

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

AMERICAN MATRIARCHY

A new engine of the middle class

SHE WAS EMBLEMATIC OF THE SURGE *in middle-class families to these suburban frontiers, though from where she sat trying to earn a few extra bucks doing freelance writing, the room was so cold she often wore gloves when she typed.*

Hers had been a long and strange trip to Rockland County, a recently carved suburb of New York City. Born Bettye Goldstein, her childhood in Peoria was hardly ideal. Growing up brainy, assertive, and Jewish kept her Midwestern classmates at a distance. That her look, too, was different—diminutive and thoughtful behind heavily lidded eyes—meant some adolescent girl classmates were even more distant.

High school can be hell.

Her life on the periphery, with few dates and episodes of extreme solitude, furnished Bettye with a sensitivity for mortals on the margins that cannot be taught in books, even to such a brilliant and dedicated student.

She found liberation and her voice in the calm, sequestered halls of Smith College in the wilds of western Massachusetts. She even chose to shed the “e” on her name, considering the appendage a vestigial pretension from life in Peoria.

She became Betty.

Liberation blooms in many forms.

Left to her own devices, Betty found ample intellectual challenge, graduating summa cum laude with a reputation for staunch antiwar positions and a stint as editor in chief of the college newspaper.

A fellowship at UC Berkeley led her westward to the tutelage of the brilliant developmental psychologist Erik Erikson. More excellence led to another promising fellowship. Betty was beginning to create a career consistent with her prodigious talents. As she later recounted, the physicist she was seeing at the time urged her not to accept the prestigious posting. He may have been intimidated by her arc of flight.

After reflecting about the kind of life women were expected to live at the time, she reluctantly turned the fellowship down.

Though the boyfriend/physicist met his own passing soon after, that fateful decision came back in interviews for the rest of her life. She had come to a fork in the woods . . . and took the road oft taken.

It was a habit she was about to break.

Sitting in the quiet of her rented home, sandwiched between the incessant demands of tending to her two grade-school boys, the brilliant scholar who had moved from Berkeley back to Peoria and ultimately to Greenwich Village sought freelance writing assignments for ladies' magazines to fill the time and the house account.

As a street reporter for a labor newspaper she honed her skills at inquiry and expository expression. She had finagled an inordinately long maternity leave after the birth of her first boy, but when she announced her subsequent pregnancy the union chose to dismiss her on the spot.

It was another time . . . back in 1957. And maternity leave meant just that.

An impending fifteenth reunion at Smith College led her to be engaged to conduct a survey of her returning class about the course their lives had taken. Working with two friends, she designed a questionnaire with a series of open-ended questions for her 200 classmates, mostly middle- and upper-class women from across the country.

Her interrogatory ranged from how these women had used their educa-

tion, to how satisfied they were with their life's direction, to how and when they confronted intimate problems with their husband. Her queries covered a great many subject areas, and yet they can naturally be summarized by the single genuine question that lay deep at the root of the entire exercise:

Are you happy?

*Like most "independent" surveys, this one had a hoped-for outcome—to disprove the growing cultural myth that self-actualization for women was negatively influenced by pursuit of college and graduate degrees. A well-circulated book titled *Modern Women: The Lost Sex* by Ferdinand Lundberg and Dr. Marynia Farnham pointed to sexual and gender dysfunction among women of higher education.*

Not surprisingly, Smith College was keen to build evidence to the contrary.

At the same time, it would be inaccurate to portray the women of Betty's Smith College class as energetically interested in the outcome of this survey—much less the women of the nation and the world. As those alums dutifully and faithfully answered and submitted their forms, there was no sense of restless anticipation. This study was the furthest thing from a bold new beginning. It was instead just a humble list of questions with ample space provided for reply.

It was just a chance to be heard.

How dangerous could a few simple questions directed to the Smith sisters of '42 be?

