

Why are women unhappier than they were 40 years ago?

An excerpt from Find Your Strongest Life: What the Happiest and Most Successful Women Do Differently, by Marcus Buckingham.

Because the idea is, in the long run, that women's liberation will be men's liberation, too. — Gloria Steinem.

Imagine it is 1969, and we're in a thriving American city. Let's choose Detroit. The '60s were good to the Motor City, and the future would have looked as bright as new chrome. Now imagine stopping a working woman on Detroit's Woodward Avenue, perhaps a young bank clerk, and asking if she would cast her mind forward, decades into the future. Not to picture the flying cars and space-themed restaurants that always seem to pop up in that era's visions of the future, but to think about the role of women at work, in business, in government, in life. What do you think she would have said?

That year—1969—was an intense, rousing time for women in America. Betty Friedan had published *The Feminine Mystique* a few years earlier and had founded the National Organization for Women in 1966. And Gloria Steinem, Friedan's more controversial compatriot, had just published the essay in *New York* magazine that clearly separated the modern women's movement from other oppressed groups, *After Black Power: Women's Liberation*, in which she called for meaningful work, equal pay, and the goal for all women to be freed from the role of only "servicing men and their children."

Fast-forward 40 years: No matter how optimistic the guesses of our woman on a Detroit street, I bet they wouldn't have outstripped what has actually happened.

I doubt she would have guessed that by the early 21st century women would be running the governments of countries as powerful and widespread as Germany and Ireland, Bangladesh and New Zealand, Chile, Mozambique, and Jamaica. Or that the wife of one U.S. president would spend months in 2008 as the national favorite to become President herself and, failing in that quest, would become an outspoken Secretary of State, or that the Speaker of the House would be a woman. Or that John McCain, the 2008 Republican candidate, would choose a moose-hunting, helicopter-riding, crowd-pleasing mother of five as his running mate because she'd stared down oil companies as governor of the tough state of Alaska.

How about education? I'm sure our woman on the street would have forecast that more girls would be completing high school and attending college, but do you think she'd have predicted that during the 2008 school year, 59% of all bachelor's degrees and 61% of all master's degrees would be earned by women, not men? Or that by 2009, four out of the eight Ivy League universities—Harvard, Brown, Penn and Princeton—would have female presidents?

And work? Again, she would probably have bet that, in the future, more women would be working, but would she have guessed that women would be holding more management and supervisory positions than men, by a margin of 37% to 31%? Would she suspect that, in like-for-like work, women would be earning exactly what men earn, and that women's pay would actually be increasing faster than men's? I doubt it.

Yet the biggest surprise would have come if you had asked her just one more question: Given all the evidence of women running corporations and universities, hospitals, media empires, branches of government and countries, do you think women in the future will be happier?

Of course they will be happy, she would have said. With all this choice and opportunity, how could they not be?

Well, as it turns out: too easily.

Each year since 1972, the U.S. General Social Survey has asked men and women: "How happy are you, on a scale of 1 to 3, with 3 being very happy, and 1 being not too happy?" This survey includes a representative sample of men and women of all ages, education levels, income levels, and marital statuses—1,500 per year for a total of almost 50,000 individuals thus far—so it gives us a most reliable picture of what's happened to men's and women's happiness over the last few decades.

As you can imagine, a survey this massive generates a multitude of findings, but for our purposes here are the two most important discoveries.

First, since 1972 women's overall level of happiness has dropped, both relative to where they were 40 years ago and relative to men's. You find this drop in happiness in women regardless of whether they have kids; how many kids they have; how much money they make; how healthy they are; what job they hold; whether they are married, single, or divorced; how old they are; or what race they are. (The one and only exception: African American women are now slightly happier than they were back in 1972—though they remain less happy than African American men.)

