

## Chapter 1

---

# For Women at the Top: How's the Weather up There?

“I remember my days on Wall Street when women would go out of their way to behave like a man. They would argue loudly in meetings, just like the men, and I would watch and think that women have a different way of doing business, and it doesn't have to be the man's way. I remember when women executives would boast proudly about not spending any time at home. One woman told me that she went back to work two days after she gave birth. I thought that was so stupid and unnecessary. Why would anyone want to do that? Of course, Wall Street is male-dominated, but the women who worked there didn't help either; they basically played along with the rules of the game that were laid down by men. There are so many misconceptions about how women should behave if they want to be as competitive as men. It is a misconception for young women to think: ‘I can't get married, I can't have children because then I will lose my competitiveness.’ That is just wrong. So much of women's growth comes from being a mother and a wife. . . . The way for women to lead is as equals with men and to work in the professional world in their own womanly style.”

These are the reflections of Zhang Xin, who was recognized by the World Economic Forum as a “world global leader” for her work as Chairman and Co-CEO of SOHO China, Ltd., an innovative real estate firm. She is one of the 62 powerful women leaders whom we interviewed for this book. Each rose to the top of her profession while she was “married with children,” or, in a few cases, provided elder care or had other family caregiving responsibilities. These powerful women reveal personal insights into the rarefied atmosphere of “life at the top.” How do women with family care responsibilities make it over multiple hurdles to get to the top of their profession and then

## 2 | For Women at the Top: How's the Weather up There?

go home every night to change diapers and read bedtime stories? What can the rest of us learn as we gaze upward into the world of top-level decision makers, politicians, law makers, chiefs of police, university presidents, and CEOs for major manufacturing corporations, to name a few positions these women occupy?

We have two very different stories to tell about women's leadership around the world and, depending on your attitudes toward women in leadership positions, the news is very good or very bad. Let's get one contemporary myth out of the way. Despite the endless blogging and newspaper headlines, women are not "opting out" of the workforce to stay home with their babies. The workforce participation rate of mothers in the United States has dropped by 2 percent since its peak in 2000, but as economist Boushey (2005) demonstrated, there was a similar drop in employment for women without children and all men, which was caused by a general recession from 2001 to 2004. Women, including those who are mothers, are in the workforce to stay. Many prefer to work fewer hours, some will take temporary stop-outs, and almost everyone wants more flexibility in how they work. Not surprisingly, the best educated women are most likely to be working; they invested years of education in preparing for employment, and they have the most to lose in terms of salary and status when they stop out. The best educated are also getting married later, having fewer children, and, consistent with this trend, may be divorcing at lower rates, which could be due to the fact that they are marrying later and hence have fewer years when divorce is possible.

The good news is that women are enjoying phenomenal advances and success in some areas. They now make up almost half of the workforce in the US (46 percent; US Census Bureau, 2007, August 9), China (45 percent; People's Daily Online, 2007, May 18), and Hong Kong (42 percent; Census and Statistics Department, 2007), which are the three societies we focus on in this book, although we include interesting facts from other countries in every chapter. The data on employment are comparable for other industrialized countries. Women are getting more education than ever before; they comprise the majority of undergraduate college enrollments in two of these societies and all other industrialized countries in the world (57 percent in the US, US Census Bureau, 2007; 44 percent in China, Department of Population, Social, Science, and Technology, 2004; 54 percent in Hong Kong, Census and Statistics Department, 2007).

Another way of thinking about the phenomenal advantage women now have in college enrollments is to highlight the growing gap between women and men in the US. Among women in the US between 25 and 34 years old, 33 percent have completed college compared to 29 percent of men (US Department of Education, 2005). The cumulative effect of this sizable difference in college graduation rates is very large. As might be expected from women's higher educational achievement, there will be increasingly more women than men in mid-level management positions, creating an overflowing "pipeline" ready for advancement to top-level executive positions.

