

Murray Hill Institute

Women Transforming Culture

Newsletter

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Letter From the President

Dear Friends,

I would like to introduce this first issue of our Newsletter with a word of thanks to all of you who have supported Murray Hill Institute since its beginnings. In October of 2000 we held our first conference, Women Transforming Culture, which defined our mission and set us in motion. In that conference and subsequent programs offered during the past years, we have examined how feminine qualities can bring about positive change in the workplace. We believe that women exercise a pivotal role in transforming culture. We seek to provide you with the information and support that empowers you to be active agents of change.

To this end we have added a Newsletter to our web site. This issue contains a Feature Article highlighting the correlation between world development and women's education, the heightened presence of women in politics, and understanding the challenges of women in corporate

leadership. In our Cultural Corner, we are happy to offer a movie review of *Mona Lisa Smile*, a film about a Wellesley College professor hopes to make a difference in the world through education. Our Q&A section for work-related issues should be of interest to you. We invite you to send us your questions for future Newsletters to let us know what is on your mind. We look forward to sharing our thoughts and expertise with you.

I hope you enjoy this new addition to our web site and draw inspiration from it in your efforts to transform the culture around you.

Sincerely,
Kathleen McGarry
President

Feature Article

News Panorama

For some time, professional women have been making significant strides in the workplace and their enhanced presence is producing a positive difference. The attributes, assets and abilities of women wherever they work in their chosen fields contribute immensely to the benefit of society. Moreover, women's values, standards and judgments are increasingly being recognized and appreciated. This Newsletter will present evidence of women's singular contributions gathered from the results of studies, reports, surveys, analyses, and data that appear from time to time that draw attention to women's positive role and performance in the world at large.

Heightened Presence of Women in the World's Parliaments – A recent compilation by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), an organization founded in 1889 and now part of the United Nations network, showed that of 181 countries observed, at least 167 have legislatures with seats held by women. Globally, as of October 2003, the percentage of women parliamentarians in the lower or single chamber (some countries have a unicameral legislature) was a record 15.2%. The highest percentage was scored by Rwanda where, following recent elections, women won 48.8% of seats in the House and 30% in the Senate. Sweden and Denmark were next in line: Women there occupied 45.3% and 38% of seats in their respective one-chamber parliaments. The top ten rankings included seven European countries, two Latin American and one from Africa.

In the United States, women accounted for 14.3% of House of Representative seats and tied with Andorra for 60th place in ranking. There are now 62 women members in the U.S. House and 13 in the Senate. Given its vast population, China had the largest number of women in its single chamber: 650 women out of 2,984. Nine countries had more than one hundred women in their legislature. It should be noted that in some countries a share or quota of seats, by law, is allocated to women.

But presence is not the only significant factor. A study several years ago by the Berlin-based organization Transparency International found that countries with a higher share of women parliamentarians tended to be more honest and less corrupt. Countries with a minimal number of women in parliament are generally among the most corrupt and least developed. As more women compete for and gain legislative seats around the globe, their growing presence should help make the world a better place.

Source: [Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Women in National Parliaments - Situation as of 20 October 2003."](#)

The Importance of Educating Women Wherever They Are – With the Middle East so much in the news, a lot of attention has been focused on the rebuilding and transformation of that region. One short article underscored the key role that women ought to play in this process. The author pointed out that there is a strong correlation between women's education and development. He

quotes an old proverb: “When you educate a man you educate a man. When you educate a woman, you educate two generations.”

Countries with the highest percentage of educated women enjoy the best standard of living, have the highest level of human development and comprise the wealthiest economies. These educated women are not only in a better position to improve their own status and well being but to educate their children and pass on a richer intellectual inheritance.

The article includes references to the economic advances made by so-called “Asian Tigers” such as Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Those countries are highly literate and the level of women’s education is very high. In contrast, most Middle East countries restrict educational opportunities for women and are among the world’s least developed and most corrupt. For example, the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s compilation of women parliamentarians mentioned earlier in this Newsletter showed that of eight Middle East countries covered, half had no women in parliament and women’s presence in others was less than five percent. In that list, the contrast between Singapore and Saudi Arabia could not be more striking.

Source: “Rebuilding the Mideast: Women Are the Key,” Jean-Pierre Lehman, www.theglobalist.com, April 3, 2003.

Women MBA Students Place More Emphasis on Values and Ethics – In light of numerous cases of corporate and financial scandals, particularly in the United States, it is worth pondering what the future might bring. Based on a recent study of MBA students, some amelioration may be on the horizon. Twelve top graduate business schools, eight in the United States, three in Canada and one in the United Kingdom, participated in this survey, conducted by The Aspen Institute, a highly regarded think tank.

Its Deputy Director of the Business and Society Program, upon presenting the results of this survey, noted that “...the definition of business success is changing. Within this trend, women are a major force in rethinking the business landscape and holding corporate decision making to a high standard.”

