

“The problem that has no name—which is simply the fact that American women are kept from growing to their full human capacities—is taking a far greater toll on the physical and mental health of our country than any known disease.” —Betty Friedan

It was Betty Friedan in 1963 who shocked the country with her book, *The Feminine Mystique*, by labelling the malaise women were feeling at the time as “the problem that has no name.” Now, more than forty years later, it’s men with the malaise.

It was while I was talking about the underlying concept of this book that I realized the evolution of this new problem without a name. When explaining to men that I was writing around the questions, “What’s holding women back?” “Why has the progress for women in business and the professions and politics been so slow?” and “Are women their own worst enemies?” I’d get a polite nod. But when told that the title of the book was *HER TURN: Why It’s Time for Women to Lead in America*, these same men overwhelmingly responded, “What about the children?” Not once did I hear that women aren’t ready or women don’t have the strength, intelligence, passion, determination, or aptitude needed to lead. No, the only response was, “What about the children?” As a modern workingwoman and mother, I did my best to hold my tongue and my sarcasm and responded instead, “Don’t children come from a man and a woman? Why Her Turn do you believe that children are the responsibility of the woman?” This response immediately evoked a puzzled look. I would then go on to explain that my belief for the need of greater participation by women in leadership positions in no way meant that I thought that the children should be abandoned.

It is quite the contrary. We are at a crossroads in our society where men have the opportunity to take a greater part in the nurturing of their children and to share in the joys of parenting. This response again would generally meet with another quizzical expression, and then their question, “Don’t you think women are born to be better nurturers than men?” Aha!

The problem.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter, the Ernest L. Arbuckle Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School and the author of sixteen books, answers the problem with no name and men's worry over who's going to take care of the children this way: "Well, why don't they? It's not who's going to take care of the children, really. I think we have just not solved the way family life intersects with work life in the United States, especially compared to the Nordic countries.

We don't believe in early childhood education, and, as many political candidates say, we should have after-school, extended school day and not just day care—all of which would be really good for this country and the kids and society and the future—but somehow we don't do it."

You might say there is nothing new in almost all men believing that women are better at raising children. And, you'd have a point. What is important here is that in the last thirty or more years, women have earned their way into the corner office, into the boardroom, into the halls of justice, and are now vying for the people's house—The White House—and more, and yet they have made no progress as being seen less involved in the home.

Let me put it another way. Women have been successful at proving that they can do just about any job a man can do and have often deserved to lead the team in the line of work. What women have not been successful in doing and, perhaps, can even accept some of the blame for, is not finding a way to demonstrate that men have the ability and most likely even the passion for childrearing.

"For women to succeed and be treated equally, the major change that now has to happen is with men and their careers," says Mara Aspinall, president of the \$240 million Genetics division at Genzyme. "Men need to be allowed to think about their own family life balance."

Aspinall and her husband are a prime example of this. He took a sabbatical to care for their newborn second son while she returned to work twelve days after giving birth. "It was an ideal time for him to take a sabbatical. While his organization was very supportive, it took a longer time for others. The New "Problem That Has No Name"

to appreciate a dad as the primary caregiver,” she says. “My colleagues had a very tough time with my returning so quickly. One woman came into my office, closed the door and asked if the baby was still in the hospital— because she could think of no other explanation of why I would be back in the office so soon. The reality is that there are lots of men who, if it were socially acceptable and financially possible, would prefer to be home with their family.”

Aspinall is careful to point out that she returned to work because she wanted to, not because she feared for her job or her position in the company. Her position was secure and the company was generous with its leave policy. The choice was to take advantage of the workplace policies as they should be used—by men and women alike. It’s when we turn lip service into spoken reality that we’ll have true equity. Don’t we all owe dads in this country this opportunity—and without any hesitation? The macho-man routine is old and out-of-date, or it should be. Women are nurturers and men are breadwinners—we see it all the time, and men, not only women, are on the losing end.