What happened next stunned her, which is surprising in retrospect for two reasons—one that she was a brilliant and observant woman, according to all accounts. But the other and more striking reason was that young Betty Friedan was a member in good standing of the very target audience she had set out to survey.

That's how deep the truth was buried.

IN *LIFE SO FAR*, FRIEDAN acknowledges that when she designed the survey with her friends Mario Ingersoll Howell and Anne Mather

Montero they were creating inquiries for their classmates that they had not truly posed to themselves. The irony, of course, is that the survey did not disprove the notion that education made women dysfunctional—instead, it bore a more powerful message.

These seemingly happily settled, educated women from all across the country were leading lives of desperation, disaffection, loneliness, and pain.

Worst of all were the feelings of resentment from women who were undergoing psychoanalysis and finding that the prescribed remedies (by their mostly male doctors) only added to their sense of isolation.

As she gathered the findings, it slowly dawned on Friedan that there was a major crisis facing middle-class American women. She broadened her inquiry to include women graduates from Radcliffe and other colleges. In time she would survey scores of women with strikingly similar results.

She composed an article and submitted it to the major women's magazines for whom she had been writing—among them *McCall's*, *Redbook*, and *Ladies' Home Journal*. Her essay was rejected at every turn. She tried another version, and then another—each time with similar result.

After her fourth attempt was summarily dismissed, despite ardent massaging and editorial accommodation, Friedan reluctantly reached a couple of conclusions.

First, the subject she had unearthed threatened the very existence of the deeper-into-domesticity magazines for which she had been supplying happy hausfrau stories.

They simply could not handle the truth.

And as she huddled for warmth in her Rockland exurbia she realized that only an independent book format would grant her sufficient latitude and freedom to explore in detail what was unfolding in her research. Her greatest challenge was distilling in a credible and sensitive way the hidden anxiety that coursed through the words of all these women.

Imagine how these Smith alums might have engaged with one another on those spring reunion afternoons in 1957. The smiles and shared laughter belied the searing words they had forwarded in secret, wrapped in the comforting sequestration of Friedan's open-ended questionnaire. None could be truly sure what the other had written. Had they shared the secret? These ladies externally adopted the code of middle-class women

everywhere in those days: an omerta shared by a generation's gender: Suffer in silence . . . endure it alone . . . keep a clean home and a smile on your face. Tell no one . . . not even . . . or especially not, your shrink.

Theirs was a deeply suppressed anxiety in spite of its prevalence—which made it the saddest kind of all.

It took nearly five years for Friedan to bring definition and form to this amorphous pain. Armed with a \$3,000 advance from publisher W.W. Norton, she lined up three days a week of babysitting help and secreted herself to the Allen Room of the New York Public Library.

It was a painstaking process, involving month after month of listening, reflection, and probing. At last the answer came to her as a great notion. Staring into the opaque angst of so many women, Friedan's first chapter was called "The Problem That Has No Name."

Betty's remarkable work took our nation by storm from its first appearance and for the intervening fifty years. It was titled, simply but prophetically, *The Feminine Mystique*.

Friedan opened her book with an admission: "Gradually without seeing it clearly for quite a while, I came to realize that something is very wrong with the way American women are trying to live their lives today." Later in the preface she faced the mirror: "I sensed it first as a question mark in my own life, as a wife and mother of three small children, half guiltily, and therefore half-heartedly, almost in spite of myself, using my abilities and education in work that took me away from my home."

From the instant of publication in 1963, Betty Friedan's life changed. In time she liberated herself from a restrictive marriage and from the reverie of Rockland County. Once again she settled in New York City, and she became a constant fixture on the lecture and talk-show circuit.

She was forceful and persuasive in the sort of way that led the *New York Times* to eulogize her as "famously abrasive." "She was one of a kind."

For years the only time the book, which debuted on the *New York Times* bestseller list, fell from that permanent perch was when there were simply no copies to be had and the printers hurried to replenish the shelves.

