue these are not women's choices but the result of workplace structures designed around the realities of men's and not women's lives.

The Maternal Wall

Capturing the essence of women's workplace struggles, Joan Williams explores the experiences of professional women who return from maternity leave and aptly describes the phenomenon the *maternal wall*. Suddenly, the jobs they had held were no longer available, or their new job assignments were less challenging and not on the executive track. Despite pregnancy discrimination laws enacted in 1978, one woman lawyer noted:

Every single woman that I have spoken to without exception, partner or associate, has experienced rampant hostility and prejudice upon her return {from maternity leave}. There is a sentiment that pregnancy and motherhood has softened her, that she is not going to work as hard. (69)

In my own experiences as a management consultant, in the early 1990's, in one of the country's largest professional service firms, my client assignments suddenly changed upon my return from maternity leave and did not include air travel. In the office we all knew that no consultant would receive promotion without taking on out-of-town client work. My

male colleagues continued to receive those assignments even after the birth of their children.

In order to avoid the *maternal wall* many women opt not to have any children and others delay motherhood until after their careers are established. When gathering research for a book about the achievements of the “breakthrough generation” Sylvia Hewlett set out to uncover the accomplishments of successful women in fields once dominated by men. To her surprise she learned many of her subjects did not have children and those who did resorted to medical intervention. The decision to delay motherhood, for career goals, made it difficult to conceive. To this group of women, career mobility meant giving up motherhood all together or enduring difficult medical or hormonal treatments to become pregnant (Hewlett “Creating” 2-3).

Staff versus Line Positions

According to the Glass Ceiling Commission findings “The critical career path for senior management positions requires taking on responsibilities most directly related to the corporate bottom line. But the relatively few women and minorities found at the highest levels tend to be in staff positions” (iv). Mike, an executive in the food and grocery industry interviewed for this study, confirm the commission’s findings that it is indeed difficult for women to take on jobs with profit and loss responsibilities. He comments: “the long hours required to manage a \$600,000 per week store with sixty to seventy associates is hard for men and women” and added it was “difficult to get any one excited about these types of appointments.” He did state that women were more attracted to “merchandising jobs with regular work hours.” Men, in his opinion, were more willing to tackle the odd work schedule of the operations side of the business with profit and loss responsibilities (Tanji, personal Interview).

Mike’s experiences are true of the population at large and are not confined to the food and grocery industry. For example, the Killeen et al study of college students reveals

reluctance by women to embark on executive career paths because of the job's negative impact on family (319). In addition, given the unequal division of labor at home, it is realistic to believe the unusual hours required to run a store would indeed have negative impact at home say when a parent is not available to help a child with school work (Hewlett "Unfinished Work" 162).

Keeping Track of the Numbers

Tracking women in the pipeline, without an of affirmative action process in place to move women to the next level, is not enough to get women into executive jobs. Both Mike's and Fran's companies track women in the executive pipeline but both companies do not have better representation of women in executive level jobs than the national average. Fran, Vice President of Corporate Diversity at a Minnesota Fortune 500 company, admitted her company is still increasing the pool of female talent through training and awareness of both employees and management. According to Fran, women in her company are still moving up in the organization's hierarchy but haven't reached high enough levels to be considered for executive level jobs (Tanji, personal interview).

Summation

When employees are 'distracted' by life's realities such as sick parents, children, or personal health issues, it is difficult for 100% of their focus to be placed squarely on work, making them less promotable. These employees become less than ideal, according to Joan Williams. Only ideal workers can move to another part of the country to gain exposure to other areas of the business. Only ideal workers can be available for their employers 60 hours a week. Only ideal workers can work weekends and night shifts to accommodate odd store hours. Only ideal workers don't get pregnant. When dedication and loyalty are determined by the number of hours an employee puts in at the workplace employees with family responsibilities are overlooked for promotion. This is especially an issue for female

employees who are responsible for care giving and household chores placing high level jobs with more responsibilities clearly out of their reach.

Chapter 4

PUBLIC POLICY SUPPORTS FOR WOMEN

As recently as the early 1960s, employment practices made it difficult for women to become full economic participants. The job market was sex segregated and companies advertised jobs in newspapers under the heading “female employment” for hotel clerks, waitresses, and executive secretaries (Bennett-Alexander 229). Executive jobs would not be found in the “female employment” section of the help wanted advertisements.

Today, most jobs must be made available to both men and women because our laws require it (Some jobs may require employees to be a certain gender where it is considered a bona fide occupational qualification (Bennett-Alexander 251)). According to the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission employees, who are denied promotions based on sex, may sue their employers claiming Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as their basis for legal action. As early as 2002, American Express Financial Advisors was ordered to pay \$31 million to female employees who claimed they were denied career advancement opportunities, failed to be hired as Financial Advisors, or had not been given fair distribution of leads, accounts, work assignments, promotion, and compensation (Wageproject).