Women MBA candidates identified a well-run company as one which adheres to a strong code of ethics and has a well defined mission. Women stressed the importance of work/life balance, favored responsibility to the community in which a company operates and recognized the need to place clients first in conducting business – even ahead of shareholders. Market realities may have sunk in: If clients and customers are not satisfied with a company’s services or products that company does not do well. And neither do stockholders or employees.

Women in the survey also indicated that they were not so satisfied with their business preparation. In response to the

question: "To what extent is your business education preparing you to manage values conflicts?" 25% of women responded "Not at all" versus 19% of the men.

Source: The Aspen Institute, Business and Society Program, "Where Will They Lead? - 2003 MBA Student Attitudes About Business and Society," May 2003.

Understanding the Challenges of Women in Corporate Leadership – A lengthier, more detailed survey examining men and women in high-level positions in large multinational corporations also brought out positive characteristics about women. Three nonprofit research organizations concerned with workplace issues collaborated on a study juxtaposing "common wisdom" with actual findings in eight key areas. Twelve major multinational companies headquartered in the United States operating in a range of industries in manufacturing and services participated in the study that was conducted over a three-year period.

Nearly 1,200 executives took part, 52 percent were women and 48 percent men, all of whom were senior-level executives located across the globe. They all reported to their CEOs or the next level down. About 22 percent of the executives were responsible for 500 or more people and 57 percent were in "line" positions (responsible for contributing directly to company earnings). Their global presence was divided as follows: 62% United States and Canada, 16% in Western Europe, 11% Asia-Pacific (excluding Australia and New

Zealand), 7% Latin America, and 4% rest of the world.

Not surprisingly, the study concluded "that men senior executives have higher status jobs than women senior executives, as measured by reporting level, number of direct and indirect reports, and total compensation." The study went on to "investigate why this is so by looking at differences in men's and women's demographics, work experiences, family lives, ambitions, and the obstacles they face in advancing. None of these factors can fully explain why men have higher status jobs than women." Then the study goes on to challenge common wisdom.

Personal life decisions underlie the whole workplace spectrum. A key finding was that women executives have had to make more critical decisions in managing both careers and personal lives. In particular, "Executive men and women have lives at home that are very different from one another: 74 percent of women surveyed have a spouse/partner who is employed full-time while 75 percent of men surveyed have a spouse/partner who is not employed." In addition, "35 percent of women versus 12 percent of men have delayed having children and 12 percent of women versus 1 percent of men have decided not to have children. Currently 90 percent of men executives have children compared with 65 percent of women executives." Interestingly, the study also found that "...women at the reporting levels closer to the CEO are more likely to have children and less likely to have decided not to have children...."

Some executives in the study placed equal importance on family and work and were labeled “dual centric.” The results here showed that “Women who are dual-centric have advanced to higher reporting levels and also feel more successful in their home lives.” Somehow these women managed to find a workable balance in their lives.

Women and men at times see different strategies needed for advancement but often each group is offered different types of opportunities. Nonetheless, stepping stones to success were more similar than different with two notable differences: “women are more likely than men to say that having very high personal standards for their work and being able to navigate the politics of their organizations have been very important to their success.”

Another common wisdom is that organizations have different barriers to moving ahead and women are more disadvantaged. True enough, as women pointed out “...being excluded from important networks, having a limited number of role models, having limited opportunities for experiences in line or in general management positions, facing gender stereotypes, and being in dual-career families” were all obstacles that hindered advancement.

Given that many more women today are in high-level positions, the responses to who helped them succeed are interesting indeed! Both men (87%) and women (81%) responded that the person who most helped them advance was a man. But

women mentors’ role in developing leaders must not be minimized: “...women who have had a woman as the most helpful person are more likely than other women to have reached reporting levels 1 or 2” – the very top.

Since it is costly to develop top talent, companies are concerned about retaining their key executives. While promotion and compensation are key elements, respondents to this study ranked high other factors including “respect, acceptance of individual differences, support in the workplace, job quality, and flexibility.”

More similarities than differences emerged in challenging common wisdom. In the final analysis, the report concluded: “Both men and women need to feel recognized for their performance and perceive the performance evaluation system as fair, both need to feel included in important networks, both need to see opportunities for growth and advancement, and both need sponsors and role models.” All of these issues need to be addressed effectively, “regardless of gender.”

Regardless of retention strategies, the study discovered that almost 30 percent of all executives planned to leave their posts within five years – but not to retire. Indeed, 56 percent “plan to pursue a different career. There are no differences between men and women in what they plan to do when they leave their companies.” No doubt some will be inspired to go into business for themselves. Here too, women are no strangers.

Source: “Leaders in a Global Economy – A Study of Executive Women and Men,” co-sponsored by The Families and Work Institute, Catalyst and The Center for Work and Family (Boston College Carroll School of Management), June 2003.

Prepared by Vincenzina Santoro, International Economist and former Vice President of JPMorgan & Co., Inc., from sources deemed reliable.