Now for the bad news. Despite women's success in education and mid-level management, few women make it to the "O" level – CEO, CFO, CIO, CTO – in the corporate world or comparable top levels in noncorporate settings, such as the highest levels of political office, or top rungs of the academic ladder. In the US, women hold more than 50 percent of all management and professional positions, but only 2 percent of Fortune 500, and 2 percent of Fortune 1000 CEOs are women (CNNMoney.com, 2006, April 17). Comparable data from the Financial Times Stock Exchange 250 (FTSE 250; Singh & Vinnicombe, 2006) show that 2.8 percent of CEOs for the top 250 companies listed on the London Stock Exchange are women. In the European Union (EU), which actively promotes gender mainstreaming, only 3 percent of the large EU enterprises have women as CEOs; women make up 10 percent of the governing boards of top listed companies, and 32 percent of the managers (European Commission, 2006). Of course, there are variations among the EU countries, with the Scandinavian countries leading in the proportion of women in decision-making positions, and Italy and Luxemburg at the bottom of the list.

It has been a half-century since the start of the women's movement, and women have only moved closer to the half-way mark in the corporate world and other organizations; most are stuck in middle management. Women in China and Hong Kong are still far from that half-way mark. In China, women make up 16.8 percent of the heads of government departments and the Communist Party, social organizations, enterprises, and institutions (Department of Population, Social, Science, and Technology, 2004). In Hong Kong, women constitute 29.1 percent of persons employed as managers and administrators (Census and Statistics Department, 2007), but few make it to

the top level. However, with the trend of more women getting into higher education in these societies, they will be following in the similar footsteps of the American women.

A bevy of commentators have suggested that women are better suited for the “New Economy,” with its emphasis on communication and interpersonal skills and the rapid loss of jobs in manufacturing, agriculture, and most jobs where physical strength is an asset. Although this may seem like a logical conclusion, there are very few women who have made it to the top leadership positions.

Statistics showing that the most talented women are stalled at mid-level positions are repeated in every career path we examined. A recent survey by the National Association of Women in Law Firms (2006) in the US found that while women account for close to half of all associates (45 percent of beginning level attorneys), they account for only 16 percent of the top-level partners, or about one in six. These numbers get even smaller when you look at managing partners, where the percentage of women is 5 percent. The disparities between women and men in the legal profession are not just a matter of waiting until there is a sufficiently large pool of talented women with the experience to move into partner-level positions, because large numbers of women have been graduating from law schools in the US since the late 1960s. The scarcity of women at the top is not a pipeline problem.

Why are there so few women at the top of the leading organizations or running law firms or heading other major institutions, given the large numbers that are stalled at middle management? An important clue can be found by taking a closer look at the women who have made it into the rarefied atmosphere of life at the top. It is even more disheartening to find that among the small percentage of high-level executives who are women, almost half do not have children. According to a report from the US Census Bureau (2004), the more money a woman makes, the less likely she is to ever have children, with close to half of all women in the US with salaries greater than \$100,000 without children. Similar data are found for women who achieve at the highest faculty ranks at research universities, where there have been extensive and eye-opening analyses of the academic success of women with children. Only one-third of all women who began their job at research universities without children ever become a mother, and among those who attain tenure, they are twice as likely

to be single 12 years after obtaining their doctorate than their male counterparts (Mason & Goulden, 2004). A McKinsey and Company survey (2007) of middle and senior managers around the world showed that 54 percent of the women were childless, compared to 29 percent of the men; 33 percent of the women managers were single, compared to 18 percent of the men. Hewlett (2002) showed that in America, 49 percent of the “best paid” women in the 41 to 55 age range and making over \$100,000 per year are childless, compared to 19 percent of the men. The double-standard is alive and well in the workplace. The presence of children signals stability and responsibility for men, who are assumed to be better workers because of their role as breadwinners. The identical situation for women has the opposite effect. The choice for highly successful women has been clear: you can choose either a baby or a briefcase.