Rarely has one small set of questions uncovered such a trove of emotion or coincided with a gender revolution of such sweeping proportion. Cause or effect is for historians to debate. Did she merely observe the

starter's pistol, or did her book itself spark the revolution?

Whatever, her book brought many soaring arrows suddenly into alignment.

No matter her cause or effect; for the women of our nation, change was already on the march.

Hi Ho, Hi Ho . . .

WHEN THE UNITED STATES ENTERED World War II, more than 12 million women were already working as a valued quarter of the American workforce. During the period of combat operations another 6 million women took active part in working for the war effort, bringing the total number of women to more than a third of all labor.

Their involvement went way beyond Rosie the Riveter. Much of their specific involvement was determined by their race, class, marital status, or the number of children they had, but their collective impact was profound.

True, women surged into positions in manufacturing, replacing men who had left those workstations to soldier on in the war effort. Half of the women who took on war jobs were minority and lower-middle-class women who were already in the workforce. But the rigors of wartime production meant that many women who were married and with school-aged children were also put to work in the plants. At the time, the very idea of tens of thousands of married mothers working in factories represented a sea change.

Taking nothing from the patriotic fervor that drove these women, a great many of them had traded up from low-paying clerical or basic service jobs to higher-paying manufacturing opportunities. More important, these women proved to themselves and to their superiors that they were more than capable of "manning" the post.

It was not simply a matter of taking up the rivet gun. An army of women flooded the fields of American farms to keep the breadbasket full. And more than 3 million women worked for the Red Cross and another 200,000 served in the country's uniform. (Women's ranks in the defense sector expanded by 460 percent.)

After the war, the cultural division of labor regained some of its earlier composition. But a majority of the women working in traditionally male occupations, both single and married, wanted access to the same job prospects they enjoyed during the war.

Try as they might, there was a significant resetting of the order, and women wishing to continue with their employment were redirected back to lower-paying jobs. Millions more were laid off and told to return to their homes.

Nevertheless.

The effects of World War II on American women could not be reversed. They had proved themselves capable—but a catalyst would be necessary to change a steely mind-set. Many white middle-class families determined that they could raise a family and own a home with a sole breadwinner. During the 1950s, only one woman in every three entered the workforce.

The taboo against middle-class women working may have been broken, but economic momentum sent them back to their kitchens for a while.

In 1960, the FDA approved a drug that brought far-ranging social change. The first oral contraceptive for women found its way to pharmacists of the nation the following year, coincidentally just at the moment when government leadership began to take note of the massive inequalities those women faced at work.

Within months of the Pill's approval, President Kennedy's Commission on the Status of Women began to delve into all manner of workplace issues and to expose in plain sight the wage gap that women had endured more or less in silence. Kennedy's commission also tackled other issues facing women, including education, Social Security benefits, and hiring practices.

It was a target-rich environment, and Kennedy's commission found ample evidence of discrimination.

Within a year, the Equal Rights Act was amended to prohibit gender-based wage discrimination between men and women in the same place of employment. The 1963 Equal Pay Act was passed.

When President Kennedy signed the bill banning wage discrimination, women were earning 58 cents for every dollar earned by a man.

In 1964, President Johnson signed his far-reaching Civil Rights Act, which included language designed to prevent workplace discrimination against women. He went even further, establishing the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to enforce these rules, and appointed FDR's son to run it.

The courts also tackled the reproductive rights of women. Headline writers called it “feminism’s second wave.”

But for all of the blossoming regulatory and legal support, women throughout the country continued to face unfair practices as a matter of routine. Something more was needed.

In 1965, despite all the changes pushed through in Washington and across the nation, Betty Friedan and twenty-eight other women on a quest created NOW, the National Organization of Women.

Serving as its first president, Friedan composed the mission for the group: “to take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society.”

