

Women, Money and Power

by Madalann Morginn

Women, money and power — there was a time not long ago when it would have been unthinkable to speak about women in this context. Most women, it was agreed, would either be at home minding the children or working as dutiful employees in any one of a number of menial jobs. Talking about women, money and power in the same breath was, quite simply, out of the realm of reality.

Any of us who look out into the world cannot help but notice the scores of dramatic and drastic changes, which have occurred in recent history. And no area that directly or indirectly affects all of us has been left untouched — the environment, world tension, global economics, natural and man-made disasters, worldwide rise in crime and corruption, unemployment. The list is endless.

And one area in particular that has undergone massive change is the job market, especially as it relates to women. For instance, recent research shows that in the U.S., 20.6 percent of federal judges are women, 13 percent are senators and 4.6 percent are neurosurgeons. But in the corporate world, the figure plunges to 1.2 percent when it comes to the number of women holding high-powered positions as chief executives in blue chip Fortune 500, or similar, companies. Sitting at the helm of a prominent and powerful corporation has historically always been a “men only” club. And for all intents and purposes, it still is. But American women, never ones to be left out of the picture for long, are making inroads small-scale inroads to be sure, but nevertheless steady. There are some victorious women who have scaled the walls to corporate superstardom — Carleton S. Fiorina, chief executive of Hewlett-Packard and Patricia F. Russo, chief executive of Lucent Technologies — among a group of about nine who occupy corner offices in corporate America.

But the chasm between women’s equality in business and in other career fields is so pronounced that many American women are asking the question, “Why can’t we get a piece of the *Really Big* corporate action?” In pondering this question, legions of books have been devoted to examining the reasons. Some of them address the question of inflexibility of work hours; some look at the problem of the “old-boy” network, which has erected almost impenetrable barriers to women attempting to climb the corporate ladder to the stars. And still other books look at the tendency of women to shoulder most of the responsibility for raising children and taking care of the home — thereby putting themselves out of the running. None of these books, though, have produced a definitive answer to the question: Why are so few women making it to Big Boardrooms? Well, it could be that they are asking the wrong question in the first place and, consequently, getting the wrong answer.

So, since the volumes of books haven’t materialized a satisfying answer, perhaps it’s worth looking at this issue from a different angle — the psychological perspective.

From a psychological point of view, women are really no different than men and nowhere is this more evident than in our mutually shared desire for power—a must for any high-ranking chief executive wannabe, no matter the gender. And the lust for power, according to renowned Brazilian psychoanalyst, Dr. Norberto Keppe, is pathological and used as a means to “dominate, control and exploit others.” And, to the consternation of many women, they are often the losers in the power game with men. Generally speaking, women have less physical strength, which limits them in certain ways, yet they possess other means to acquire power, which they have honed to a fine art. Women are coy, often subtle and covert in their quest for power—hiding behind masks of care, concern and vulnerability. And it isn’t always obvious to spot their motive. Men, on the other hand, are more up-front and direct. When you see a man on the power trail, there is no mistaking his motive, it’s there for all the world to see. So although the method of actually acquiring power may be different for a man and a woman, the intention is identical.

That old shop-worn maxim, “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely,” accurately depicts the psychopathology around the quest for power, according to Dr. Keppe. In his thirty-five years of clinical practice and research in South America, the U.S. and Europe, Keppe reached the conclusion that the very nature of the pursuit of power corrupts people—it is not the mark of a well-balanced, healthy individual to want to have domain (in whatever form) over his fellow man. So although many women give lip service to the fact that they have no desire for power themselves, this doesn’t stop them from hitching their wagon to powerful men—entering into pacts with them to grab whatever advantage they can in the exploitative society in which they live. As long as they are with a man who is supporting them, catering to their whims and fancies, pampering them and surrounding them with a never-ending rainbow of material goodies, they are happy—to a point. And this is the role that many women play. A quick thumb-through of a history book, magazine or newspaper will put to rest any illusions you may have had about women’s lack of interest in direct or indirect power.