We are all well aware of the fateful, and somemight say outright foolish, remarks former Harvard University president Lawrence Summers uttered at a conference regarding the lack of women’s innate abilities in math and science. A media extravaganza ensued, eventually leading to Summers’ resignation. Score some points for the media for underscoring women’s value. Yet, night in and night out, television instills the image of Dad as a complete bumbling idiot when it comes to parenting. There is no outrage from men or women on the media’s perspective on men’s role as guardians. Men can work, lead companies, make money, and father children, yet they are incapable of making a bed, cooking a meal, or changing a diaper. It’s interesting to note that in the TV sitcom, women are making it: They lead companies, make money—and juggle the man, who is incompetent when it comes to the household, along with the rest of the family. There are no points for women’s value here, however. Every one of these stereotypes plays into why women are being held back. Kanter calls it “the lingering stereotype” and it’s hampering progress in equality of the sexes.

“Top positions really require 150 percent of people’s time, energy and loyalty, and not everybody wants to give that nor should they,” Kanter says.

“But the fact of family responsibility still haunts women because there’s an assumption made by many people who are looking at candidates that the women will drop out, and that assumption might or might not be true.”

So, what does it take for a woman to overcome this lingering stereotype? “If you’re an ordinary woman, you have to be extraordinary to beat an ordinary man,” Kanter says. “It’s still based on assumptions, but again, the more women who get up there [to the top], the more things will change.”

And what about the single parent or the single person who doesn’t have the luxury of a second breadwinner in the family? Shouldn’t the system allow for their rise to their best potential regardless of gender? A January 2007 New York Times article¹ announced that for the first time in history, 51 percent of women are now living without a spouse. The data came from the 2005 Census, and compares to 35 percent of women living without a spouse in 1950 and 49 percent in 2000. The report dramatically changes the way we must model social and workplace procedures. The year 2005 was also the first time in our history when married couples became the minority in American households. Employers and the government must respond to this information with new ways of distributing benefits and shaping pathways to independence. Stephanie Coontz, director of Public Education for the Council on Contemporary Families, comments, “This is yet another of the inexorable signs that there is no going back to a world where we can assume that marriage is the main institution that organizes people’s lives. Most of these women will marry or have married. But on average, Americans now spend half of their adult lives outside of marriage.”

The Census Bureau’s 2005 American Community Survey showed that, among the more than 117 million women over the age of fifteen, only sixty three million are married. The report also showed that the proportion of married people has been waning for decades, particularly among the younger age groups. So, although our culture is still in a marriage mindset, the statistics tell us that the reality is very different. This is neither the place nor the time to address why there are these changes to the institution of marriage. It is, however, the time to accept the change and demand that our society begin to live with the reality of a changing culture.

We cannot expect women to take advantage of the education and opportunities available to them in 2007, the same opportunities that have always been available to men, and then tell them the children are their responsibility, too. It just doesn't make sense. Our beliefs are so grounded in the fact that women are the ones who give birth that we forget to assess logically not only what might be best for the child but also for society. Allow me to provide you something else to think about here. Today, many gay and lesbian couples choose to have a family. In the case of a lesbian couple, a decision can be made as to which individual will bear the child. This very important decision is thoughtfully made for what is best for the family.

Can you imagine if this were the opportunity for every couple in the country?

Of course, this choice is not available to most couples. But that does not mean that there is not a choice when it comes to childrearing. Every individual in this country is responsible for the next generation. They are the leaders of tomorrow and they are the reason we work so hard to make our world better. The most visible sign of this, and a moment I hope will remain vivid in our minds, was at the swearing in of our first woman Speaker of the House. At the opening ceremonies of Congress on January 4, 2007, congressmen and congresswomen brought their families to witness the momentous occasion. Nancy Pelosi was escorted into the House chamber by her grandchildren, and all the children were invited to the speaker's chair to touch the gavel. Senator Blanche Lincoln, a Democrat from Arkansas, said it best on Good Morning America, "We're here to make this great country better for the next generation. . . . [We need] reminders, every now and then, of what it is we're trying to do, and the choices that women make. They have to get results."