And in case you're wondering, this finding is neither unique to this study, nor is it unique to the U.S. In the last couple of years, results from six major studies of happiness have been released:

- The United States General Social Survey (46,000 people, from 1972 to 2007)
- The Virginia Slims Survey of American Women (26,000 people, from 1972 to 2000)
- The Monitoring the Future survey (430,000 U.S. 12th graders, from 1976 to 2005)
- The British Household Panel Study (121,000 people, from 1991 to 2004)
- The Eurobarometer analysis (636,000 people, from 1973 to 2002, covering 15 countries)
- The International Social Survey Program (97,462 people, from 1991 to 2001, covering 35 developed countries)

All told, more than 1.3 million men and women have been surveyed over the last 30 years. Wherever researchers have been able to collect reliable data on happiness, the finding is always the same: Greater educational, political, and employment opportunities have corresponded to decreases in life happiness for women as compared with men.

The second discovery is this: Although women begin their lives more fulfilled than men, as they age they gradually become less happy. Men, in contrast, get happier as they get older.

This creeping unhappiness can seep into all aspects of a woman's life. When the researchers asked more specific questions, such as, "How satisfied are you with your marriage?" and "How happy are you with the things you own?" and "How satisfied are you with your finances?" the pattern was always the same: women begin their life more satisfied than men, and wind up less satisfied. Sure, the crossover points vary a little—women's happiness with their marriage sinks below men's at the age of 39; their satisfaction with their finances dips at 41; and by 44, they're more dissatisfied than men with stuff they own.

But overall, the trajectory is consistent, and consistently downhill. As you can see from the graph, by the time women reach 47, they are, overall, less happy with their life than men, and the trend continues on down from there.

Of course, this doesn't mean that every individual woman becomes less happy than every individual man. We've all got our own stuff going on and, man or woman, some days we're in a happy purple haze, some days we've got the blues, and some days we even succumb to the "mean reds," as Holly Golightly called them. Nor does it mean that this darkening outlook on life is necessarily going to afflict you. You are a unique human being, blessed with the freedom to make your own choices, and so it's completely within your power to choose a life, and a perspective on life, that becomes more fulfilling as you get older, not less. There'd be little point reading a book such as this if you didn't believe you had this power.

However, right now, the two trends we see in the data are real and telling: Over the last few decades, women have become less happy with their lives. And, as women get older, they get sadder.

Look around and you can easily find other research that confirms and colors these two trends. Take stress as an example. Sociologists from Ohio State University examined time diary data from two national surveys, one conducted in 1976 and the other in 1999, to see whether men's and women's experience of their "free time" had changed over 20 years. Here's what they found:

- Women were much more likely to feel sometimes or always rushed in 1999 than in 1975, while men were not.

So not only are women becoming less happy decade by decade, their minutes are becoming more stress-filled as well.

- Each hour of free time reduces men's odds of feeling rushed by 8%, but each hour of free time has no similar effect for women. So whatever is happening to women in their so-called free time is not helping them feel less stressed.

- For women the odds of feeling sometimes or always rushed are 2.2 times higher for married women with children than for single, childless women. The same is not true for men. Translation: kids inhibit relaxation for women, but not for men.

Looking beyond pure survey data, the World Health Organization can track what this increase in stress does to a woman's mental health. According to their most recent analysis, depression is the second most debilitating disease for women (heart disease is first), while for men depression clocks in at No. 10. As a result, women choose to medicate themselves with anti-anxiety and anti-depression medication twice as often as men do. Never one to miss an opportunity, the big pharmaceutical companies nurse this need by targeting two-thirds of all advertising of these medications explicitly to women.

"Hey," you might say. "Life's tough. Deal with it." And of course you'd be right. Life is not designed with anyone's happiness in mind, and it has the disconcerting habit of not rewarding good people as much as we'd expect, punishing the wicked less vigorously than we'd like, and even on occasion getting the two completely mixed up.

Even so, only the most wasted of cynics would deny that something's got to give. Not only is this "tough life" significantly tougher on women than it is on men, but the advances of the last 40 years were supposed to have changed things for the better. And not just for womankind, but for each individual woman. Those hard-won rights, opportunities, and advantages were supposed to have netted women more than just another burdensome role to play—"you at work." They were supposed to have fostered in each woman feelings of fulfillment and happiness and even, for the special few, the sustained thrill of living of an authentic life.