But the pace of change was glacial. A frustrated Lyndon Johnson signed Presidential Executive Order 11375 in 1967 banning gender discrimination in federal hiring. And still the wheels of justice turned at a funereal tempo. Later, the Equal Rights Amendment of 1972 was proposed and passed in the House and Senate but fell three states short of the thirty-eight state requirement for ratification by the 1979 deadline.

Even as regulations and laws protecting working women were circumvented, events had taken on their own momentum. History has a funny way of breaking what will not bend.

The rise of the service sector and the parallel shifting in employment roles in manufacturing played to women’s strengths in the workforce. So did increased expansion of women’s access to higher education.

In the 1960s, 70 percent of families had a stay-at-home parent—most often Mom. That fairy tale lasted until the days of double digits; the three uglies cast a very long shadow.

Runaway inflation, sky-high interest rates, and spiking unemployment in the 1970s made stay-at-home parenting a luxury, a vestige of an earlier economic circumstance. Civil rights gave way to home economics and necessity made women the mothers of invention.

The proportion of women in the workforce increased from 43 percent in 1970 to 59 percent in 2006. Women's relative wages also gained. In 1979, full-time women employees earned about 62 percent of what their male counterparts did. By 2006, before the economic conflagration, women earned just above 80 percent of what comparable men took home.

Looking behind the numbers, it is impossible to ignore the pride-swallowing grind that women have endured. During those intervening twenty-five years, women made extraordinary strides. They made so much progress and built so much momentum that a very basic tide had turned.

And policy makers, business leaders, and even many women are still in denial about how important that passage has been.

For decades we have managed women's issues through the same rearview mirror we've used for most policy—marking progress in increments and exhorting patience. But for anyone daring to peer around the corner, women have advanced their own cause in a striking and immutable manner.

It is time to acquaint yourself with the new Feminomics. The tipping point has already passed.

Women will move from parity to superiority over the short term. And in many measures they already have.

FEMINOMICS AND MIDDLE-CLASS RECOVERY

THE GAME, AS THEY SAY, has changed. That sound you are hearing is the shattering of every glass ceiling . . . now and forever.

In 1970, only about 10 percent of women in the labor force had bachelor's degrees; by 2006, it was over a third.

The Great Recession and subsequent anemic recovery only exacerbated the trends—and few people have taken the time to acknowledge where things stand as a result.

In a phrase, women have built an extraordinary position—now and for the future. And any true rejuvenation of the middle class must involve major acknowledgment of the shift in the balance of gender power that has already occurred.

First, the dramatic reduction of heavy manufacturing and construction jobs disproportionately hit men. From December 2007 until the job market ran aground in February 2010, the economy lost more than 8.5 million jobs. Losses for men were so pronounced in the beginning that it was called a “Mancession,” and when the market started to turn it was called a “Shecovery.”

The disparity makes sense when you investigate where women started out before things went south. Despite all the progress in the last generation, there are still gender barriers in different parts of the economy. At the beginning of the recession, women held just about half of the non-farm payroll jobs, by any measure an extraordinary accomplishment.

Women did not participate equally in all sectors, holding just 29 percent of the jobs in manufacturing and 13 percent of the jobs in construction.

As these two sectors collapsed, the education and health sectors added 844,000 jobs (almost 200,000 of which were home health and home nursing jobs), which boast women participation rates of more than 75 percent of the jobs. Women also held 57 percent of the public-sector jobs, which initially gained in the early days of the recession.

The stirring result is that by the spring of 2010, for the first time in our history women made up 51 percent of the professional workers in the United States. And 70 percent of American women with children under eighteen are earning a paycheck while raising their children—a position diametrically opposite of where things stood when Friedan went to press.

Women have truly arrived. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, women now hold 51.4 percent of managerial and professional jobs (they held 26 percent in 1980).

Over half the accountants in America are women. A third of the physicians are women, as are 45 percent of the associates in law firms; both are tracking to put women in the majority soon. Already women hold half of all banking and insurance jobs.