But, what about those women who refused to make a choice and have succeeded at the top of their profession with children and other family care responsibilities? What can we learn from these women who are leading dually-successful lives, with happy, thriving families and occupational success at the highest levels? To answer this question, we interviewed 62 women at the top of their profession, with about equal numbers from China, Hong Kong, and the United States. Their ages ranged from mid-forties to early eighties, with the majority in their fifties and sixties. These high-achieving women had all been married and, in most cases, were also mothers or, in a few cases, had some other highly-involved caregiving responsibility, such as caring for a sibling with disabilities or ailing parents. They occupied a wide range of top-level positions including Chairman of Deloitte LLB, President of Old Navy/Gap, Managing Director of China Light & Power, several university presidents, chief of police, Vice-President of IBM Greater China Operations, president of a television station, cabinet member, presidential adviser, state legislator, Supreme Court justice and deputy chairperson of the standing committee of the National People's Congress in China, and President of the Legislative Council and head of the civil service in Hong Kong. The American leaders include white, African-American, and Chinese-American women, several of whom are listed in *Forbes* magazine's (for multiple years) *100 Most Influential Women in the World*. A listing of the women we interviewed, with a brief biography for each, can be found in the Appendix. This cross-cultural group of women leaders

helps us to understand the issues women face in a more diverse and global context.

The interviews were conducted as part of a project entitled “Work–Family Balance for Women in Chinese and US Societies: Implications for Enhancing Women Leadership” for which one of the authors (Fanny) received funding as a participant of the 2004 Fulbright New Century Scholars (NCS) Program. The interviews focused on the decisions that Chinese and American women leaders made about their work and family roles, on the strategies they adopted at different stages to address these competing forces, and on the cultural meaning of work–family balance for these women, as well as on their leadership styles.

To ensure diversity of background, we included women leaders from different sectors, including government, politics, business, and the professions. The sample of women leaders was not intended to be representative. To start with, they are not the typical women in the population; they are also not typical of women leaders as few top women leaders are married and have children. Instead, access to top women leaders with family responsibilities who would consent to the interview was the key consideration. We relied on networking for the access.

Fanny conducted all the interviews personally, in the cities in which the women leaders resided, or, in a few cases, during their visits to Hong Kong. The in-depth interview was based on an outline that had been sent previously to the interviewees. Although an outline was provided, the interview was unstructured to allow the interviewees to elaborate on themes that were important to them. We only spoke to the women personally, not any of their family members. Other than a few who requested anonymity, most of the interviewees consented to the use of their identifying information for research purposes.

## Mommy Track versus Career Track

The Mommy Track was first offered as an alternative to the Fast Track by Felice Schwartz in an article she wrote for *Harvard Business Review* in 1989. In that article, she suggested that corporations and other employers offer an alternative career track for women who

wanted either to slow down their pace at work or to step out of the world of work for a while to spend more time with their children. Schwartz never used the term “mommy track,” but it was used repeatedly in the media frenzy that followed her publication and the term stuck because it succinctly summarized a polarizing concept in the contentious debates about women and work. The alternative and admittedly slower-paced career track Schwartz proposed was intended as a way of retaining talented women who might otherwise leave high-pressure jobs when childcare responsibilities were added to an already overly full day. Schwartz was pilloried by the popular media as being opposed to women’s advancement.

The idea that giving birth meant career-death generated emotional responses from all parts of the work–family spectrum. In fact, Schwartz was arguing that corporations, law firms, and other major employers of highly talented women were losing their investment by not providing ways to help women with primary childcare responsibilities succeed at work. Today, we find this sort of thinking in the establishment of what are commonly known as family-friendly work policies. These are policies that are designed to provide more flexibility and more control to individual workers so that they can manage the dual demands of family and work. These organizational policies coupled with tax incentives are well established in the Scandinavian countries, which set high standards in gender equality. Depending on the nature of the position, options may include the opportunity for part-time employment, including reductions in the number of days worked so that parents can be at home when their children have school holidays, flexible start and stop work schedules, job sharing, telecommuting, and almost any combination of alterations in the standard nine to five workday, which in reality can be a standard 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. workday in high-pressure jobs.

One reason why there was such an outcry of condemnation for the idea of a mommy track was that it would be utilized mostly by women, and thus created a second-class citizenship for women in the workplace. It also created an organizational category for women based on assumptions about their ability to remain on the fast track while toting babies and carrying the bulk of the responsibility for care of the home. The concern was, and still is, that the mommy track creates a second-class ghetto for women, and even the most ambitious women who have no intention of reducing or rearranging their work

hours will be damaged by being automatically categorized as someone who will never be a high achiever.