Despite the need for public policy to protect the rights of employees from discrimination and employers from frivolous law suits brought against them, the personal toll of filing a claim of discrimination and the pursuant public relations nightmare for companies makes the courtroom a less than ideal forum for addressing workplace inequities. Nonetheless, the federal courts have proven helpful for women establishing their place in the labor force by sending the message to employers that it is illegal to deny women promotional opportunities based on her sex.

Glass Ceiling Commission 1995

The federal government embarked on its Glass Ceiling Initiative 17 years ago. The purpose of the initiative was to identify barriers that prevent minority people and women from moving into middle and upper level management positions. The results were published in 1995 in a report entitled *A Solid Investment: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital*. The document's 235 pages include recommendations for bringing women and minorities up the corporate hierarchy and into management and executive ranks. In 1995, 95 – 97% of the senior managers—vice presidents and above—were men (iv).

Our nation's employers are now wiser to the under representation of women in middle and upper management as a result of the Glass Ceiling Commission's work. Its findings are wide ranging and include the following recommendations for workplace practices: "Demonstrate CEO commitment; include diversity in all strategic business plans and hold line managers accountable for progress; use affirmative action as a tool; select, promote and retain qualified individuals; prepare minorities and women for senior positions; educate the corporate ranks; initiate work/life and family-friendly policies; adopt high performance workplace practices; lead by example; strengthen enforcement of anti-discrimination laws; improve data collection; increase disclosure of diversity data" (13). As a result of the federal government's guidelines many companies incorporated these policies into their workplace practices. The results are in, and 17 years later, women make up 50% of U.S. managers and professionals (Catalyst "Fact Sheet").

Affirmative Action Provisions

When companies with 50 employees or more contract with the Federal Government for \$50,000 or more, the court may order certain remedies if they are found to be guilty of intentional exclusion of women and minorities. One such remedy is the adoption of an affirmative action policy designed to hire or promote a previously excluded group.

Affirmative action provisions are included in a subsection of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Bennett-Alexander 154). The affirmative action provision does not apply to private sector companies unless they contract with the Federal Government. However, many private sector companies implement affirmative action plans in order to move more women up the corporate hierarchy and to protect themselves from discrimination law suits.

Originally designed to include more women in the workplaces of federal contractors, affirmative action has proven an effective tool to motivate companies to hire and promote women to better reflect their representation in the local labor force (Bennett-Alexander 162). Affirmative Action programs also protect employers from discrimination claims. Unfortunately for executive women, affirmative action plans have not been enough to ensure that their representation in senior management reflects their proportions in the managerial labor pool.

So why the low numbers of executive women despite the implementation of affirmative action plans? Gender preference programs have grown out of favor within recent years in light of reverse discrimination charges and state laws banning such arrangements. Men and non-minority employees, who believed they were unfairly passed over for promotion by women and minorities, took their complaints to court (Bennett-Alexander 176). Michigan passed a law in the fall of 2006 banning any gender preference programs like affirmative action for state contractors and university admissions (Townes 4).

However, despite the disfavor of formal affirmative action plans, some Minnesota companies have not shied away from informal preference practices. When asked if they would hire a woman over a man for positions where women were underrepresented, and all things being equal in terms of qualifications, the executives in this study all answered "yes." These executives were aware of the fact that the proportion of women senior executives did not reflect those found in the managerial pool. Additionally, these companies tracked diversity, offered pipeline jobs to women, and mentored women to help increase the number

of female executives and protect their companies from gender discrimination charges. The effectiveness of some of these policies are addressed in Chapter 3.

Family Medical Leave Act 1993

Another Federal policy enacted to support women in the workplace is the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). This law entitles women and men, working for companies with 50 or more employees, up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for a newborn infant, an adopted child, a sick or elderly parent or for a serious health condition (Bennett-Alexander 258). This policy helped many women take time off work to care for infants with the added benefit of knowing their jobs would be available upon their return to work. However, the option of leave taking for women in the Fortune 500 executive ranks is not clear. When the *Wall Street Journal* did an article on the experiences of CEOs who became pregnant during their tenure the *Journal* was hard-pressed to find any women from the elite Fortune 500 executive ranks. The two women that reporters did track down were heads of smaller family-owned businesses. These women did not take time off work after the births of their children but rather worked from home (Shellenbarger D1). Family Leave, while guaranteed by law, is typically not an option for executive women a clear indication of how the executive lifestyle does not match the realities of women's lives.

Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978

One such policy designed to address the realities of women's lives is the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, enacted in 1978 as an amendment to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. This law was designed to prevent discrimination on the basis of pregnancy, but it has not proven to be an effective shield against bias in the workplace for mothers. The law ensures that women who are pregnant or have babies are not denied opportunities at work, including

protection from an employer who “feels the need to lighten the employee’s load, though the employee has not requested such” (Bennett-Alexander 255). But, employers often do change the workload as discussed in the Maternal Wall section of this paper. *Ms. Magazine* columnist, Justine Andronici, believes the penalty that women pay for having children is the result of stereotypical thinking that mothers are less committed to their jobs. As a result “performance appraisals suffer, promotions grind to a halt and career-enhancing assignments decline” (63).

Fair Labor Standards Act 1938

The Fair Labor Standards Act was designed to protect all workers. The law sets the standard work week to 40 hours but does not apply to management level employees. The Fair Labor Standards Act entitles non-management workers to overtime pay after the forty hours. As such, there is no incentive for companies to ensure their executives, who are exempted from overtime, do not work over 40 hours a week. As a result the executive workweek has crept up to 60 hours. Since employers use “number of hours worked” as the basis for promotion women who have care giving responsibilities are left behind (Hewlett 273).

Summation

Federal statutes like the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, Family Medical Leave Act, and Affirmative Action programs, helped bring about social change making cultural acceptance of women in the workplace a reality. In fact, Carly Fiorina, ex-CEO of Hewlett Packard, got her first job as manager after AT&T was ordered by the federal government to hire and promote more women (Fiorina 38). These Federal policies serve as potential legal threats to companies who may be unfairly treating

employees whether intentionally or otherwise. However, threatening an employer with any type of claim such as sexual harassment or pregnancy discrimination could end a career. There will be no advancement to the executive suite if an employee becomes a legal threat to the company. These types of situations are best dealt with one to one between the perpetrator and the person wronged and, for the sake of career mobility, must never reach upper level management (Shapiro 26).

Chapter 5

OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities for women in corporate leadership are becoming a reality within the elite Fortune 500 companies and from without. This country's largest corporations are looking for ways to attract and retain female talent as the battle for the best and the brightest employees heats up in our very competitive market place. At the same time, women seeking immediate decision making authority are looking beyond Fortune 500 companies and starting their own firms or working for smaller companies. All the while, old attitudes about women in corporate leadership are fading.

Changing Gendered Assumptions

In the new millennium women are almost half of the workforce (Freedman 150), half of the managers and professionals (Catalyst "Fact Sheet"), and 16% of the senior executives (Catalyst "Census Marks Gains"). Gender social norms regarding work in domestic and market spheres are adjusting to meet the needs of the ever expanding economy in which women are expected to be full participants. Much has changed since Adam Smith wrote *An Inquiry into the Nature of the Wealth of Nations* which clearly defined domestic unpaid work for women and market work for men.

Not only are women active participants in the economy they are often its leaders. According to psychologist Alice Eagly, "In the United States, women are increasingly praised for having excellent skills for leadership and, in fact, women, more than men, manifest leadership styles associated with effective performance as leaders." However, Eagly also points out our culture's reluctance to fully accept women as leaders since employees are more likely to wish they had a male boss rather than a female boss (1).

Diversity

Minnesota executives in this study all believe gender diversity is good for business especially when customers are predominantly women. It makes sense that leadership be more reflective of their customer base. Fran, VP of Corporate Diversity, noted the business and societal case for diversity:

Diversity is essential to our survival. We seek innovation through diversity. We want to be a great place to work. Diversity is good for the individual as well as society (Tanji, personal interview).

Entrepreneurship

The climate is also changing for women who want to run their own businesses. Instead of waiting for Fortune 500 companies to admit them into the executive suites, women who want the opportunity to take risks, test personal limits, create wealth, and make strategic decisions turn to small companies or become self-employed entrepreneurs (Korn/Ferry 7). According to the Women's Business Research "nearly 10.4 million firms are owned by women (50% or more), employing more than 12.8 million people, and generating \$1.9 trillion in sales" and women owned firms are being created at around two times the rate of all firms (Women's Business Research).

Jane, corporate executive and board of director member, agrees with this assessment. She noted women were truly succeeding in their capacity as small business owners. In her opinion large old companies were taking too long to adjust to the changing roles of women in business (Tanji, personal interview).

Even lending institutions accept the idea of women business owners allowing for more venture capital opportunities. One such source of funding is the Sofia Angel Fund the

purpose of which is to “invest in small businesses that are led by women, have women as their primary customers, or otherwise serve markets that support women or address women's concerns” (Business Wire).

