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A HISTORY OF THE CORPORATE WIFE, 1900-1990

By

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FOREWORD
LITERATURE REVIEW

There is no published literature concerning the history of the role of the corporate wife. In fact, what literature there is on the subject ignores the development of the role. The reasons for this may lie in the way knowledge is dealt with in the three disciplines which might be expected to be concerned with the subject: business, history and sociology.

Business literature is seldom concerned with the past. One exception is the highly respected Business History Review; however, no articles on the wives or family life of businessmen have appeared in the journal in the past 40 years. By its very nature American business is oriented toward the present and the immediate future. Business history in business publications has usually been limited to biographies of individual businessmen and histories of specific companies or industries. Also, the influence of employers on the personal lives of their employees is a delicate subject; corporate wives certainly fall into this category. To give one example, the Young Presidents' Organization, a private organization devoted to company

presidents under the age of 50,¹ has for some time held workshops for the wives of its members. Yet the vice president of the organization denied the author access to its archives and refused to allow the organization librarian to release any of its archival material. In a letter to the author, the Research and Library Manager wrote, "Since its inception Young Presidents' Organization has kept a low profile relevant to its membership and activities."²

General interest business magazines have, over the years, published several articles on corporate wives and the relationship between a man's wife and his work. Most of the articles are cautionary in nature, describing the pitfalls of having the "wrong" kind of wife, bemoaning the demands a wife makes, or the problems a wife can create.

Historians have long been fascinated by the interaction between industrialization and society, and by the roles that have developed from it, such as those of the tycoon and the assembly-line worker. However, the role of the corporate wife has not been touched on in the historical literature. Perhaps this is because the everyday life of middle class or upper-middle class white collar family members, caught

¹ Encyclopedia of Associations 1993 ed., s.v. "Young Presidents' Organization."

² Nancy Shepard, Research and Library Manager, Young Presidents' Organization, to Julie Still, 9 October 1992.

between societal extremes, has not appeared worthy of study. Women's studies is a relatively new phenomenon, and this particular female role has, to date, escaped notice. It may also be that since the work of corporate wives could be classified as "shadow labor," it has escaped comprehensive research.

While sociological literature does sometimes trace the development of a social role, it most often studies people in a given place at a given time. Thus, while there are several studies of corporate wives done at varying times, they are not concerned with the origins or development of that role. Psychological literature also looks primarily at the present. Although some psychological studies have examined corporate wives, there has been no attempt to place the role in historical perspective.

The popular press has shown an interest in the wives of businessmen for some time. There have been a number of articles in women's magazines, most giving advice on how to be a good wife, or, at least, avoid being a bad one. Almost all are anecdotal in nature, with little or no statistical data or specifics provided.

By taking all of these sources and studying them in a chronological fashion, one can see patterns develop and change over time, and make some assumptions about the development of the role. Of course, what is being studied

is more likely the perception of the corporate wife as opposed to the reality, but much of history is dependent on the observations of individuals who are seeing through the prism of their temporal and cultural setting.

To try to collect all relevant materials possible, the author has reviewed the following periodical indices: Business Periodicals Index, International Index to Periodicals (and its successors, the Humanities Index and the Social Sciences Index), PAIS, for the years 1900 (or the inception of the index) to the present, and the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature for selective years. The headings checked were as follows: Businessmen, Business women, Domestic Relations, Executives, Executives' wives, Family, Husband and wife, Husbands, Marriage, Married women, Marital satisfaction, Wives, Women--Employment, and Work and family. The author also searched the OCLC database and the online versions of America: History and Life, Sociological Abstracts, Psychological Abstracts and Dissertation Abstracts. Government publications provided useful statistics. American Diaries did not list any entries for the wives of businessmen, although there were entries for the wives of men in other occupations. Standard sources such as The Directory of Oral History Collections and Special Collections did not list any resources relating to the study of corporate wives.