With the advantage of hindsight, it seems that both points of view on the establishment of work conditions that help working mothers stay in the workplace are correct. Providing more flexible ways of allowing employees to do their work is good for business and can relieve stress for employees with children or others to care for, but it can also have negative effects on the career trajectories for the employees who use them. There are, of course, other ways to help families combine work and family, but these other ways involve a redefinition of many of our societal roles and rules, and societal changes are much more difficult than changing work policies or passing legislation to protect the rights of employees who are also caregivers. Real reform involves changing the normative roles of mother and father so that both are equally responsible for the family and the home they share. It involves removing the stigma from the users of family-friendly work policies, and arranging the nature of work so that anyone who steps off the fast track is not penalized with lower hourly pay, less desirable work assignments, little chance for advancement, and no way to rejoin their fast-track peers when they are ready to re-enter full-time employment. Real change also requires community support for working families and valuing caregivers. We are a long way from real change, but we are moving in that direction.

The biggest problem with workplace solutions to managing work and family is that they carry an implicit assumption that motherhood is incompatible with life in the executive suite. The opposite assumption is made for men, who are perceived as more responsible when they have children. The default assumptions are that mothers will be less committed as workers and have more absences from work than fathers. While many parents may want more time to catch their breath while also toting strollers and perhaps pushing wheelchairs, not everyone does. The powerful leaders we interviewed make it clear that it is possible to have a highly demanding career and a happy family. We have heard people say that it is not possible to do both, often repeating the trite aphorism that “no one can have it all”; the experiences of the high-achieving women we interviewed and many others clearly show that it is possible for women to combine a commitment to their family with a commitment to a high-level career. Of course, it is not easy to combine a high-powered job with



motherhood, but it is also not easy to care for children all day, or to work part-time, with reductions in pay and few opportunities for advancement, while caring for children. Not all mothers will want a job at the top, but it is possible. Our outstanding women leaders tell us how they did it and how they inspired others to do it too.

For Jenny Ming, President of Old Navy/Gap, it was never a question of family or career. For her, these two most important spheres of life create one identity. She told us:

“I look at my career and my personal life as one. I don't see them as separate. It's one complete circle of who I am. Other people say, 'Now I'm going to put my career on hold so that I can have a family, then once my family's back on track, I am going to go back into my career.' I never looked at it that way. I want them both at the same time. I really didn't want to be a stay-at-home mom because I really like the outside interests. But I didn't just want to be a career woman without a family. For me, career and family have never been separated. It's about having both.”

Jenny Ming takes a straightforward approach to integrating work and family. She did not want to be short-changed in life, so she created a dually-successful life for herself. No wonder *Wall Street Journal* listed her among the *Top 50 Women to Watch*. When work and family are thought of as separate domains of life, we assign the caregiver-family role to women and the assertive-career role to men, keeping them aligned with traditional sex roles where men are the breadwinners and women are the bread bakers. A recent study found that these stereotypes persist – both men and women believe that male leaders “take charge” while female leaders “take care.” These false beliefs reflect a fundamental fallacy. They reveal the underlying assumption that these traits are mutually exclusive so leaders cannot both “take charge *and* take care” (Catalyst, 2006). But the women we interviewed have already proved they can. Psychologists now understand how stereotypical beliefs operate automatically and unconsciously to affect our behaviors. The ideology that work and family are separate spheres of life shapes our expectations and creates an implicit barrier to women's advancement. Leaders, like the rest of us, live one life, not two, and new models of successful living call for success in all domains of life.

## Work and Family Domains

The research literature has traditionally conceptualized work and family as two separate spheres of life and often focuses on the conflicts between them. In a recent study of working executives conducted by the Families and Work Institute (2006), the researchers compared the relative emphasis the executives placed on their work or their family. They called these two orientations “work-centric” and “family-centric.” They asked about priorities over the past year because there are momentary differences when one domain will take over the other, depending on a myriad of possibilities – whether the children are home with the flu, or the deadline for the report really is tomorrow, and so on. Not surprisingly, given the group that was sampled, 61 percent were work-centric, which means they showed a tendency to center the activities of their life on their work. By contrast, 31 percent were dual-centric, placing equal emphasis on both work and life. If work and family were actually conflicting roles in the lives of working adults, then we would expect that being equally committed to both spheres of life would be very stressful because it would be very difficult to do both well. Surprisingly, the dual-centric executives were less likely to report that they were stressed than those who were work-centric. Caring equally about family and work reduced stress, possibly because it made life more interesting and there are more opportunities for success. It is not necessarily more stressful to be committed to both work and family. Caring for a family all day is stressful and exhausting work, so it is not as though the alternatives to combining work and family are restful or easy.