This hasn't happened. Whether you're looking at the data or reading these stories or just listening to the sound of your own voice, the conclusion is hard to escape: Over the last 40 years or so, life is not becoming more fulfilling for women; it is, in every way we can measure, becoming more draining instead. To use Thomas Jefferson's words, while women now have the liberty to choose whichever life they'd like, many are struggling in their pursuit of a happy life.

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Ten myths about the lives of women

Marcus Buckingham

Studies show assumptions about women and leadership are often wrong.

1. With better education, better jobs, and better pay, women today are happier and more fulfilled than they were 40 years ago.

Actually, the opposite is true. Surveys of more than 1.3 million men and women reveal that women today are less happy relative to where they were 40 years ago, and relative to men.

2. Women become more engaged and fulfilled as they get older.

No, men do. According to a 40-year study of 46,000 men and women, women begin their lives more satisfied than men and then gradually become less satisfied with every aspect of their lives—marriage, finances, things they own, even family.

3. At work, women are relegated to lower level roles.

In fact, 37% of women hold managerial positions, vs. 31% of men.

4. Most men think that men should be the primary breadwinner and women should be the primary caretaker.

While 74% of men agreed with this statement in 1977, only 42% say that today. (39% of women agree.)

5. Women would prefer to work for other women.

About 40% of women want to work for men, while 26% prefer a female boss.

6. Flexible work options, such as paid leave and telecommuting, allow women to feel happier at work.

Studies actually show a negative correlation between taking advantage of such options and a women's self-reported daily happiness. These programs, by themselves, won't make you happy.

7. Motherhood makes women happier.

Studies show married mothers are more stressed and less happy than married women with no kids.

8. Kids want more time with their working mothers.

Not according to the kids. When 1,000 children in grades 3-12 were asked what they wanted from their mom, only 10% said "more time." More than a third said they wanted their mom to be "less stressed and tired."

9. Women are good at multitasking.

Women are no better at it than men, and research shows that your IQ drops 10 points when you do two tasks at once.

10. Women are paid less for the same job.

The oft-quoted 77¢ on the dollar figure is accurate. But almost all of the gap is caused by different levels of experience. Women interrupt their careers and that leads to being perceived as having less experience.

For more information on the studies behind each myth, check out these sources:

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7. R.J. Evenson and R. Simon, *Clarifying the Relationship Between Parenthood and Depression*, *Journal of Health & Social Behavior*, vol. 46 (2005): 341-58.
8. J. Coleman and S. Coontz, eds. "What Do Children Want from Their Working Parents? Unconventional Wisdom: A Survey of Research and Clinical Findings." Prepared for the Council on Contemporary Families' 10th Anniversary Conference at the University of Chicago (accessed on Dec. 4, 2008).
9. R. Moroney, "Men and Women Are Equally Bad at Multitasking," (Mar. 7, 2007, *The Wall Street Journal* (accessed on Jan. 13, 2009); Hewlett Packard, "Abuse of technology can reduce U.K. workers intelligence," (accessed on Jan. 13, 2009).
10. "Exactly how much housework does a husband create?" (University of Michigan News Service, Apr. 3, 2008) (accessed on Jan. 28, 2009).

Why Women Make a Difference in the Boardroom

Blythe McGarvie

There are more women than ever in executive positions these days, but their scarcity in the boardroom could be hurting U.S. business.

When I was in my twenties starting out in business, I asked the septuagenarian man sitting next to me at a meeting held at his private club whether it accepted women as members. Without missing a beat, he said, "Of course we do. We have many widows here." I thought that if he could not distinguish between women able to join a club on their own and those who gained membership as adjuncts to their husbands, he probably would have difficulty promoting or working for a woman in the business realm.

While finding women in executive positions is hardly novel today, finding them in the boardroom is much more unusual. This fact not only verifies a persistent hesitancy among established males to open doors to women, but it also may be a cause for concern over the strength of U.S. business.

Homogenous groups underperform in solving difficult problems, according to research in professor Scott E. Page's book, *The Difference*. "Groupthink," defined by Irving Janis in 1972 when he wrote about disastrous policy decisions, occurs when groups make decisions without considering all of the alternatives and consider unanimity more important than the quality of the outcome.