Business ownership does come with caveats. Women, attracted to the idea of making their own decisions by running their own companies, may quickly realize the pull of family responsibility exists in the world of small entrepreneurial companies as well. The competing demands of children and business ownership are as great as the demands of family and large employer. The dream of creating one's business schedule around family needs fades quickly when customers and suppliers expect owners to be on the job during traditional business hours and workdays.

Addressing the Realities of Women's Lives

Sylvia Hewlett President of the Center for Work-Life Policy, and researcher Carol Luce, examine the lives of high achieving women, before and after they have children, in “Off-Ramps and On-Ramps: Keeping Talented Women on the Road to Success.” Hewlett and Luce noted the ease with which talented women leave the workplace (off ramps) and the difficulties of getting back in (on ramps) given the reality that women take time off to care for children and aging parents. Hewlett, Luce, and their team surveyed 2,443 executive track women with graduate degrees, professional degrees or high honors undergraduate degrees (44) to find what it would take to lure women back into the workplace. Hewlett and Luce recommend workplace practices that address the realities of women's lives. Some on-ramp practices include:

1. “Create reduced-hour jobs.” In order to accommodate both work and life, high achieving women need more time at home in order to address caregiving needs (50).
2. “Provide flexibility in the day.” Flexibility was extremely important and more important than money for two-thirds of the women surveyed (51).

3. "Provide flexibility in the arc of a career." When a professional woman is in the midst of raising very young children she may need to relax career demands, temporarily requiring telecommuting or shorter projects (52). This allows her to remain connected to the company without leaving it entirely.
4. "Removing the stigma." If women are indeed going to feel their careers are not in jeopardy by taking advantage of flexibility and/or reduced hour policies, corporations have to get serious about not penalizing employees for doing so. According to Hewlett's survey 21% report "there is an unspoken rule at my workplace that people who use these options will not be promoted" (52).
5. "Stop burning bridges." Hewlett's findings showed no women interested in returning to their old places of businesses. The negative circumstances surrounding their departure left no desire to return. They felt "ill-used", "underutilized" and "underappreciated". Hewlett suggests companies examine policies, practices, and attitudes and not assume family responsibilities are the only reason qualified women leave their companies (52).
6. "Provide outlets for altruism." The survey results indicate a desire of women to return to work in the non-profit sector. Mentoring and formal women's networks within the company may satisfy the needs of these women to serve their communities (53). Many Fortune 500 companies have non-profit foundations whose work may appeal to some women on-ramping back into business.

Hewlett's findings echo earlier recommendations for workplace flexibility by the United States Glass Ceiling Commission over a decade earlier ("Solid Investment" 25). However, unlike The Glass Ceiling Commission that focused on getting women and minorities into management and executive positions, Hewlett's work focused on women already in executive track careers who had taken leaves of absence.

Flexible Workplaces Are Becoming A Reality

Corporations are beginning to answer the call for workplace flexibility. When asked to reflect on why so few women are represented in the highest levels of management, Fran, VP of Corporate Diversity at a Minnesota consumer food products company noted, “Companies have only recently started to focus on women and their needs.” Her company is looking at how to best address the challenges women face and is taking a closer look at workplace flexibility. “We are focusing on flexibility in terms of how the work gets done, either in the office, at home, on a project basis, by working three months then off three months.” Fran’s company is also shifting from the idea of promoting based on hours worked but rather promoting based on results (Tanji, personal interview). This will indeed help women who are quite capable of doing the work but not able to physically be at the office during traditional hours due to care giving and other responsibilities at home.

Increased public recognition of companies that establish family friendly policies has taken hold in Minnesota. The Minnesota Work-Life Champions awards program promotes companies who recognize the whole lives of their employees. The program “honors flexible and supportive employers” (Minnesota Worklife Champions). Companies are encouraged to offer flextime, job sharing, temporary voluntary reduced time, regular part-time, compressed workweeks, telecommuting, and reduced summer hours (MN Work-Life Champions) enabling employees to balance their family lives with their busy work schedules. But, as stated earlier, Hewlett’s and Luce’s findings caution employees who use flexible workplace practices. Their research subjects described an unspoken rule that the use of these practices reduces one’s chances of promotion (52). The Minnesota Worklife Champions addresses these concerns by honoring companies that promote employees who work flexible hours.

Mentoring

The Commission recommends that organizations ... establish formal mentoring programs that provide career guidance and support to prepare

minorities and women for senior positions (United States “A Solid Investment” 24).