It is interesting to note that, in general, women who work outside the home are both happier and healthier than those who do not. In Barnett and Hyde's (2001) review of the literature, they conclude that working women are less depressed and report better physical health than women who are not employed. In their review of the Framingham heart study (a large study of precipitating factors for cardiac-related illness), they conclude that the only group of working women that shows an increase in heart disease that is related to employment is women in low-paid jobs, with high work demands and little control over their work, with several children at home,

and little support to help with the children. When we consider the stressful lives of women at the top of their profession, we also need to respect the fact that women in low-wage jobs near the bottom have their own stressors and it is these women who show the negative health effects of long work hours and little support. Women in low-wage jobs have little control over their work lives and often over other aspects of their lives.

Other indicators that combining family and work is not bad for your health come from the finding that the entry of large numbers of mothers into the workforce has not reduced life expectancies for women. One prediction about the entry of women into the paid workforce in large numbers was that they would start dying at younger ages, much like men in general. Women live an average of 6 to 8 years longer than men, a fact that has been attributed to many factors including the fact that they are less likely to engage in risky behaviors, that they are less likely to go to war, and the possible protective effects of estrogen. The gap in life expectancy between women and men is narrowing, but the narrowing is more likely to be caused by increases in male life expectancy than by decreases in female life expectancy. Life expectancy at birth for both women and men in the US, China, and Hong Kong has been increasing. It now reaches 80 for women and 75 for men in the US; the corresponding figures for China are 74 and 71; and those for Hong Kong are 85.5 and 79.4. Having meaningful work is associated with psychological well-being (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, & McKee, 2007). Working and caring for a family do not cause ill health or high levels of stress. High stress levels result from lack of support, low wages, overwork, and monotonous work where there are few opportunities for control. Similar conclusions are found in studies with Chinese women (Aryee, Luk, Leung, & Lo, 1999; Tang, Lee, Tang, Cheung, & Chan, 2002).

The importance of having meaningful work in one's life was recognized by Lorna Edmundson, President of Wilson College in Pennsylvania: "We [my husband and I] were well along in our work when we married. I'd also watched my mother ignore her own ambitions by deferring to my father. And I could see that that wasn't very good for her mental health; I didn't want that to happen to me." For Lorna Edmundson the question was not whether having a high-powered

job and a family would be too stressful, but whether *not* having a challenging job and a family would be bad for her mental health.

In Chapter 6, we illustrate how our group of women leaders integrate their work and family domains and transform the conflict model of work–family balance into a model of harmony.

## Discrimination and Dissing

The climb to the top of any profession can be brutal, but it really is a steeper route for women, who face multiple obstacles, which require high jumps and belly-crawls. Did you know that it is legal to discriminate against mothers in hiring in many states in the US, because these states have no employment laws to protect mothers? In fact, those who are opposed to providing equal protection for mothers during the hiring process argue that it is their right to decide not to hire mothers. Despite this unsettling situation, many mothers are suing their employers for discrimination under a variety of laws, and winning. Very large verdicts against companies who have gone too far in their discriminatory practices against mothers are making overt discrimination less likely, but implicit or less obvious types of discrimination still occur. Discrimination against women employees who are pregnant or have just given birth is also one of the most frequent complaints received by the Equal Opportunities Commission in Hong Kong.

Most people probably know that women, on average, earn less money than men, but the real difference in wages between women and men is the difference between women with children and women without children. Mothers earn much less than women without children, whose salaries are often close to those of men with comparable qualifications and jobs. Thus, the gender wage gap is really a mommy wage gap – as if working mothers needed the double whammy of more work and less pay!