No quantitative studies of corporate wives were done in the early part of the twentieth century. Anecdotal articles are the primary source of direct information. Sociological studies done during this time period, especially the Lynds' study of Middletown [Muncie, Indiana], touch on the role and provide valuable information. Census materials and other government statistics give raw data that can be applied to the topic. Etiquette books are also a source of information on the social boundaries of the corporate lifestyle. In this time period especially, the corporate wife is only seen in the shadows of research on businessmen. Thus, a study of business leaders and their backgrounds provides some information on the types of women these men married. It was during this time period that the role of the corporation and therefore the corporate man was developing. While direct information on the corporate wife is scarce in these years, the sources available do provide the groundwork for the way the role developed in later years.

After World War II there was an information explosion on the corporate wife. Suddenly, articles on the subject were appearing regularly in business and popular magazines. The first known study of the corporate wife was done by William H. Whyte, Jr., in two 1951 Fortune magazine

articles.³ The articles were later included in a book of essays on communication by the same author.⁴

During the 1960s sociologists began to examine the role of the corporate wife, resulting in several published studies. Advice books for women included information on how to be a good corporate wife. Some of these were written specifically for the corporate wife by other corporate wives and almost serve as a job description and procedural manual. As in the earlier time period, etiquette books and government statistics also provide information useful in the study of corporate wives.

With the growing women's movement and the advent of women's studies in the 1970s, corporate wives were written about more often. As is all too often the case, the popularity of the subject led to the quick publication of several books and articles. Unfortunately, many of these works make sweeping generalizations without providing data to back them up. Although these materials may be interesting, they provide little dependable information and the conclusions are difficult to verify.

³ William H. Whyte, Jr., "Wives of Management," Fortune (October 1951): 86+ and William H. Whyte, Jr., "The Corporation and the Wife," Fortune (November 1951): 109+.

⁴ William H. Whyte, Jr., and the editors of Fortune. Is Anybody Listening?: How and Why U.S. Business Fumbles When it Talks with Human Beings (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952).

The increase in the number of working women and subsequent two career families became popular research topics as well. However, while some of these studies are quite good, they seldom focus on specific occupational groups, such as executives, or on how the wife's employment affects her previous role as half of the husband's two-person career. Books written as advice manuals for the woman executive seldom address the role of her husband in her career or how her employment affects her husband and his work.

Since women, especially those who do not work outside the home, are often neglected in histories and other research, and since the "work" of the corporate wife is primarily to enhance someone else and not draw attention to herself, it is not surprising that the role has seldom been seriously studied. This thesis is an attempt to examine the role in a historical context, and to trace the way it has developed and changed in reaction to social and cultural forces.

INTRODUCTION

It is usually understood that certain occupations are most efficiently carried out by a married couple. This phenomenon has been called the "two-person career." Religious occupations, such as the ministry or missionary work, provide good examples of this. Farming is another example, especially small farms which are often run by a husband and wife. In other occupations, a spouse is expected to conform to certain behaviors or to accept certain disruptions. The spouse of a politician is expected to be involved to some degree in politics. Those who marry doctors are, or were, expected to assume that emergency calls could come in the middle of the night or on holidays. Military dependents (including spouses) are expected to move often and must adjust to long separations. Traditionally, it has been the wife who has acted as adjunct to her husband. However, in the last few years, more husbands have also been called upon to play this role.

One of the best examples of the two-person career is the combined work of a corporate businessman and his wife.¹ The wives of corporate businessmen have been assigned a particular role and are often credited with having a great

¹ Hanna Papanek, "Men, Women and Work: Reflections on the Two-Person Career," in Changing Women in a Changing Society, ed. Joan Huber (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 96.

deal of influence on their husbands' careers. Many corporations interview or in some way investigate the wives of men who are under consideration for executive or other important positions.