Women are indeed finding opportunities as mentees. Once the ‘good ole boys’ network kept women from learning the tools of the trade. Now mentoring programs help women get prepared for corporate leadership. Mike, a senior executive from a Minnesota Fortune 500 company, is an active mentor in the MENTTIUM 100[®] program in Minnesota. According to Mentium’s website, this program offers a one-to-one mentoring experience by matching a mentor, either male or female, with mentees, who:

Are women who are emerging leaders within their corporations.

Are mid-level managers.

Have 6-15 years of solid corporate experience.

Are highly motivated and willing to invest time in their professional development.

Are willing to set goals around their business competencies to make the most of the Mentium match process. (Mentium)

The formal relationship exists for one year. Mentors and mentees do not have to work for the same companies and do not have to be from the same geographical areas (Mentium). When asked about his participation in this program Mike was adamantly in favor of giving women the same access to mentoring that men have had in the past (Tanji, personal interview).

The Board of Directors

Some of the mandates of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 may mean a brighter future for women wanting to take on leadership responsibilities as members of a board of directors. Patricia Flynn, former dean of McCallum Graduate School of Business at Bentley College, noted in the December 2004 issue of "The National Association of Corporate Directors" the mandate to openly reveal the nominating committee's selection process will help women. In the past, the nominations of board members was a very informal process and consisted of asking current board members, mostly male, for their recommendations. The results were boards of directors that were, well, mostly male (17).

Talent for boards today is recruited from non-traditional areas such as academia, government, and non-CEO executive positions where women are better represented. This will help women seeking board membership since there are so few women CEO's available for these coveted positions. In fact, the need to look at non-traditional areas of recruitment is the result of a shrinking pool of CEO's due to increased time commitments and accountability required by the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002. This is a "positive move for women" who seek leadership opportunities, according to executive recruiter Sally, because nominating committees are forced to look for talent from other senior management positions where women are slightly better represented (Tanji, personal interview).

Public Awareness. Public events raise awareness of the fact that there are so few women executives and board members in our publicly traded companies. Some groups are also actively engaged in educating the public, potential women board members, and corporate leaders about the necessity for more women on Minnesota's corporate boards. The National Association of Corporate Directors (NACD), Minnesota chapter, sponsors a *Women on Boards* event every year. According to Kathy, an active member of NACD, Minnesota chapter, her organization also collects names and biographies of women willing to serve on boards and distributes the list to companies needing to fill vacancies (Tanji,

personal interview). At the University of Minnesota, Carlson School of Management, the public is invited to listen to interviews by Marilyn Carlson Nelson and various executive women from throughout the country, most of whom serve on corporate boards of directors. The resulting dialogue between Ms. Nelson and her guest is a glimpse into the real lives of female corporate executives working in male dominated fields.

Care Giving Dads

Hollywood uses humor and comedians to depict care giving dads in movies: Michael Keaton in Mr. Mom, Eddie Murphy in Daddy Daycare, and Steve Martin in Cheaper by the Dozen. All funny movies with funny men in the leading roles who set their professional careers aside so their wives can pursue their goals. But is American culture ready for real stay-at-home dads? The answer is a cautious "maybe". An August 2005 issue of *USA Today*, noted a 29% increase in the number of families in which mothers were in the labor force while fathers were not since 1993 ("Mr. Mom"). The article is quick to point out the number of families with traditional mother/father roles greatly outnumber the stay-at-home dad households.

Gender role reversals within the family are not likely to sweep the nation anytime soon according to research by psychologist Amanda Diekman and Wind Goodfriend. Despite the significant rise in the proportion of women in schools of law, medicine, and business since 1965, the number of men employed in these fields has not declined. They say, "men's work roles have remained relatively stable. Men continue to participate full-time in the paid labor force, with only a slight decrease. Men also retain their occupancy of the highest levels of leadership roles" (370).

Summation

Since Daddy Daycare remains a fictional fantasy and women's work continues to include household chores and childcare as well as full time jobs, it is indeed refreshing to hear how some companies are meeting the flexibility needs of their employees. It remains to be seen whether employees, who work odd hours outside the office, will be viewed as serious contenders for the executive suite. Best Buy, of Minneapolis, Minnesota, has experimented with a clockless workplace. This is a fairly new experiment at Best Buy with its pilot program implemented in 2003. Soon the company's 4000 headquarter staff will be judged by output not hours. Early signs indicate the program is a success in terms of higher productivity, jobs satisfaction, and employee retention. What we won't know for a long time is if working from home, at unusual hours, is conducive to career mobility. The executives at Best Buy are not part of the ROWE, "results-only work environment" experiment. These executives continue to report to work every day (Conlin).