Having heard loud and clear that it's men's concern about the children that is holding women back, I decided to ask women for their thoughts. I surveyed 650 women with the following question: "What is holding women back from leading in America? In your profession? In all professions?" Within minutes, I received dozens of responses, all with a similar theme. The following comments speak clearly to what women see as the obstacles. "I work in a very male dominated industry—particularly at the senior levels. Success often requires senior sponsorship, investment skill as well as growing the business (asset gathering). Often men have greater success due to broader networking opportunities (college/grad school classmates, golf, etc.) particularly as the majority of CIOs,

CFOs, and treasurers are men. It is also a demanding field that can require long hours and travel, which means a good support system and understanding spouse. A friend who heads Credit Suisse's global equity team out of London said to me that almost all of the women she knows who have succeeded in this business either are not married, have no children, or have a spouse who is home or in a low-demanding profession—and I think it is the exception that you can have two people in demanding professions and still have a successful marriage/family without the demands taking a toll.

“I have fought at firms to allow flextime (not widely embraced in the investment profession) in order to retain and attract qualified individuals. At my firm, 20 percent of employees are on flextime (male and female), and it is hugely successful for them and the firm, but that is the exception, not the rule. For example, when I was offered a position at BlackRock, a firm at the time that was only sixteen years old, less than 20 percent of the investment professionals were women (although they boasted that they had nearly a fifty-fifty ratio—the women were all in operations, support, and marketing).

They told me that they hire a mix of about fifty-fifty for the investment staff each year. When I asked why they couldn't retain them, BlackRock responded that they never asked why they left! Discussions with individuals in the know indicated that working on that team was like spending your days in a locker room—enough said.”

—Barbara J. McKenna, CFA, Principal, Longfellow Investment Management Co.

“Believing they belong at the top and helping each other the way men do.”

—Suzanne Bates, CEO, Bates Communications

“I believe the country is still fighting with the stereotypes of women and their place in the world. It is still difficult for a number of people, including other women, to trust that women are perfectly capable, willing, and courageous enough for the job. I also believe that women are not always given the exposure to leadership opportunities because of where they are in the hierarchy within companies. Thankfully this is changing, but slow to happen. In my case, having spent twenty-five-plus years in corporate America, I was always waiting for the

opportunity to prove my value. I was sometimes turned down for promotion because I lacked experience, but when I sought the experience, I was often not given it. I also felt that the company looked out for displaced men more than displaced women. I have several examples of jobs being split in two so that a displaced man would have a place to fall—clearly this was convenience rather than need. I wish I had an equal number of examples when this happened on behalf of women.” —Celia A. Couture, Founder, CC Consulting

“Women have a collaborative, non-hierarchical mindset. Women function best as peers and don’t like following other women. Men are competitive and hierarchical. This means that when women lead, it is most successful when it is collaborative. Men don’t usually respect this. A woman who listens to them rather than tells them what to do is their peer, not their boss.”

—Katherine E. Putnam, CEO, Packaging Machinery Company Inc.

“It’s hard to pin down one thing, but if you looked at the big picture, I would say that it’s a corporate work model that’s outdated and needs re-engineering. In the past, when America has had to change the existing culture, it took the government to come in and make sweeping changes like child labor laws, the Nineteenth Amendment, Social Security, minimum wage laws, the GI Bill, and Title IX. Now, we have a conundrum. We are not a world leader when it comes to family policies in the workplace. And now it’s America that needs some changing, yet they (current leaders) have neutralized the government from doing so. As long as families are put below the shareholder value and it still takes two incomes to be ‘middle class,’ it’s the women who are going to suffer—because it is the women who do 100 percent of the child-birthing and still remain the vast majority of caretakers. As such, women are going to be forced to make choices between their work and their children and, even if they don’t have children, they will be hit with a ‘Potential Mommy Penalty.’