How are women positioned for the future? Today, women earn almost 60 percent of the university degrees conferred in the EU and the United States. On grades and board scores alone, women could hold even higher percentages in the best-ranked schools than they do. But university leaders prize balance in their coeducation.

Today, there are millions more American women in college than men, and they are headed to supermajority. Why has this happened? As women traded up in the quality of the jobs they could get, the proportional financial return to women for a college education became far greater than for men. Their prior entry-level incomes were dwarfed by what they could earn thanks to higher education and even higher aspirations. As women got better, higher-paying jobs, they also delayed marriage and child rearing.

Women went from looking for jobs to looking for careers.

In graduate schools women are evolving too. In 2005, women earned 60 percent of the master's degrees and about half of the PhDs.

For a while, women focused their undergraduate studies in less immediately "marketable" areas—again the shift has been tectonic. When Betty Friedan first published her book, 40 percent of women got their BAs with a focus on education and 2 percent in business and management. Now it is 12 percent education and 50 percent business and management.

Medical schools now report that women hold 51 percent of the seats, and law schools put women at just under half of their enrollment. For several years running, more than 100,000 women have taken the GMAT tests to get their MBAs. In 1997, about 39 percent of MBA students were women, and by 2007 the number exceeded 44 percent. Harvard, Stanford, and many of the other prestigious MBA programs are admitting record numbers and proportions of women.

For the first time, female economics doctoral candidates at Duke University will outnumber their male colleagues; nearly two-thirds of the entering class of economics PhDs are women, and the national average exceeds 30 percent.

These extraordinary achievements signal increasing responsibilities for middle-class women. They have been focused, intent, and yet flexible. Recalling that 70 percent of families in 1960 had at least one stay-at-home parent, now 70 percent of families have either or both parents working, or are a single-parent household with a sole breadwinner.

In 40 percent of all households in this country women are the sole or lead breadwinners—and that number is increasing.

Yet women still have ground to cover. They comprise only about

20 percent of the math, science, and technology undergraduate majors nationwide, and just 14 percent of Fortune 500 officer positions are held by women (just 3 percent of the CEO slots).

It is always easy to point to the 16 percent of Fortune 500 board seats occupied by women and complain about glass ceilings. But the momentum of Feminomics is simply too powerful to ignore.

The economic empowerment of middle-class women and the millions of younger women who have worked to position themselves for leadership roles in the middle class is one of the great fifty-year accomplishments in our history. In the half-century since *The Feminine Mystique* burst into national consciousness, women have become the vital ingredient in re-energizing the middle class in every area of our society.

The time has come for an economic empowerment zone for women.

This book makes no attempt to designate whether men come from Mars, Venus, or Uranus. It simply acknowledges the fact that women are a key ingredient to middle-class revival here on planet Earth. It ascribes nothing more than motivation, focus, and flexibility to women. Women have simply made the adjustments and the sacrifices to improve their lot—clearly; the increased access to higher education was available to both genders.

Consider the rate of change. At graduations in the 1950 academic year 120,796 women earned college degrees—some 24 percent of the more than half a million college diplomas awarded. By the 2009 graduations, women earned 1,849,200 degrees, making up 60 percent of the sheepskins handed out.

The combined effects of greater absolute numbers and greater share of the total signal a fundamental change in the ability of women to get jobs throughout the U.S. economy. Look at Europe for direction. In the European Union, women have filled 6 million of the 8 million new jobs created since 2000.

For decades, these have been subterranean economic forces. But with the disproportionate dismissal of men the new balance has burst into high relief.

It is far too early to sound the death knell for the male labor force, though the damage was widespread. Since December 2007 men have

accounted for seven of every ten jobs lost (half of all job losses came from construction and manufacturing). By February 2010 the share of adult men with a job shrank to 66.6 percent. Until this recession the number had never been below 70 percent since these numbers were first tabulated post-World War II.