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

Learned beliefs about gender are embedded in our economic history, our workplace policies, our laws, and our social constructs. As these learned beliefs and the definitions of appropriate behavior for men and women change over time, more opportunities for women in corporate leadership unfold. Signals of shifts in gendered role definitions are seen as early as the formation of western economies when women such as Barbara Bodichon and Charlotte Gilman rejected their exclusion from the paid economy. One century later American women are almost half the country's labor force (Freedman 150).

But historic exclusion from paid work has proven a tough obstacle for women to overcome and contributes to their slow climb to the top of the corporate hierarchy. During the formation of our western economy, for the cultural elite like Adam Smith, the role of women in the new economy was domestic in nature and they were excluded market work. Caring for children and the home was the role assigned to women (Smith 734). Market work was the domain of men despite the contributions of women in the dairy and textile industries.

Today, the labor force looks a lot different than it did during Smith's time. A couple of centuries later women are actively engaged in all areas of paid work. However, masculine leadership norms continue to dominate the executive landscape in America. Preconceived notions about how a leader should act and the traits they must hold form barriers to the boardroom for women. Aggressive and achievement oriented traits are associated with male leaders while feminine traits, such as friendly and sensitive, are assigned to female support roles (Catalyst "Women Take Care" 7).

Recalling that our workplaces were designed by and for men, it stands to reason that their structures would adhere to men's rather than women's lives. When women entered the labor force in great numbers these last few decades (Freedman 150), the work was performed away from home and practices such as the 40 hour work week did not take into consideration the care giving responsibilities of women. Executive jobs, and their accompanying work schedules requiring upwards of 60 hours per week, make it almost impossible for many women to lead companies and be care givers to their children (Hewlett "Unfinished Work" 162). Indeed, when women do become mothers they often find their status within the company is lowered because they are perceived to be less committed to work and more committed to family (Williams 69).

The United States Glass Ceiling Commission's report in 1995 included recommendations like preparing women for profit and loss jobs and affirmative action plans. While the Commission's recommendations were meant to encourage companies to consider women and minorities for management positions their intentions fell short of the mark for a variety of reasons. Women are not attracted to profit and loss jobs, according to one Minnesota executive, because of the unusual hours. As Joan Williams emphasized, women are not ideal workers unencumbered by family commitments (4). Affirmative action plans to put more women and minorities into the executive pipeline, have grown out of favor with corporations because of the backlash of reverse discrimination complaints.

The news is getting better for women seeking board membership and executive positions. In March of 2006 Catalyst reported an increase of women on our nation's Fortune 500 boards of directors to 14.7%. This is movement, albeit slow, in the right direction, up from a rate of 13.6% in 2003 and in 9.6% in 1995. Additionally, when the executives in this study were asked if they would consider a woman over a man, all else being equal in terms of training and experience, the answer was a resounding "yes". Additionally, women executives are now 15.7% of corporate officers in America's 500 largest

companies which is up from 12.5% in 2000 and 8.7 % in 1995 (Catalyst “Census Marks Gains”).

My own career path did not lead to the executive suite. At first, the challenges of raising children, running a household, and commuting were difficult but not insurmountable for my husband and me. Then when my daughter’s grandmother chose not to provide childcare we were forced to make a choice between one inadequate daycare provider over another. I believed, in my heart of hearts, that only my family members or I could love and care for my children appropriately. Since my husband’s salary was ten thousand dollars more a year than mine, it made economic sense that I be the one to leave behind the world of paid work, a professional degree, and 20 years of experience.

I have been advocating for workplace gender equity ever since in hopes that my two daughters will not have to make a choice between work and family. In my utopian world men and women will be comfortable bringing their whole selves to work every day without employers misconstruing family commitment as a distraction from the work but rather an enhancement to the well being of their employees.

I began this study intrigued by the lack of women leaders at the highest levels in corporate America’s largest companies. During my research it became evident that minority men and women were also underrepresented in Fortune 500 executive suites and boardrooms. The challenges to attain high levels of corporate leadership facing minority people are outside the scope of this study, as are those facing gay, lesbian, transgender, and bisexual people.

It was my hope to uncover the barriers (heterosexual white) women face in obtaining the most elite jobs in America in order to continue breaking these barriers down. Here are my own recommendations for creating workplace cultures conducive for developing women leaders:

1. Incorporate female norms in the workplace practices and policies. Recognize the

workplace was designed with the ideal worker in mind, a male, with one wife at home taking care of the children and domestic chores. Today, men and women both work outside the home. Our economy depends on the wages of all of its citizens but our workplace practices and policies do not reflect the needs of dual-wage earner families.

