

DIANE F. HALPERN AND FANNY M. CHEUNG

WOMEN AT THE TOP

CHILDREN

Powerful Leaders Tell Us How to
Combine Work and Family

MONEY

WORK

HEALTH

HOME

LOVE



Women at the Top

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Diane F. Halpern and Fanny M. Cheung

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Women at the Top

Preface

Sometimes, it is difficult to know what is fair and what is discrimination. In 2000, Diane received two e-mails from Hong Kong, on the same day. At the time, she didn't know anything about "the case." It was the first time that the recently formed Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) had sued a government department, and both sides wrote to her on the same day asking her to be their expert witness and consultant. It was a sex-discrimination case, but unlike most of the cases that are very common in the US, this one concerned the educational opportunity of sixth-grade girls.

Hong Kong had a complex system of allocating places in secondary schools. The system allowed sixth-grade students (actually their parents) to choose which secondary school they would attend within their geographical district. Not all of them could get into the school of their choice. So, all of the students rank-ordered the schools they wanted to attend, and those students who had better academic results had priority in the allocation. The students were grouped into five categories (bands) according to their academic results. The top 20 per cent of the students had priority to choose their first choice, then the next 20 per cent, and so on. So, if your academic results were not at the top, you might end up in a school at the bottom of your list. The academic results that were used for the grouping included the students' grades in three school subjects, English, Chinese, and Mathematics. The students' scores in a public Academic Aptitude Test were used to benchmark the schools because there were large differences among the elementary schools the children attended. In the late 1980s, the Education Department of the Hong Kong government found that, on average, boys were scoring higher on the public test, but girls were getting better school grades. It is a common

phenomenon that girls get better grades in school just about everywhere (Halpern et al., 2007). Boys catch up with the girls later on, at least on some educational assessments, but, on average, boys are behind the girls in classroom grades at the end of sixth grade. If grades in English, Chinese and Mathematics alone were used to categorize students, the top 20 per cent group would be more than half girls.

So, the Education Department decided that, in order to be “fair,” the benchmarking of the schools should be scaled separately for boys and girls in the same school (producing a boys’ norm and a girls’ norm); the male students and the female students were separated into two parallel groups for banding; and the admission quota for boys and girls in co-educational schools were set to be about equal. In other words, boys were compared to boys only and girls compared to girls. Though convoluted, this sounded like a fair plan at the time because it resulted in each of the five “bands” or preference groups being half girls and half boys.

When the Sex Discrimination Ordinance came into effect in Hong Kong in 1996, parents realized that their daughters were disadvantaged in their priority banding because, even though some of the girls got higher school grades than the boys in their class, the girls might be placed in a lower band because each band was required to have an equal number of girls and boys. They complained to the EOC. The EOC considered that this system discriminated against those girls who scored ahead of some of the boys in the top bands, because this system treated them unfavorably on the grounds of their sex.

The actual situation was considerably more complicated, but this is the main idea behind the “banding” system that was used to establish preferences for entry into secondary schools. After significant soul-searching about what is fair for girls and boys, Diane decided to work for the government side in this case, reasoning that she would have the biggest effect on the schools if she worked *with* them and not *against* them. In fact, she recommended that they do away with the system of banding and preferences for secondary schools and use a different system for secondary school placements.

Fanny was the founding Chairperson of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) in Hong Kong from 1996 to 1999. She had initiated a formal investigation on this case, which concluded that the government’s school places allocation system was discriminatory

(Equal Opportunities Commission, 1999). She recommended that the government review and revise the system in line with nondiscriminatory and modern pedagogic practices. Her successor subsequently brought the case to court, and the EOC won. Although Fanny was not the Chair of the EOC at the time the lawsuit was brought against the government, she and Diane met when they were on opposite sides of a historic sex discrimination lawsuit in Hong Kong. Most people would think that it would be impossible for a deep friendship to take root and flourish under these circumstances, but most people would be wrong. We found that although we were on opposite sides of an intensely heated issue, we actually agreed on almost everything related to the case, including a preference for an amicable resolution instead of a costly, protracted, and bitter legal battle. Over the years since our initial meeting, we have become close friends and great fans of each other's work, despite living on opposite sides of the world and coming from very different backgrounds.