Without incentives or penalties, why would those at the top of the ladder want to change anything? Believe me, if it were left to them, we’d still have children working forty-hour weeks.”

—Diane Danielson, CEO, downtownwomensclub.com

“It takes a long time to reverse a pattern of domination, both culturally and actually, but it is happening slowly in our country. The media continues to play a big role in discouraging young people from seeing the arenas of leadership as wide open to all people. Leadership is not understood as the inclusive process it needs to be, but rather as lodged in one very powerful person. Leadership is often portrayed as an onerous, all-consuming, antagonistic, have-to-know-all-the-answers kind of thing, and many women don’t see themselves filling that kind of role. To the extent that society defines leadership as more inclusive and complementary, more people will imagine themselves productively participating. Power and resources are still much intertwined in America, and women and people of color often have less access to resources upon which to build.

“In education, access remains a huge issue for people who are the first in their families to go to college and for lower-income people. In terms of leadership, there are some very visible women leading major educational institutions, but the numbers are still small. This remains true for intellectual leadership as well, where a man’s voice, especially when affiliated with a prestigious institution, gets heard before a woman’s voice that is saying the same thing.”

—Gloria Nemerowicz, President, Pine Manor College

“The major elements holding women back right now from leading in America are the appropriate opportunities to do so. Life is so much about chances. Being in the right place at the right dawning moment. But many women are still not getting those chances. That is why they have not led America more. This is true in all professions, including law. To a lesser extent, there has been one other key element holding women back from such leadership positions, and ironically, this is one which women do control: the basic faith in oneself to master the hurdles that will enable the assumption of such leadership roles. Too many women are afraid they won’t be able to pull it all together—the travel, the meetings, the dinners, the work—and still have any semblance of a personal life. So they don’t even try. And it’s so shortsighted.

I always tell the women I work with, ‘Yes, you can make this work. But you don’t have to do it alone. Find the right help at home with your kids. Talk with your spouse about how to divide up some of the parenting responsibilities. Figure out

how to make this work for you. Don't say that you cannot do this. Because you can. And you can do it really well! Believe in yourself and the rest will fall into place.' And I noticed some time ago now that the women who never seemed to have this fear of failing everyone and everything, who just grasp the opportunities as they come and figure it out as they go, are the very ones who have succeeded wildly. They never stopped to say: 'I cannot possibly . . . ' or 'I don't know how to. . . .'"

—Mary-Laura Greely, Member, Mintz Levin

“Confidence and the old boys’ network. Let me explain. First, on confidence. Professional women today are harder working and, in many cases, better educated than their male counterparts. Yet, despite women’s greater access to higher education, women are slower to find their voice in business and politics. Over and over again, I hear women say: ‘It wasn’t until I was in my forties that I really developed the skill and ability to throw my hat in the ring for leadership roles.’ Women should take advantage of professional development courses, training in public speaking or graduate-level business courses (the high-testosterone kind) to gain the confidence necessary to make sure that they earn their leadership stripes in their thirties, rather than waiting until their forties or fifties. The old boy network may have gone underground (it’s more subtle now) but it is not dead. Take a look at the day planner for any male senior executive: Unless he’s dining with a female client, business prospect or potential lover, he’s not socializing with his female colleagues.

In my own profession, there are many women in public relations, but fewer female business owners. Key barriers include access to capital coupled with a reluctance to take risks.”

—Geri Denterlein, CEO, Denterlein Worldwide

To sum up the comments from my survey, women are being held back by each other, by their different leadership style, and, most important, by a government that has not kept up with cultural changes and mandated the kinds of family leave programs that allow all available workers to succeed. And, it is also clear that women understand that men are still more comfortable with each other. Regardless of the push to get women

into more senior positions, men will always look to fill an opening with one of their own. This is not because they discriminate against women, but because it is the decision with the least effort and potential long-term complications.

We have to be honest here and accept that men think more like other men than they do like women and they certainly believe they understand each other better. There is little comfort for men in trying to picture their second-in-command as a wife, mother, housekeeper, and business decision maker. The visual just doesn't connect for scores of men.