2. Childcare is an issue for many women and men, and employers can play a huge role in making quality childcare available. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota has already incorporated onsite childcare facility near its property in Eagan, Minnesota.
3. Put more flexibility into the workplace. Realizing that meetings with bankers and corporate leaders will on occasion require executives to physically be at some location at some time, much of executive business today can be conducted with the advances of telecommunication technologies. There continues to be too much emphasis on face time and hours put in at the office as a requirement for executive path jobs. Women and men with care giving and employer responsibilities require flexibility to meet competing demands of work and life.
4. Employers must re-consider the traditional path to the executive suite, taking into consideration female dominated jobs, as training grounds for future executives. For example, women in the human resource function or administrative assistant job classes must be viewed as potential leaders and offered training and encouragement to move into senior management positions.
5. Employers must look for potential leaders in the pool of part-time workers. There are times during the course of a career when women must work fewer hours in order to juggle family and work commitments. This does not make part time staff any less committed to the success of the firm.
6. Employees, leaving the workforce to care for young children, can keep their skills

updated by retaining membership in professional organizations and attending training sessions offered by these organizations.

Unlike the Catalyst research group, I do not believe it will take 70 years for more women to reach the executive suite ("2005 Census") because gender norms are constantly shifting to accommodate economic realities. One such reality is the need for American companies to compete in a global economy requiring talent wherever it can be found. Additionally, an aging population and labor force (Murray 3) means companies must retain as many workers as possible for as long as possible and that includes women with care giving responsibilities. Finally, the American ideal of equal opportunity is embedded into our legal system forcing companies to include women at all levels of the corporate hierarchy.

Proving themselves worthy of jobs at the highest levels of decision making are brave competent women like Irene Rosenfeld, CEO, Kraft Foods; Andrea Jung, CEO, Avon Products; Indra Nooyi, CEO, Pepsico; and Anne Mulcahy, CEO, Xerox, to name just a few (Hymowitz R1). All of these women challenge gender assumptions about leadership, every day breaking down barriers to the boardroom once considered insurmountable.

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Appendix A: Women Board Members and Executives in Minnesota's Fortune

1000 Companies

Appendix A: Women Board Members and Executives in Minnesota's Fortune 1000 Companies

2005 Minnesota Rank by Revenue	Fortune 1000 Rank by Revenue *	Company Name *	Industry *	Revenues (\$ in millions) **	Women Board Members **	Men Board Members **	Total Board Members **	% Women Board Members	% Men Board Members	Women Senior Execs **	Men Senior Execs **	Total Execs	% Women Execs	% Men Execs
1	27	Target	General Merchandisers	49,934.00	3	9	12	25.00%	75.00%	1	9	10	10.00%	90.00%
2	40	UnitedHealth Group	Health Care: Insurance	37,218.00	3	9	12	25.00%	75.00%	2	13	15	13.33%	86.67%
3	77	Best Buy	Specialty Retailers	24,901.00	2	10	12	16.67%	83.33%	2	13	15	13.33%	86.67%
4	85	St. Paul Travelers Cos. (stock)	Insurance: P & C (stock)	22,934.00	3	9	12	25.00%	75.00%	3	13	16	18.75%	81.25%
5	104	Supervalu	Wholesalers: Food and Grocery	20,209.70	2	8	10	20.00%	80.00%	2	7	9	22.22%	77.78%
6	105	3M	Miscellaneous	20,011.00	3	8	11	27.27%	72.73%	2	18	20	10.00%	90.00%
7	143	U.S. Bancorp	Commercial Banks	14,705.70	2	13	15	13.33%	86.67%	2	9	11	18.18%	81.82%
8	190	Northwest Airlines	Airlines	11,279.00	1	12	13	7.69%	92.31%	0	6	6	0.00%	100.00%
9	197	General Mills	Consumer Food Products	11,070.00	4	8	12	33.33%	66.67%	5	17	22	22.73%	77.27%
10	198	GHS	Wholesalers: Food and Grocery	11,050.60	0	17	17	0.00%	100.00%	0	7	7	0.00%	100.00%
11	246	Medtronic	Medical Products & Equipment	9,087.20	1	10	11	9.09%	90.91%	2	13	15	13.33%	86.67%
12	256	Xcel Energy	Utilities: Gas & Electric	8,506.70	2	10	12	16.67%	83.33%	4	8	12	33.33%	66.67%
13	279	Land O'Lakes	Consumer Food Products	7,742.20	0	24	24	0.00%	100.00%	1	9	10	10.00%	90.00%
14	319	Thrivent Financial for Lutherans	Insurance: Life, Health (mutual)	6,445.20	1	16	17	5.88%	94.12%	5	8	13	38.46%	61.54%
15	402	Hormel Foods	Consumer Food Products	4,779.90	2	12	14	14.29%	85.71%	1	26	27	3.70%	96.30%
16	442	C.H. Robinson Worldwide	Transportation and Logistics	4,341.50	1	8	9	11.11%	88.89%	3	14	17	17.65%	82.35%
17	455	Ecolab	Chemicals	4,184.90	1	13	14	7.14%	92.86%	2	15	17	11.76%	88.24%
18	476	Nash Finch	Wholesalers: Food and Grocery	3,897.10	2	9	11	18.18%	81.82%	4	6	10	40.00%	60.00%
Minnesota Fortune 500					33	205	238	13.87%	86.13%	41	211	252	16.27%	83.73%
19	522	PepsiAmericas	Beverages	3,344.70	0	8	8	0.00%	100.00%	2	8	10	20.00%	80.00%
20	548	Penair	Industrial & Farm Equipment	3,120.20	3	7	10	30.00%	70.00%	1	9	10	10.00%	90.00%
21	586	Bemis	Packaging: Containers	2,834.40	2	11	13	15.38%	84.62%	1	8	9	11.11%	88.89%
22	655	Valspar	Chemicals	2,440.70	2	8	10	20.00%	80.00%	1	17	18	5.56%	94.44%
23	675	Alliant Techsystems	Aerospace and Defense	2,366.20	1	8	9	11.11%	88.89%	2	14	16	12.50%	87.50%
24	686	St. Jude Medical	Medical Products & Equipment	2,294.20	1	9	10	10.00%	90.00%	3	14	17	17.65%	82.35%
25	734	Minnesota Life Ins.	Insurance: Life, Health (stock)	2,093.70	3	9	12	25.00%	75.00%	1	9	10	10.00%	90.00%
Minnesota Fortune 1000					45	265	310	14.52%	85.48%	52	290	342	15.20%	84.80%