Dissing (actually *dissin'*) is a common slang word for showing disrespect. Like discrimination, it is often more visible when women rise through the ranks of macho professions, like police departments. Margaret York, former Deputy Chief of Police for Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), explained that for many police officers, her rise to power was

“an assault on their masculinity. When we were in homicide, I was working with a woman partner. This was the first time two women ever worked on the same homicide team, anywhere in the country. And so, we got a lot of notoriety because we were two women. They started calling us ‘The Crack Team.’ Now, the crack team, what they were giggling about behind the scenes was they meant the crack in a woman’s anatomy, which is the vagina. That’s what they meant by ‘The Crack Team.’ But it also is a common term in our vocabulary that means ‘good team,’ ‘you’re right on,’ and ‘you’re right on top.’ One male detective was interviewed in the newspaper, and he said, ‘Oh yes, they are our crack team.’ But he said it as, ‘Oh yes, they are one of our best teams.’ But all the boys were laughing because they knew what he really meant.”

Discrimination and disrespect can take many forms. Marjorie Yang, Chairman of the Esquel Group, a global manufacturer of over 60 million shirts a year – virtually every fashion brand name, including Polo Ralph Lauren, Hugo Boss, Tommy Hilfiger, and many more – told us how she handled gender discrimination as she worked her way to the top.

“When I worked at Jardine Fleming (one of the leading international financial investment firms), I knew how to handle verbal discrimination from my bosses. I could handle their teasing because I had a strategy. For example, when they asked me to pour coffee, I did not mind; but I would later ask them to do other similar tasks for me in return. In general, I was able to rein in my negative emotions and avoid anger using this strategy.”

Marjorie Yang is now among the “50 most powerful women in the business world,” according to *Fortune* magazine.

Kim Campbell, the nineteenth Prime Minister of Canada, was the first female to hold that position. She is also a past President of the International Women’s Forum, an organization of pre-eminent women leaders. She reflected on the nature of prejudice against women in high-powered positions and women’s prejudice against women leaders:

“As human beings, we begin to learn from birth how the world works. If we live in a world where leadership is masculine, we react negatively

to women in that role even if consciously we think we support equality. Our early preconceptions are very difficult to change and this is why many women do not support women leaders. Ambitious women often identify with men because they are the empowered group.”

It is hard to read her words without thinking that she must have faced some difficult situations as the first woman prime minister in Canada. She also hits on a central theme that we repeat throughout this book – much of the discrimination and prejudice against women at the top of their profession is unconscious. But that doesn't mean that we are hopeless and helpless pawns doomed to remain prejudiced. There is much we can do to prevent our immediate reactions from becoming actions and to help others recognize their own automatic and unconscious prejudices (Williams, in press, suggests we use the term “unexamined”).

Mary Ma, CFO at Lenovo at the time they were purchasing IBM Personal Computing Division, was identified by Forbes (2005) as one of the most powerful women in the world, and ranked as number 10 by Fortune (2006) in the 50 most powerful women in business. She offers sage advice for handling prejudice and discrimination:

“I always view myself as neutral. Probably people view me differently, but the important thing is whether you view yourself differently. You can view the fact that you are a woman and feel discriminated against, then probably you will feel the discrimination. But if you don't view it that way, then you won't feel anything. If you take it seriously, the impact will be doubled or tripled. But if you take it casually, then you can overcome it.”

She suggests that at the individual level, you don't need to think about the daily hassles as discrimination, but just deal with whatever comes along, more like a problem to be solved. Such an approach will keep you from boiling over when asked to bring the coffee or when there is a sexist comment. Next time, ask others to bring the coffee in a spirit of sharing the office tasks, and respond to a sexist comment as you would to any insult.

Reframing the experience of discrimination at the individual level does not mean that it is not confronted as a systemic problem at the collective level. It should be, and the international and national efforts in strengthening antidiscrimination measures should not be

relaxed. The disrespect for women in the workplace, especially in positions of power, needs to be addressed, but in a way that does not denigrate the woman. For example, when Hillary Clinton stumbled on a question during one of the US presidential debates, the other candidates rushed in to take the advantage. You are probably thinking, so what – this is what political candidates do. But in making her look ridiculous they “did Hillary imitations, complete with mincing steps and effete hand gestures,” as *New York Times* columnist Stanley Fish (2007) described the ensuing events. They ridiculed her by exaggerating female stereotypic behaviors and women’s generally higher-pitched voice. Some readers will respond to this as “no news” because political candidates attack whatever they can about their opponents, but by emphasizing to the public extreme female traits, they were subtly reminding voters about negative female stereotypes and why they might not want a woman for a president.