I have been told many times over the years that men with stay-at-home wives have the most difficulty in seeing the long-term success potential for the women they employ. Those big-type CEOs who predictably make the little jokes about their wives "who shop 'til they drop" are clueless when it comes to how they should act around career women. Should we scream discrimination with this behavior? Of course not. Eventually these "knuckleheads," the only term I can comfortably use for these gentlemen, will learn that the business world has passed them by and they are seen as dinosaurs by most men and women.

This problem may be greatest on Wall Street. Over the past decade, most of the top brokerage firms have had sex discrimination cases brought against them. Clearly, a lawsuit was less expensive than doing the right thing. A Diversity Inc 2007 article spotlights the paltry amount of diversity in the pipeline. The lack of opportunity as well as pay inequities cause diverse individuals to leave the industry. And, for women particularly, the highly publicized sex discrimination cases that most of the major brokerage houses have undergone and succumbed to are reason enough to take their talents else where. We shouldn't have to look alike to get ahead.

When looking at sheer demographics, the company that doesn't seriously begin to recruit and retain its women is going to be left in the dust like so many dinosaur bones. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that, by 2010, the number of available jobs is projected to increase by more than twenty-two million. The labor force, however, is only projected to increase by seventeen million. Every man and woman, with the capacity to do so, must be able to fill these positions. Retaining

talent is not just good business sense, it is crucial for our economy. But back to how this will be possible. America once and for all must address priority Number One—our children and families.

For every step forward, the worry about the children brings women two steps back, or that's the potential unless, as Kanter points out, a woman is so extraordinary that she's able to supersede the prevailing mindset. Here's an example. When interviewed for this book, Diana DeGette, a Colorado Congresswoman who's Chief Deputy Whip and in her sixth term, shared her story of beginning her run for the seat made vacant by Pat Schroeder: "Schroeder was the icon of American politics and she had been there for twenty-four years. She had raised her kids in the job and yet some people said to me, 'Well, I'm not supporting you because we already had a woman,' and I said, 'Well, men have been succeeding each other for generations in Congress and it seemed to work out OK.' Then other people said, 'How will you raise your kids in this job?'" DeGette knew that Schroeder's children were the exactly same age as hers, two and six, when she had been elected to Congress. DeGette continues, "Twenty-four years later and they're still asking me the same questions they asked Pat." Given the success of so many women in politics today, isn't it time we stop asking the same "what about the children?" question in reference to women's leadership? As DeGette points out, her career in law that preceded her career in public service was just as demanding of her time.

I believe the answer is to give more women political power and that question, once and for all, can and will be resolved. Women will make their case: that they are up to the challenge of accomplishing any job a man can do. But we have hardly begun the work toward the emancipation of men. It's time to accept our collective advances and create a level playing field for men. At the moment, we can't be the best in the CEO office and the best at reading bedtime stories at the same time.

This is a serious point of order for women if they're to come full circle into creating the life they want. They can't have career, home, and children all to themselves. Clearly, there is no balance in having it all, all by ourselves. Balance comes with being able to depend on the support of all of those around us. Our complex society (worldwide) is in need of a shakeup, something we will discuss at the end of this

these lectures in how we can get there. But for now, let's agree to the understanding that our first priority is the next generation, without whom we have little reason to achieve grandeur. When all of us are found to be accountable for their success, we will truly be the role models for the world.

“My grandfather once told me that there were two kinds of people: those who do the work and those who take the credit. He told me to try to be in the first group. There was much less competition.” —Indira Gandhi

Much has been written on how men and women are different. Much has been written about how men and women are alike. Right brain, left brain—women use one and men use the other. Women are better nurturers, caretakers, multitaskers, and jugglers of all that needs to get done. Men, on the other hand, work best when they focus on one thing at a time.