* Fortune.com
 ** 2004 or 2005 Annual Report, or corporate website accessed December 2005
 According to 2003 Catalyst Census - National Percent of Board Seats Held by Women at Fortune 500 Companies 2003 was 13.6%

Appendix B: Participant Profiles and Methodology

In order to ensure confidentiality, in accordance with Institutional Review Board: Human Subjects Committee standards, real names of subjects are not used. Despite efforts to conceal the identities of the subjects and their companies, many executives asked to participate chose to decline citing the proprietary nature of the information, the potential risk for litigation, and the companies general policy not to grant requests for interviews to students.

The interviews ranged from 22 minutes to 60 minutes in length. Three of the interviews were in person while the other three were over the telephone. The interviews were not taped but rather the interviewer took notes while conducting the interview.

Jane is an Executive Vice President in the healthcare industry. She has a nursing background. From 1998 - 2000, she was recognized by *Fortune Magazine* as one of the fifty most powerful women in American Business. She is also a member of the corporate board of directors in another Minnesota company in the food industry.

Mike is a Senior Vice President at a Minnesota Fortune 1000 company in the Food and Grocery industry. He actively participates as a mentor for Menttium, a company that matches mentors and mentees.

Sally is an Executive Recruiter. She is a member of corporate board of directors in a Minnesota Fortune 100 company in the chemicals industry.

Kathy is Founder and Co-CEO of a Minnesota consulting firm. She is an active member of the National Association of Corporate Directors. She has co-founded numerous firms. Kathy works actively to bring to the attention of the public the fact that women are underrepresented on Minnesota corporate boards.

Fran is Vice President of Corporate Diversity in a Minnesota Fortune 1000 consumer food products industry. She does not hold an executive level position. High level corporate executives were not made available for this study. Company officials believed Fran would be more appropriate for the purposes of this research.

Ruth is a Senior Vice President in the Food and Grocery Industry in a Minnesota Fortune 500 company. She became a senior executive in 2005 after spending thirty years with her company.

Appendix C: Executive Questions

Interview Questions

- Describe your company's formal succession plan
- Describe your company's informal succession plan
- Does the succession plan involve individuals inside or outside the company?
- Explain the objective requirements for promoting, hiring executives?
 - For example, previous profit and loss responsibilities, functional expertise, industry expertise
- Although more difficult to identify, explain any subjective requirements for promoting, hiring executives?
 - Perceived commitment, personality, similar interests, socio-economic background, care giving responsibilities, ambition
- Do you think any of these requirements disadvantage women from becoming executives?
- In your opinion, why don't women occupy almost half of the executive positions in Minnesota when they occupy almost half of the work force? Minnesota's Fortune 500 companies have 16.27% women in their executive ranks.
- In your opinion, does it matter that gender diversity exists on your executive team? Why or why not?
- When experience and qualifications are equal amongst applicants would you consider a woman over a man for an executive position?
- In your opinion are executives recruited for their potential or proven accomplishments?

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