Fanny Cheung

Fanny came from a traditional Chinese family in which sons had a more favorable status than daughters, but educational achievement was supported and rewarded in all of the children. It was through academic achievement that she developed her self-efficacy, which is a psychological term we explain later in this book. It refers to the belief that with hard work, you can achieve high-level goals. Inspired by the activism she witnessed during her undergraduate studies at UC Berkeley and doctoral studies in Minnesota, Fanny has spearheaded many campaigns on behalf of women since she returned to Hong Kong. She started the War-on-Rape campaign in the late 1970s, set up the first women's center in the local community and the first gender research center at her university in the 1980s, and lobbied the government for the extension of CEDAW (the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) to Hong Kong in the early 1990s. She joined a network of Asian women scholars to promote gender studies in the region. In 1996, she took leave from her university position to serve as the founding Chairperson of the Equal Opportunities Commission, to bring the Sex Discrimination Ordinance into effect. With her background in psychology,

she reckoned that it would take more than legal action to change society. She laid a strong foundation in public education and research at the EOC. Through her advocacy at the United Nations CEDAW Committee and her networking of local women's organizations, she successfully lobbied the Hong Kong government to establish the Women's Commission as a central mechanism to promote the advancement of women in 2001.

From her experience of promoting equal opportunities to a public that was uninformed on gender issues and skeptical about the need for the EOC or a women's commission at all, Fanny learned a lot about the biases and myths that need to be dispelled. In particular, the cultural values placed on the family and on harmony are often cited by Chinese men and women to counter what they consider as unnecessary and imperialistic imposition of Western feminism. Feministic values promoting women's autonomy and empowerment are regarded as threats to the family and social harmony. Many women themselves subscribe to these traditional norms and justify the gender gap as a matter of choice that women make voluntarily. If it is an act of free choice, then the gap should not be considered as discriminatory. However, the argument here has missed a fundamental problem – women's choices are constrained by the systemic barriers that are implicit in the norms.

Early studies on the gender gap focused on women's deficit and disadvantages. In highlighting women's problems, women were often studied as victims of their perpetrators and the oppressive system. Less attention was paid to their resilience and agency in defying all odds to overcome the barriers. Recent developments in positive psychology illustrate the value of studying the strengths and assets of people who thrive and succeed in spite of adversity. What factors will bring a positive outcome?

Psychology has also demonstrated the power of social learning, learning from observing role models. So learning from women who succeed in bridging the gender gap despite the barriers would inspire others on what it takes to do so. Having met many successful women leaders through her work, Fanny has been reflecting on these questions. Given the importance of family to women's lives, is it possible for women to have a happy family as well as a successful career? How can women overcome the assumed conflict between the demands of a happy family and a successful career? What can we learn from

those women who are leading dually successful lives, with happy, thriving families and occupational success at the highest levels?

When Fanny was selected as one of 31 international scholars in the 2004 Fulbright New Century Scholars (NCS) Program, she decided to take this opportunity to find out the answers from dually successful women leaders. The theme of the 2004 Fulbright NCS was "Toward Equality: The Global Empowerment of Women." In addition to participating in focus groups on shared interests among the NCS scholars, she undertook an individual project on "Work-Family Balance for Women in Chinese and US Societies: Implications for Enhancing Women Leadership." She interviewed Chinese women leaders from Hong Kong and Mainland China, and compared them with women leaders in the United States. The two Chinese societies reflect convergent and divergent trends of development in women's status while sharing the same cultural roots in the concept of womanhood. Hong Kong also serves as a bridge in the contrast between Chinese and American women, being a more Westernized and economically developed society. Fanny included Asian American women as a further cultural link between Chinese and American societies.

In the US, Fanny contacted several state chapters of the International Women's Forum (IWF), with the endorsement of the IWF President at that time. IWF is an organization of pre-eminent women and its mission is to further dynamic leadership, leverage global access and maximize opportunities for women to exert their influence. Some of the interviewees referred other women leaders to the study. In Mainland China, Fanny contacted women leaders in Beijing and Shanghai through contacts at the All-China Women's Federation, the National Congress of Women, the China Association of Women Entrepreneurs, as well as universities and personal networks. In Hong Kong, Fanny knew most of the top women leaders in the public and private sectors through her previous position as the EOC Chairperson and through the Hong Kong chapter of the IWF.

To enhance sensitivity to the American cultural perspective, Fanny approached Diane to collaborate with her on this project from the beginning. Diane and her university hosted Fanny's sabbatical in the US to conduct her interviews with the American women leaders. Over a series of mutual visits, we worked together seamlessly to interpret the findings, tie in the relevant research literature, and write up the book. This collaborative process opened our eyes to the convergent

styles that we shared in doing our best for our work and our family. We also recognize the relentless support that both of our husbands have given us throughout the entire process. When Fanny spent her two-month sabbatical at Claremont McKenna College, her husband, Japhet Law, an academic trained in operations research and industrial engineering and a former Dean of Business Administration, took leave to be with her and assist her with her study in the US. He has always been a champion of her cause, and has encouraged her to take up the leadership opportunities that emerged in her career path. He is an integral part of her work and family life.