Men are from Mars and women are from Venus, to coin a phrase. Men are hunters and women are gatherers. Men play sports, women play dress up. Men want fast, sporty cars. Women want safety and comfort in their vehicles. Women are good at language and history and men excel at math and science. Women want a man with money and a good job. Men want a woman who is happy to stay home and cook and clean.

Does this sound right to you?

Does it fit the world you live in? Can we stereotype people because of their gender? Race? Economic background? Religion? Physical disability? Accent? Ancestry? Sexual orientation? Size? Or age? When a former president of Harvard University even questions the innate abilities of men and women, his words bring on a firestorm of protests. And, for some, his words brought to memory the long-purported theory about the innate abilities of whites and people of color.

It might make for good reading, or better yet for good debate, but I've learned you can't judge a book by its cover. I guess that tells you what generation I come

from. As much as I would like to assume that any one of the categories listed above could easily describe a person, I have learned that until you really get to know someone, nothing can tell you much about them. And, that is particularly true about men and women. The only thing we can all agree on is that most men and women are biologically different.

Now, this is not meant to amuse you but to enlighten you because the moment you make a preconceived decision about someone because of one of the just-mentioned categories, you have sunk to the lowest form of bigotry and discrimination—stereotyping. Plus, you lose out on the opportunity of discovering for yourself just how wonderful Mother Nature is and some something you don't know. Every person has value as a human being and you will be better for learning what that special quality is if you leave your judgmental nature at the door.

A spring 2005 Q&A provides a glimpse of what it's like to be a female in a highly visible, typically male-dominated field, that of chief justice of a state supreme court. The female chief justices in Illinois, Massachusetts, Utah, and Wisconsin at that time, Mary Ann McMorrow, Margaret H. Marshall, Christine M. Durham, and Shirley S. Abrahamson respectively, agreed that there are special burdens and advantages to being the rare woman with such high visibility.

First, there's the positive. "You're a celebrity," says Durham. Next, there's the we've-come-a-long-way satisfaction that McMorrow relates. As a young prosecutor, she was asked to argue a case before the Illinois Supreme Court. Thrilled with the opportunity to be the first woman to do so, she worked hard to prepare her brief and argument. Right before the "big day," McMorrow was told that a woman could not argue before the Supreme Court. Of course, she was hugely disappointed. "Now I sit on the very court before which I was not permitted to argue," she says. "When I see so many women arguing and drafting briefs, I cannot help but think what a waste of talent there was so many years ago."

And then there's the pressure of being one of the few of your gender. Durham said of the scrutiny she felt all along: "If I had failed as a trial or an appellate judge, it would have rebounded not just to my detriment but also to that of women lawyers across the board." So many professions and careers benefiting from differing points of view make "a vive la difference" attitude a strength. It is almost impossible to imagine that women in America didn't have the freedom to express themselves openly in all the ways men have as guaranteed by the Constitution. Whether as a chief justice or in any other role that makes a positive impact in how we live our lives, men and women bring qualities to bear that benefit the society as a whole. We are fortunate in America for our freedom of speech and ideas and what allows not only individuals but also the media to express themselves.

Our media, as flawed as it might be as expressed in this book, sometimes gets it right in giving women the right kind of visibility. When reading the headline for a Wall Street Journal interview with the four Sullivan sisters, I immediately recalled the famous story of the five Sullivan brothers, who had enlisted in the Navy in February 1942, with the promise that they would serve together. The ship they served on was attacked and all five brothers died. Their plight inspired a movie and initiated a change to the policy of the U.S. War Department. Had The Wall Street Journal picked the Sullivan sisters with an instinct that their story, too, could move a generation?

The Sullivan sisters grew up in Elberon, New Jersey, in the 1960s. Their upbringing, similar to mine and many other women with dads and moms who want their daughters to be independent, was about learning a strong work ethic and the determination to succeed. Their dad, an executive at AT&T, taught them what he knew about launching products, profit margins, teamwork, and competition. And their mom taught them that ambition is a feminine quality and that self-discipline is important.