"Less feverish"

In my experience as a chief financial officer and currently as a board member for Accenture (ACN), Travelers (TRV), Viacom (VIA.B), and Wawa (WAWA), I've observed numerous situations in which women raised considerations that had not been brought up by men and that allowed for better discussions and better decisions—with ultimate unanimity. As Cathryn Cranston, board member of American Media, told me: "Women deliver their comments in an equally substantive, but less feverish, way than men."

A token woman on a board is not sufficient to make a difference, but evidence shows that those companies with several women board members report better financial results. Research conducted by Catalyst, a nonprofit corporate membership research and advisory organization, has found that companies with more women board members outperform those with fewer female representatives.

A 2007 study found that boards that held more women experienced return on equity 400 basis points higher, return on sales 400 basis points higher, and return on invested capital 300 basis points higher than boards with only token female representation—one or two women. To understand this dynamic, I asked an expert who makes her living recruiting board members and CEOs, Gayle Mattson, executive vice-president and global leader of the board and CEO practice at DHR International. She believes her clients are best served by her ensuring that searches are global and inclusive.

As an example, let me cite my own experience. I am the chairman of the Travelers' Investment and Capital Markets Committee overseeing more than \$70 billion in investments. We did not have any major impairments like other insurance and financial services firms. I credited this both to our committee and to management, which is comprised of male and female global thinkers.

Asking the right questions

Women and ethnic minorities constitute the core of the slate of candidates Mattson presents. "Women change the dynamics of transparency and openness. Nothing is taken for granted," Gayle explains. Today, she finds a challenge in assuring that companies have multiple women board members. She cites that companies get into less trouble and have different risk profiles with more women board members. She worked with Principal Financial Group and is convinced they avoided the mortgage meltdown "...because board members asked questions early on. They looked at issues." This company's board of directors consists of four women and eight men.

In the past many board members were active or recently retired CEOs, mostly white males. Since the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, demand for financial experts skyrocketed. Women with financial expertise had board opportunities they didn't have before. I already served on the boards of Wawa, Accenture, and Pepsi Bottling Group (PBG) before passage of this law and have seen the great leap forward for women since then. Yet women with the potential to serve on boards need the same mentoring and teaching as high-potential men.

The best way to groom a future woman board member is to have the CEO work closely with her on strategic projects and financial priorities. In this process, she will have the opportunities to distinguish herself and build a network of various constituencies with whom the CEO works. This is a good practice whether the aim is to groom the female executive as a board member of the company for which she works or as an outside director.

Seeking out mentors

A company may well want to allow a few high-potential executives to work closely with members of its board of directors. Women need to seek experience with other board members if they want to be qualified to serve on boards in the future. When I was a chief financial officer for five years of Hannaford Bros. (acquired by Del Haize in 1999), I had monthly phone calls with one of our board members regarding economic conditions in our new market. She was certainly very interested in our business, but she also used these calls to prepare for her role on the Federal Reserve Board of Richmond. I viewed each call as a mini-exam and wanted to make sure that I provided accurate and insightful information and analysis to her.

She also had a regular call with the head of internal audit as part of her preparation as chair of the audit committee. I owe a considerable debt to this board member as I learned from one of the most intelligent, best-trained, and gracious woman I have ever met. Not every board member is willing to spend time with management. If you are looking to prepare yourself for a board position, choose as mentors those board members who care about development and learning. Such people groom future leaders.

Today, women no longer have to wait until men die to join many private clubs. Let's open the boardrooms to women directors who can keep your companies financially sound, be role models for talented young women, and make U.S. business even better.

What Companies Need to Develop Women Leaders

Anna Marie Valerio

Women are in the majority of those now earning college and graduate degrees. Here's what business can do to train them for leadership roles.

Retaining talented women in corporations is more critical than ever. Successful organizations know that developing individuals who can truly lead in the global economy gives them a competitive advantage. My interviews with high achievers of both genders in Fortune 500

companies and universities have revealed much about leadership today. For the first time in history, the attraction, retention, and development of talented women has become an important issue for many American corporations.