Job losses in this recent recession were steeper and more prolonged than in any contraction in the last sixty years. We lost more than 6 percent of payroll at the worst point, compared with 3 percent in the 1981 recession and much smaller dips in other downturns.

A bigger story for men is playing out across the vast public sector and in select industries.

Since February 2010, the manufacturing beast has begun to stir. Abetted by early stages of reshoring and wage-gap compression with China, men have gained back nearly 300,000 jobs in the male-dominated manufacturing sector. Construction, too, has come back from its multiyear hibernation. Men continue to gain in those two sectors, and women's hiring has actually retreated.

Men have gained position, too, in education and health services.

The public sector has been a lagging indicator, adding jobs in the early phases of the recession and only recently beginning to see meaningful cuts. After holding up reasonably well through the recession, the sequestration and other local government budget cuts have disproportionately affected women.

Local governments facing continuing shortfalls in tax revenues and decreasing federal assistance, relief, and stimulus spending means more bad news for women.

The sputtering economy and the lack of any true leadership on job creation have brought the labor force participation rate to a new low for both sexes. Despite recent signs of relative improvement for men overall, worker participation of just 62.8 percent is an enemy of economic progress.

While the women's participation rate is relatively steady at 55 percent, as is always the case digging deeper tells a different story. Department of Labor data in 2008 clearly shows that white women are far more likely to be employed than are black and Hispanic women. Unemployment among

young black women has increased to over 20 percent. And today 15 percent of Latina women in the same age cohort are unemployed.

Age matters. Young white women are doing as poorly as young white males—11 percent at least are unemployed.

What all this gender bias has done in the face of male employment meltdown is cause gender rebalancing in selected markets. Federal data shows that men are making increasing inroads in the retail sector, long the province of women. Three years ago, women made up a meaningful majority of payrolls in the retail trade (something that has been true for at least three decades).

Men now account for 51 percent of the retail jobs in the country. Increasingly, men are being forced to be more flexible as the prospects for broad-scale rebounding in construction and manufacturing remain elusive.

Put another way, lower-wage industries like retail, education, restaurants, and hotels have been a disproportionate provider of new jobs. Women typically face more jobs in those sectors, but men are getting tired of waiting.

In spite of the recent rebound in the hiring of men, the trend toward increased employment and purchasing power of women continues. Studies show that female consumers control as much as 85 percent of all purchasing decisions responsible for \$7 trillion in spending. This surge in influence reflects a combination of factors. First, in the 1970s women contributed between 2 and 6 percent of the family income. Today, women provide 42.2 percent of the family income, and even more are the primary breadwinners for their family.

An interesting question is whether this shift in earning and purchasing power will be the key determinant of who is in the working class and who can maintain middle-class status. In 2005, the top quintile of families had over 77 percent of their members with two or more wage earners.

Single-earner households were far more prevalent in the lower quintiles, and most often the lead earner was still a man. Women wage earners were responsible for many families remaining in the middle class. And for many others, their wages were the ticket out of working-class status.

Which is why the wage gap has become more than a moral equity issue; it is a vital ingredient of the middle-class revival.

And we are fighting it for many of the wrong reasons.

Our economy is increasingly dependent on building a wider and deeper skill base. Workers who have taken the steps to educate and retrain themselves will be the beneficiaries of this growing war for talent.

The combination of an aging workforce and a renaissance in manufacturing and health care means that the United States will have to make more effective use of its female population. We have heard the statisticians decry the bad economic trade that a college education now represents. They claim that the costs of education are not worth the long-term income benefit.

What these bean counters ignore is that a college education is the best known cure for unemployment. Measuring simply by dollars out today versus earnings in the intermediate term ignores the special flexibility and adaptability college graduates enjoy. Once again risk is left out of the equation—but less and less by women.