The results of these parents' work in mentoring their daughters to be leaders: Denise Sullivan Morrison is president of Campbell USA; Maggie Sullivan

Wilderotter is chair and CEO of Citizens Communications Company; Colleen Sullivan Bastkowski is regional vice president of sales at Expedia Inc.'s Expedia Corporate Travel; and Andrea Sullivan Doelling is a champion horse jumper and a former senior vice president of sales at AT&T Wireless.

The article quotes these sisters as having had "to outperform men, take jobs men didn't want and draw on the perseverance they learned as children." And they "continue to make their own opportunities, another lesson learned from their parents." Yes, the media can, and occasionally does, expose real stories of women who are making it and even gives them credit for it.

The Sullivan sisters' story brings up the importance of being taught confidence at an early age. In my experience, the most confident people are the least judgmental people. Perhaps, I'm stereotyping with this observation, but I don't think so. When you are comfortable in your own skin, you have less reason to question someone else. Diversity is all about bringing more perspectives to the table. Debate is all about having more than one opinion to discuss. If there were only one way to think about things, life would be pretty boring. Nothing is more enriching than to have a different point of view expressed and have a whole new way of looking at a particular issue.

I often say to my husband, you don't have to tell me I'm right, just tell me that you understand my point of view. Of course, I then remind him that if we talk long enough, I will be right, so he might as well give in early . . . but I digress.

Seriously, not enough can be written about the importance of bringing people with different views to the table for discussion. The recent involvement of your country in Iraq is a perfect case in point. Every leader must surround himself/herself with different perspectives. It is the only way of seeing the whole picture and making the best decision. Communication styles are a major component of this discussion. Generally, women are seen as less communicative at work regarding their needs, yet able to speak more openly than men in every

other aspect in the rest of their lives. Men speak more directly about what they want at work but seem unable to do the same in other situations.

Could it be that it isn't the gender but the circumstance and the "what-is-expected-of-me syndrome" at play here? Sociologists, psychologists, and academics have spent decades arguing the gender myths. These myths are then transposed into our TV shows, movies, books, and newspaper and magazine articles. We are what the media and others tell us we are. Or are we? The Economist³ reports that the world over, parents still prefer having boys over girls. The premise that boys have a better opportunity for economic success and therefore better prospects for survival is as antiquated as believing women's hormones can drive them to insanity. In other words, these are ideas, or myths, held by a generation long past. Girls today get better grades, earn more degrees, attain higher financial returns in their investments, and, because they tend to do the housework, childrearing, and work outside the home, they outproduce men.

The media is obligated to restate the facts of the power and future of girls. The media's image of girls and women does not reflect the reality of their achievements. Women may be involved in a juggling act at work and at home, but the majority of women are making it work. The working mom understands the need for outside support from family, friends, or structured day care. She coordinates the needs of every member of her family. The stay-at-home mom doesn't have it any easier as she involves herself in her community, at her child's school, and more. But too often the media pits the career mother against the stay-at-home mother. The stay-at-home dad is pitted against the status quo for macho men. Family values are spouted by both political parties but answers for catching up with the progress of the rest of the world, or more specifically with Canada and Europe, are not in the dialogue. The most educated generation in our history is caught in the crossfire of wanting it all, and yes, all at the same time. When the best and the brightest, and I mean the majority of graduate students—women, the supposed weaker sex—are ready to take on the world of work at every level, our culture is set in a tailspin as to how to respond.

A Worldwide survey, released in March 2007, dubs single twenty something women as “Atalantas” and describes them as “independent, educated, upwardly mobile, and in no rush to wed.” She is looking for strong female role models and is dedicated to achieving her goals and passionate about her independence. She describes herself as a “homelover, not a clubber” and depends on her peer network for all her life advice. Finally, she finds herself wanting to be carefree and explorative one minute and dependable and responsible the next. It’s obvious that this generation of women is ready for anything and believes they can have it all. Atalanta’s role models are not just found in the media’s portrayal of single women on such shows as Sex and the City and in the movies. The question is, why doesn’t the media focus its attention on the positive aspects of Atalantas in its business news? These enthusiastic, energetic women are the future in America. They are role models in their own way as freedom fighters for determining how women will rule the next generation.