Demographic trends inform us that when the large number of baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) in the U.S. begin to retire, there will be a shortage of trained, experienced people who can fill key positions. The smaller Generation X (born between 1965 and 1979) will serve as the replacement group and will need to be ready to move into leadership roles. The most likely candidates to be promoted into those leadership roles in the U.S. are those who are now earning the majority of college and graduate education degrees. This majority happens to be female.

Research has shown that women leaders are good for business. Companies with the highest representations of women in leadership roles show better financial performance. What companies must do is make the organizational climate more hospitable to women to allow greater flexibility in the way women are perceived and allowed to act. Organizations may implement programs and policies that can support diversity and inclusion, women's leadership, and work-life integration.

Furthermore, some of the evidence on generational differences suggests that both men and women from Gen X and Gen Y are more likely to be family-centric or dual-centric, that is, placing a high priority on family or on work and family equally. Issues that were once considered "for women only" now apply to both men and women in the workforce, leading to greater job satisfaction for both genders. Here are the essential principles companies can implement to develop women leaders:

Communicate the commitment to diversity. The commitment to diversity starts with the CEO and the board of directors. It needs to be obvious throughout the organization, starting with the top leadership team and cascading outward.

Find placements for women on boards. Norway is meeting a goal set in a 2003 law for 40% of board seats to be held by women. CEOs can recommend women candidates to their boards of directors and recommend women candidates for other companies' boards.

Generate diverse candidate nominations. Starting with their direct report team, CEOs can demand and insist that selection teams generate gender-diverse candidate nominations, emphasizing that the quest for well-qualified candidates be made a priority.

Measure performance on gender-related issues. Surveys can be designed to measure results at all levels in an organization. They can be a useful tool to provide detailed analyses of outcomes and trends, and CEOs can use them to track the effects of diversity and inclusion initiatives, help them determine annual strategic objectives, and allocate resources for leadership development initiatives.

Sponsor women's networks and leadership forums. Encourage mentoring and provide opportunities for mentoring relationships to evolve that are based on natural affinities between people and "chemistry." Women need to learn more about how other women were successful in achieving their professional goals.

Provide external coaches and internal mentors for high-potential women. Coaching also accelerates the learning process and can be helpful for high-potential women by providing them with more feedback about their performance and how they are perceived within the organization.

Hold decisionmakers accountable for distributing advantageous assignments. In most organizations there are key jobs and experiences that are critical to future success in leadership roles.

Often these are line jobs with profit and loss responsibility, and they may even be "must haves" for candidates being considered for leadership positions.

Provide external development programs. Sometimes managers learn valuable lessons about leadership from roles they assume outside the workplace. External "stretch" assignments enable leaders to gain experiences not available within the organization. Loaned executives may work with volunteers to manage employee campaigns in businesses, government, and professional companies. These experiences expand women's networks and give them valuable feedback about their performance. Stretch experiences also include roles requiring public speaking and serving on boards.

Create international development programs. At one time, you could "get your ticket punched," literally and figuratively, by doing a stint at a company's overseas office. Rather than spend the time and money associated with selecting candidates, relocation, training, and repatriation, assignments may be structured for three- to six-month periods with visits home. Both men and women find this less disruptive to their personal lives.

Allow greater work flexibility. Technology now erases the time barriers around the globe and allows speeds of human communication never before experienced by previous generations. While this has had both advantages and disadvantages for individuals, it also permits us to restructure and reevaluate how we work. The measurement of tangible results and the overall value of an employee's contributions may now trump "face time" at work as a criterion for performance. Since the 1980s many companies have had flexible work arrangement policies: flextime, telecommuting, reduced/compressed hours, and job sharing.

For CEOs and their organizations to remain resilient in the face of both technological and social change, they may consider taking a more holistic, systemic strategy by redesigning how careers are built. There are specific ways in which organizations can encourage their managers, both men and women, to play a greater role in developing talented women in their organizations. Having a better understanding of how to create organizations that flourish in these difficult times benefits management, male and female employees, and all stakeholders.

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