### Earning a Living and Psychic Dollars

A *New York Times* analyst working with data from the US Census Bureau shook our views about how people arrange their lives when he announced that “51 percent of women are now living without a spouse” (Roberts, 2007). These data may be somewhat misleading because they include all women over the age of 15 and few women that young would be expected to be married, and they include temporary separations due to military service or similar circumstances. But even if these data overestimate the percentage of women without spouses, they make a strong point about our contemporary lives – we can expect to live some portion of it without being married. With an aging population, in which women generally outlive men, we also expect a growing proportion of elderly women who would not be living with a husband. In a popular book, *The Feminine Mistake*, which is a clever take-off of the feminist classic, *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan, 1963), Leslie Bennetts (2007) presents the reasons why women should not rely on husbands for their financial security. She argues that women need to remain in the workforce because even short time-outs have a large effect on lifetime earnings. Given the high rate of divorce, women need to be prepared to support themselves and their family; and even for families with intact marriages,

family emergencies can quickly deplete the financial reserves of the single-paycheck family.

### *The Earnings Gap*

Why do women earn less than men in comparable positions? This question has dogged researchers for decades. Some portion of the difference can be explained by the fact that many women take time out from paid employment to care for newborn children and sick family members, and when they return to work, they are more likely to work part-time or fewer hours in full-time positions than men. Women also tend to select careers and occupations that generally pay less than others that require comparable experience and years of education, such as teaching versus engineering or social work versus working in a financial institution. An analysis of this sticky economic question was conducted by the Council of Economic Advisers (1998) in the US. They found that even after controlling for these variables, “the evidence is that labor market discrimination against women persists” (p. 2). A more recent analysis estimates that approximately 20 percent of the earning gap between women and men cannot be accounted for by occupation, hours worked, and other relevant variables (Government Accounting Office, 2003). The authors of this report also document the finding that jobs that offer more flexibility also offer lower pay and fewer opportunities for advancement, a fact that they took into account when estimating the “unexplained” portion of the pay gap. There is a lingering bias against paying women at the same rate as men. Similar results were found in the analyses of gender earnings differentials in Hong Kong (Lee, Li, & Zhang, 2008). The actual earnings differential widens with age. These economic analyses show that over 90 percent of these earnings differentials from 1991 to 2001 were due to unexplained factors, which may be caused by discrimination or other unrelated factors.

### *Earning Respect*

Working for pay provides people with “psychic benefits” that go beyond the money earned. In general, women who earn their own money have more power in their marriage or other relationship than those who do not earn their own money.





Figure 1.1 Source: TMS Reprints, Glenview, IL

Nora Sun, Chairman and President of a consultancy company which advises European and US firms on their investment in the China market, and former Principal Commercial Officer for the US Foreign Service, offered advice that is similar to Bennetts’:

“Don’t depend on marrying a husband and having him take care of you. After I got my college degree and started working, I had a sense of accomplishment I never had before. I felt free that I could do things and I’m competent. Even though my husband was very responsible and took care of us, I did not have self-confidence until I had my college education. There are some women in the US who are overly rude or abrasive, because they want to prove they are also competent. I don’t think you need to do that. You can’t pretend to be what you are not. If you are competent, you are confident.”

With so many women in middle management positions and the substantially higher graduation rates from college, an increasing number of wives are out-earning their husbands. Twenty-five percent of wives in the US and 29 percent in Canada earn more money than their husbands (Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2006). A survey conducted by the Marriage and Family Society of China in cooperation with the Psychology Faculty of Beijing Normal University found that one-fifth of working women in China earned more than their husbands, but the earning discrepancy was not large (Xinhua News Agency, 2002, July 6). However, while wives who out-earn their husbands gain more power in the family, the reversal of the power structure may pose challenges to the marital relationship. The researchers of this study suggested

that when the Chinese husband earned more than his wife, they were most likely to enjoy a harmonious home life. This suggestion reinforces the old Chinese proverb that says a marriage will not last long if a wife is more capable than her husband.