Women of all ages today are looking to see how other women are doing it and have done it. Whether it’s by attending women’s conferences to hear the stories of women CEOs or devouring the less-than-frequent business stories found in business magazines and newspapers, or, if they’re lucky, looking up the ranks within their workplace, today’s career women are seeking inspiration from other women in order to compete and thrive.

The annual lists of top businesswomen, most powerful women, and richest women open up the world of possibilities. For example, this year’s “Fortune 50 Most Powerful Women” list illustrates the diversity of women and their companies. The first three are the CEOs of PepsiCo, Kraft Foods, and Archer Daniels Midland (ADM). We are immediately made aware that women are being taken seriously at least some of the time. Indra Nooyi, born in India and CEO of PepsiCo since August 2006, brought her custom as a lifelong vegetarian to the healthy nutrition concept the company has adopted. Irene Rosenfeld stood her ground earlier at Kraft when she left the company because she disagreed with top management. The company brought her back as CEO in June 2006, when top management’s direction wasn’t working. Pat Woertz showed her stuff at Chevron

but knew the CEO slot wouldn't open for years, so she took time to research other opportunities. ADM came knocking within months and Woertz became CEO in April 2006. These women and many more like them cannot be dismissed as rare or eccentric. They are more the norm across America today although our media does little to tell us about their journey. They are women who are serious about their career and work. And they are women who bring the meaning of vive la difference to corporate influence.

When asked about what she thinks women bring to the table, Ellyn McColgan, who's president of Fidelity Investments Distribution and Operations and has been on the list of Fortune magazine's "50 Most Powerful Women in Business" since 2004, answers, "I'm thinking of a half a dozen of women who work here at Fidelity who are widely recognized as smart and as the people who get a lot done. They work well across divisions because they are so focused and they work so well with other people."

Women are also making their mark out in the market place. A 2006 New York Times article focuses on the need for American companies to wake up to the consumer power of women. In it, Michael J. Silverstein of the Boston Consulting Group says that women "will earn more money than men if current trends continue by 2008." Women make the majority of buying decisions not only in household goods but also travel, automobiles, education, financial services, and healthcare. Women also make almost half of home improvement and consumer electronics buying decisions. And, by owning almost 50 percent of all small businesses, women are key purchasers of all business products and services.

There is not just diversity in what women versus men want but also in what different women want. When I started my newspaper, I queried advertising agencies about how they targeted businessmen. The answers from agency to agency were similar as they each had a clear profile about what a businessman looked like, what he read, what he watched, and where he travelled. When asked the same question about a businesswoman, no agency had a clear idea of how to reach her. There was no clear profile for a businesswoman.

I knew immediately, I had an opportunity to fill a niche. The point is not to suggest that men are predictable and have no mystery to them, but that women hold the surprises.

This isn't to say that corporate is completely gender blind. One startling "new" idea is that women and men network differently. The passé brainchild of networking your way to new business only on the links or over cognac and a smoke is being replaced, at least at some major companies across the country according to an article in The Wall Street Journal.

Profiling women's events at firms such as Ernst & Young, and General Electric, writer Carol Hymowitz reports, "After all, networking over shoe shopping at a Manhattan boutique is no different than playing golf and sharing cigars after a steak dinner is for men." I've attended many women-only networking events myself, including a night at the theatre, an exhibit at the art museum, wine and chocolate tastings, fashion shows, and even a lesson in flower arranging. The point is not that women don't, or can't, enjoy the things men do, but that they enjoy other social gatherings as well, and a smart company will provide alternative occasions to make sure they tap into the passions of all its customers.

So why is most of our country still caught up in a one-size-fits-all mentality? And, why is that one size a white male forty regular? Even he is looking for more choice and opportunity to embrace a "vive la difference" workplace.