Cultural Corner

Mona Lisa Smile – A Review

The latest Julia Roberts movie, *Mona Lisa Smile*, which is currently in the theaters, is a college-girl movie set in 1953-54 at Wellesley College in Massachusetts. Julia Roberts plays Katherine Watson, a “progressive” art history instructor from Berkeley, who hopes to make a difference in the world by helping to educate the smartest women in the country.

The message that the movie seems to promote is a somewhat affectionate but censorious trip back to a fifties view of the world where the academic establishment (as represented by Wellesley) is not ready to look at modern art as a subject for serious study, and the only real goal for a Wellesley girl is to be engaged or married before graduation. Although the movie adapts history unfairly to achieve its agenda, the final messages are not as clear as one would expect.

The primary mistakes are those of chronology. First of all, Wellesley College

was itself quite progressive long before the 1950’s. (This reviewer entered Wellesley in 1968 as a major in art history. I have checked with several older alumnae who were there in the forties and fifties to see if there could have been such a radical change in 15 years-they say no.) Although marriage and family were normal expectations even for a Wellesley graduate in 1954, it would not have been too surprising for a graduate to continue in law school, medical school, or go into professional work of some other kind. Picasso and modern art were certainly part of the curriculum, although not on the syllabus of Art 100 then or later, as modern art fell into a different course because there simply would have been too much material for one year. The Wellesley College community justly has objected to this incorrect portrayal of its own character in its alumnae magazine.

Another anachronism is the character played by Julia Roberts. Her costuming, behavior and mode of speech are characteristic of the seventies rather than the 50’s. Her character seems to have dropped into the movie from twenty years into the future instead of merely from California. And, although she at times loses her temper and is self-assertive (in one scene she storms into a fellow professor’s class yelling “To hell with Wellesley”), she is unsure of herself personally, and her own desires.

In her first class, the students have read the entire syllabus-worth of material, and, without being asked to contribute, identify and comment correctly on each slide. She is left speechless. No art history professor I ever

encountered at Wellesley would have been at a loss for words to add, elucidate or fabricate information about their images if necessary to fill time. Even if by some miracle the students had read the entire text before the first class, they never would have been rude to the professor as they are in the movie—not even in the seventies, let alone the fifties.

Despite warnings that the Italian professor (Dominic West) “sleeps with his students,” she succumbs to his charms partly because he seems to be “modern” like herself, but finds truth in the concept: falsus in unum, falsus in omnibus. The movie seems accidentally to make the point that this affair, like another with one of his students, was detrimental to the woman involved. It is only fair to point out that another student marries (albeit for wrong reasons), and has an even worse experience. The viewer is supposed to be outraged that a sympathetic character who is the school nurse, a lesbian, is fired for handing out birth-control devices. It was in fact, as the college president says, against the law.

Her encouragement to the “smart” girl, Joan, (played by Julia Stiles) to go to Yale Law School begins with her giving her an application. When Joan chooses to marry and not to go to law school – not even a lesser one near her husband’s graduate school, Miss Watson is clearly disappointed. Joan replies, “You said you wanted me to be happy. This is what will make me happy, and I won’t be any the less smart.” It proves that someone who is intelligent and confident of her own vocation

can make the decision not to go into the professional world. Although this is contrasted with a girl who marries and becomes miserable (because her husband is unfaithful), it is the smart and confident girl who is in control of her life and her vocational choices.

This surprising plug for the choice of being a wife and mother is strengthened by the parting conversation between Katherine Watson and the Italian professor. Hurt by her rejection, he counters by telling her that she did not come to Wellesley to make the students “all they could be,” but rather she came to make them “like (herself.)” Touché.

After the movie seems to dispel the idea that the married woman “sells her soul for a center-hall colonial,” the credits use advertisements from the 50’s that re-instate that concept again: (“This Christmas, she’ll be happier with a Hoover!”)

Despite the anachronisms, which can be annoying and distracting, and the expected agenda of feminism and libertinism, which come and go, the movie is enjoyable. The different “types” of school girls, reminiscent of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, or other school movies, are well-drawn and fun. The fact that the movie presents not only the expected feminist viewpoint but also the opposite point of view is refreshing and leaves the viewer thinking.

The **Cultural Corner** movie review was written by Sarah Phelps Smith, Ph.D.

Q & A

The lively exchanges that have taken place during the Murray Hill Institute conferences have clearly shown that many workplace dilemmas are common to a wide variety of professions. To continue these discussions, the Murray Hill Institute Newsletter is inaugurating a Q & A section. Email us your questions; a selection of the best responses will be posted in the subsequent issue of our Newsletter.

For our next issue, Sarah writes:

“I have been doing the same kind of work in a large corporation for many years. Although I like my job, it is hard to retain the same level of interest and enthusiasm that I had at the beginning. What are some of your readers’ best tips for avoiding burnout and continuing professional growth?”

Send your answers, and ideas for future questions to: info@murrayhillinstitute.org