Diane Halpern

Diane finds it difficult to write about her childhood. Her early years were spent in one of Philadelphia's poorest neighborhoods. Diane's mother died when she was 8. Although her father came to the United States from Romania when he was young, he maintained traditional attitudes toward the role of women. She recalls her father telling her that there was nothing worse than a career woman. Of course, rural Romania where her father grew up is so different from today's world that it is difficult to know how to judge these attitudes given the time and context. Diane recalls that he was opposed to women being allowed to vote, reasoning that they would vote for the better looking candidate instead of considering the issues.

One of the major turning points in Diane's life came when she was awarded a full scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania. She spent her freshman year in mechanical engineering, a choice that she made while in high school when she was totally unaware that she would be the only female in all of the engineering schools at Penn at the time. She caused a small scandal when, as the only female in engineering, she wrote an article for the Alumni magazine on mechanical birth control devices. Her boyfriend at the time suggested that she sit in on some of his psychology classes that were given by the legendary psychologist Henry Gleitman. She did and she was hooked forever – both to psychology and to the boyfriend who recommended the class to her. Diane married at the end of her sophomore year (at a very young age). When Diane's husband took a job as legal counsel to Federated Department Stores in Cincinnati, she applied to

universities in the area. It was her good fortune to enter the doctoral program at the University of Cincinnati where she was mentored by Joel Warm and Bill Dember, two real scholars in perception, which was the area of her dissertation.

Diane and her husband, Sheldon, had adopted transracially and are the very proud parents of Evan, who was 5 years old when Diane began her doctoral program, and Joan (now Jaye), who was 2 years old at the time. Diane had no idea how she would manage graduate school with two young children. Three years later, when Sheldon's job transferred him to the Los Angeles area, Diane was fortunate in finding academic positions, first a temporary position at University of California, Riverside, then at California State University, San Bernardino, and presently at Claremont McKenna College. Their children flourished in the warm California sun. Evan is now an endodontist married to Karen, with two amazing children of his own, Amanda (5) and Jason (4). Jaye is in her third year of law school, married to Danny and mother of a terrific 2-year-old, Belle. Jaye began law school when Belle was 5 months old, so issues of work and family are both personal and professional for all of us.

In 2004, Diane was elected president of the American Psychological Association, one of the largest professional societies in the world. She made the issue of combining work and family one of her central themes during her presidency. Even today, she gets moving letters and e-mails from working mothers in all sorts of jobs thanking her for raising the issue nationally and bringing more psychologists and others into the field. As director of the Berger Institute for Work, Family, and Children at Claremont McKenna College, Diane continued her work in the intersection of work and family issues, where she studied the effect of parental leave on post-partum depression, how family-friendly work policies reduce stress and enhance health, and how families prepare themselves for the new demands of the knowledge economy.

Diane spent three months in Hong Kong, working with Fanny on the manuscript for this book, which took almost two years to complete. Her husband, Sheldon, helped her settle in Hong Kong and supported her separation from the family so that she could complete this book. Diane believes that we owe it to our sons and daughters, granddaughters and grandsons, and the generations that will follow them to create solutions that allow them to live fully – enjoying the

richness of a loving family and using their talents and interests in meaningful work. Why should they settle for anything less?

We marvel at rich experiences that our group of women leaders have shared with us candidly. They are all extremely busy women who were willing to take the time to speak to us about so many aspects of their lives. We are most grateful for their participation. We also acknowledge the support of the Fulbright New Century Scholars (NCS) Program administered by the Council for International Exchange of Scholars, which created the opportunity for and funded the major part of this project.

Very few women make it to the top of their profession and among those who do, almost half have no children or other caregiving responsibilities. The message for working women everywhere has been clear: to make it to the top you have to pick one – your family or your career. *Women at the Top* presents a new look at how women can create dually successful lives. Women everywhere are waiting for an answer to the universal question of how to succeed in their profession when they are also wives, mothers, and family caregivers. Using the best psychological research and personal interviews with 62 women with families and prominent leadership positions in the US, China, and Hong Kong, and drawing on the life experience of prominent women leaders with children in Europe and other places around the world, we show women how to combine babies and briefcases for dually successful lives.

In this book, our diverse perspectives come together to create a new vision for dually successful women leaders – leaders whose lives are filled with meaningful work and loving families. In other words, leaders who have it all.

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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

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 obtaining 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