Time after time, those who have jobs fare far better in seeking new ones. College graduates are not the first to go in a downsizing. Those recently laid off do far better than those out of work for a protracted period.

Degrees are also an excellent way to position oneself for retraining and career enhancement—in and out of the workforce. There have been studies which show that women are more willing to train for new careers and new jobs once the plant leaves their town or a major employer engages in massive layoffs.

Truth be told, these studies are too recent and too localized to be truly determinative. But what they claim is that men have been more resistant to relinquishing their craft or their profession in search of a new paycheck. That psychology may be accurately portrayed, but the absolute numbers are more telling.

Simply put, when robotics or a shuttered factory obviate the need for an arc welder we need to make the path easier for that skilled laborer to find another job. Because when the manufacturer pulls up stakes in Flint, Michigan, that job is unlikely to ever return.

And so arc-welding jobs in Flint may be gone with the wind as well.

We need to create flexibility when corporations abandon communities—that's how new jobs get formed.

CORE CURRICULUM

SO WE FACE A NEW economic reality—the core of Feminomics.

With millions more women than men attending college, combined with a pattern of greater flexibility for embracing career change and getting the best renewal training during their career, women have become the flex factor in the new labor force.

It makes no economic sense to pay them less.

Increasing women's participation in the labor force and bringing pay to parity will without fail boost our country's GDP.

Corporations will be forced to address the combining of work with child care. The energetic way that women are working and improving their station puts us far past the days of Mommycare. That original path had the mark of female exceptionalism about it. Now the true response is more market driven. Telecommuting, flexible hours, child-related leaves of absence— all will be offered as a matter of course.

Why are the big corporations making such accommodating moves?

Because women are already exerting their newfound economic power. When they encounter roadblocks at their companies they do something that has stunned their corporate “benefactors.” They simply quit the inflexible behemoth and start their own companies with greater focus on flexibility.

In the past decade, women have started more privately owned companies than men at a rate of more than two to one. Women-owned enterprises employ more people than the Fortune 500 and have combined revenues in excess of \$2 trillion.

Middle-class women are a force of economic nature. And they are just getting warmed up.

But trouble still lurks around every corner for working mothers who are poor. Public and private-sector initiatives have not touched them. These women fail to get the benefits from female-friendly companies. Child care continues to be so expensive that many poor working mothers can barely keep up with expenses. Millions of families must fight to cope with a school-day that bears no relationship to their working lives, and worse, they must engage insufficient and brutally expensive child care facilities.

What is necessary is a cohort of both public and private initiatives to feed the needs of working mothers. It will take years for such steps to be taken. By that time, given the increasing number of single-parent households, women who are sole breadwinners will likely represent the majority of households.

Economic necessity and doing the right thing will converge—not as an example of female exceptionalism but as a matter of economic empowerment.

What are the elements of such a female empowerment initiative?

Expansion of paid family medical leave will be necessary if mothers are to balance their caregiver responsibilities with their breadwinner duties.

Raise the minimum wage to more than \$11 per hour and vigorously police gender inequities.

Create incentives for affordable, tax-deductible child care. If we allow a tax-deductible child care program we will empower more women to join the workforce and enlist the aid of many men and women who are marginally employed. Tax-deductible child care is the definition of win/win.

Embrace charter schools and other initiatives where children's schooldays match more closely their mothers' work-days. It simply does not serve our children or their working parents to cling to the vestigial three o'clock dismissal.

Universal pre-K should be a matter of civil right so long as it is tied in to a robust next step in the school system. Study after study cites the benefits of reading to children earlier and to the power of instilling educational curiosity at a younger age.

And for God sakes, if you hire women, pay them. It is past time for equal pay for equal work. The mommy-track discount is an anachronism that ignores the facts. Your average talented worker is someone's mother. Pay her what she deserves.

If you don't, she will quit your firm and start a highly effective competitor.

So play offense or defense—it doesn't matter.

Just do the right thing . . . or she will.