It is a relatively recent phenomenon that women have begun to rebel against the socio-economic control and domination held over them by men for so long. Initially, the male-female pact was set up as a division of ‘labor’—the women inside the home, the man in society. And this worked for a while. But in recent years women soured on this arrangement and have taken matters into their own hands in an attempt to change the scene.

The alienated state in which women initially chose to live, and which they at first thought was a pretty sure thing, has in reality been a disaster for women—estranging them from socio-economic reality and robbing them of their independence. Initially believing that it was much easier and safer to live within the confines of their homes, supported and protected from life’s ups and downs by a man, they have in recent times done an about face and have re-asserted themselves. In developed and semi-developed countries around the world, women now comprise a hefty chunk of the workforce—some by choice, many by necessity.

From the beginning of the Twentieth Century, a myriad of feminist movements were organized, crusades waged and protests made to combat the social injustices perpetrated

against women, set up under the banner of “gaining rights for women.” And who would argue that this hasn’t been necessary? Historically, women have fared badly in society lacking the same rights and privileges that men have taken for granted. The basis of the feminist movement has been the demand and acquisition of rights – respect, dignity and equal opportunities. But according to Brazilian Psychoanalyst, Dr. Claudia Pacheco, there is a hidden agenda. From her many years of study, research and her clinical practice in Brazil, the U.S. and Europe, Dr. Pacheco has discovered that “women want more freedom and more power, not for the purpose of bringing greater justice and dignity to human existence, but rather so that they will have the so-called power to do all of the unreal, psychopathological things men do.” “Women,” she continues, “want freedom to acquire all those insane things men want: power, wealth and prestige.” Or put another way, they simply want to feather their own nest. Dr. Pacheco says, “I am not saying that every woman has this intention, but certainly we have to admit that the overwhelming majority waits for the opportunity to fulfill this intimate wish.” Indeed, this is a damning indictment of women, who generally see themselves as kinder, gentler, more honorable – and hence, better than men.

Dr. Keppe and Dr. Pacheco both observe that the thirst for omnipotent power and the goodies associated with it, whether coveted by a man or a woman, is not healthy or balanced and is associated with narcissistic, megalomaniacal and theomaniac behavior (the wish to have God-like power). It’s not such a stretch to see that individuals with such attitudes are ravenous for power, and you merely have to scan the press and TV news programs to see the array of politicians, military types, ‘stars’ and boardroom executives playing the power game. Unfortunately for the rest of the world, the wreckage left by so-called powerful individuals is breathtaking in its scope of misery and suffering – environmental degradation, wars, genocide, corrupt governments, social upheaval, failed institutions and companies, mass unemployment, broken families, abused children – to name a few. By contrast, more balanced, stable individuals are simply not interested in power for themselves – and, fortunately, this constitutes the majority of the population.

In the past, women confined wielding their power to their homes – manipulating and controlling the lives of their husband and children. Now it seems they are on the march to a larger playing field and are invading professions that offer a whole new range of candy and toys. Of course, the hunt for power and its trappings is not publicly admitted as such – it most likely isn’t even personally admitted. It is usually couched in terms of simply wanting the same rights and privileges as men – or, more accurately, the right for a shot at power, big money, prestige and social influence. But it isn’t proving to be an easy ‘war’ and, as statistics reveal, men are putting up one hell of a fight for their cherished and guarded territory.

So, where will this all end? Will women prove able warriors in their ongoing battle to invade corporate boardrooms for their share of the power and spoils? Or will men continue to lock arms manning the lines in the ongoing fight to hold women at bay?

In the final analysis, the real question begging to be asked is: when will the time come when both men and women get honest enough to see and admit that their drive for

unbridled power is unhealthy and dangerous? Dangerous to themselves. And dangerous to society, because no one single person is capable of assuming so much power without dire consequences the consequences for which we all continue to pay an enormous price.

References:

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