We did not ask the women in our high-achieving sample about income levels because such information is often perceived as being more private than the details of one's sex life or other intimate issues. One reason why people so intensely guard information about their income is that the amount of money people make is implicitly tied to feelings of self-worth. However, some of our interviewees did reveal that they were making more money than their husbands. As we discuss in our closing chapter, having more money does not buy more happiness, and in fact, once essential needs are met, additional money does little to increase happiness (Diener & Seligman, 2004).

However, money is a big factor in discussions of CEOs and people in other top positions. *Money* magazine and other financial publications regularly publish the salaries of top leaders. The average CEO salary for a company listed in Standard & Poor's 500 was 14.78 million; of course that means that half made more. In an article written for *Forbes* magazine, the authors described executive compensation as "paychecks on steroids" (Ozanian & MacDonald, 2005). As you might guess, the steroids were not estrogen. There is a big difference between the salaries of the top one or two people in large organizations and those of numbers three, four, and five. Even a brief reading of the list of CEOs who are top earners will reveal the absence of women's names. So, while more money will not bring more happiness, this is a relationship that very few women will get to test firsthand. But when they need to test it, how to handle this exception to the normative expectation in the marital relationship is a challenge. Some of the women leaders in our sample shared this challenge with us.

## Why the Scarcity of Women at the Top Matters

The G8 is a group of eight countries which exert substantial control in the global economy via a variety of economic institutions such as the World Bank. In 2007, Angela Merkel, Germany's first woman chancellor, hosted the G8 meeting. This was the first time the G8 had

been hosted by a woman since 1984 when Margaret Thatcher was the host. The 2007 meeting was also the first time the issue of women's equality appeared on the agenda. There was also a focus on poverty and women's issues in Africa on the 2007 agenda, which has been credited to Merkel who is an advocate of women's rights. The consideration of these issues by G8 leaders could result in major advances in improving the lives of many people around the world. We do not wish to denigrate the work done by many men who care about poverty, disease, peaceful solutions to conflict, education, human rights, and similar topics that are sometimes called "women's issues," but we do believe that, on average, women's priorities will reflect a set of concerns that have been ignored or perceived as less pressing when only men have been in charge.

As you will learn, the women leaders in our sample created workplace practices that are more supportive of families when they assumed positions of power. The politicians carried what was initially a concern about the education of their own children into office and translated it to education for all children. Kim Campbell, the first woman prime minister of Canada, and one of the women we interviewed, is a long-time proponent of women's rights. She worked on legislation designed to prevent violence against women, which was one of her key objectives as prime minister. When women lead, their leading issues reflect their experiences as working women, mothers, daughters, wives, and caregivers. If there is any doubt that women can also lead during times of war or effectively manage finances, we ask readers to think of the ferocity of mother bears when their cubs are threatened, or the countless women who manage family budgets with limited incomes. There is nothing in women's roles (or nature) that would reduce their abilities in any of these areas.

The need for recruiting more female talent at the top is most keenly felt in Europe where there is a drop in the talent pool with the low birth rate and a shortfall in the active workforce is forecasted. By tapping into the underutilized pool of skilled women, the projected shortfall will be drastically reduced. A McKinsey (2007) study analyzed the relationship between the number of women on the governing bodies and the performance of 101 listed companies across Europe, America, and Asia. The study found that companies with a critical mass of at least three women in an average of 10 members in a governing body obtained better results in organizational excellence

and financial performance. In a follow-up study, McKinsey (2007) further found that companies with women in top management outperform their sector in terms of return on equity, operating result, and stock price growth. So recruiting and retaining women at the top makes business sense.

When leaders are selected from only one-half of the population, you must also wonder about the lost talent from the other half. Any society that is not developing the talent of all of its citizens will find itself losing economic and political ground in the coming decades. We all benefit when the talents of all citizens are developed to their fullest extent. For those readers who are wondering how we can nurture everyone's talents so that everyone can participate in meaningful work, and still have a caring society that nurtures and protects its children and those who are disabled or ill, we turn now to the voices of our extraordinary sample of leaders and bolster their comments with scientific research findings. The powerful women leaders who shared their life stories with us show us how to combine work at the top of one's career with a happy and healthy family.