William H. Whyte, Jr., was a pioneer in the study of corporate businessmen and their wives. In his classic work The Organization Man, he offers the "corporation man" as the most conspicuous examples of the "organization man":

They are not the workers, nor are they the white-collar people in the usual, clerk sense of the word. These people only work for The Organization. The ones I am talking about belong to it as well. They are the ones of our middle class who have left home, spiritually as well as physically, to take the vows of organization life, and it is they who are the mind and soul of our great self-perpetuating institutions. Only a few are top managers or ever will be. In a system that makes such hazy terminology as "junior executive" psychologically necessary, they are of the staff as much as the line, and most are destined to live poised in a middle area that still awaits a satisfactory euphemism.²

The women studied in this thesis are married to "corporate men," men in middle level management, personnel managers, accountants, engineers, and other white collar occupations, which for ease of use, are sometimes grouped together under the title "executive." Some studies on top executives and their wives are also included, as those in the upper levels of management would have, for the most part, worked their

² William H. Whyte, Jr., The Organization Man (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 3.

way up from middle management. For the purposes of this thesis, some distinction needs to be made between types of salesmen. Retail sales clerks, usually workers with little chance for significant advancement, are excluded. Research on small, family-owned businesses, which operate much differently from a corporate environment, are also excluded. However, since sales is the lifeblood of corporate American and most top level executives started out in sales, the wives of such men are appropriate for this kind of study.

The role of the corporate wife, as with much of what is classified as women's work, can be called "shadow labor." This has been defined as "enhancing the status and well-being of others."³ It is routinely undervalued because part of the role is to erase any evidence of effort:

The more she seems natural at it, the more her labor does not show as labor, the more successfully it is disguised as the absence of other, more prized qualities.⁴

This may be especially true when the person playing the role does not have an officially assigned function, no written job description, but is expected to play what is perceived as a supportive role. Furthermore, this role is seen as

³ Arlie Russell Hochschild, The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 167.

⁴ Ibid., 169.

voluntary, although research shows that all too often it is mandatory.

It is impossible to study a social role without placing it in context. Thus, much of this thesis will be devoted to exploring the business world, as this will define the demands on both the corporate wife and her husband. In addition the thesis will include information on the domestic and homemaking duties of wives, the relationship between businessmen and their wives (as distinct from the marital relationship of those in other occupations), the attitude of corporations towards spouses of employees, and the social duties of corporate wives. Finally, working wives and corporate husbands will also be examined.

There are two possible ways to look at the development of the role of the corporate spouse, thematically or chronologically. Both would involve a certain amount of repetition. However, this paper examines a social role over a period of time, and many of the changes in that role are related to events occurring in the larger world. There were two significant shifts in the relationship between the corporate world and the corporate spouse, and it seemed more logical to arrange the paper chronologically with thematic subdivisions. Thus this paper is divided into three time periods. The first is from the turn of the century to World War II, from about 1900 to the mid-1940s. In these years

the groundwork was laid for the mobile, consumer-oriented society that came to dominate the second half of the twentieth century.

Although resources are limited for this time period, it is important to examine it because the executive role itself developed and became more commonplace during these years. New developments in industry and technology, such as the assembly line, changed the way industries did business. The principles of scientific management became accepted and business came to be a subject considered worthy of study.

Labor saving devices allowed the housewife to do much of the housework herself, and the number of household servants declined. Mobility allowed adult children to move and marry far away from the family home. Thus, what we now perceive as the nuclear family became the norm.

The growth of national publications and syndicated columns and newspaper articles provided for a more homogenous press; standardization also spread into other areas of life, such as shoe sizes and packaged foodstuffs. Social roles became standardized on a national basis. During this time, that the role of the corporate wife was formed as a middle class, white collar norm.

The second chapter concerns the role of the corporate wife from the late 1940s to about 1970. The homogeneity of the pre-war years became the conformity of the 1950s.

Social analysts complained that Americans had become conformist and bland.⁵ Children who preferred playing alone to playing in groups were suspect. Men who chose not to marry were viewed as immature or homosexual.⁶ Family was paramount in the 1950s and the basis of that family was marriage with clearly defined sex roles:

The fifties ideal of a marital partnership was based on the assumption of a wife's role as hostess and consort. This was essential for the smooth running of the household and for the promotion of her husband's career.⁷

A variety of societal factors, such as sharply divided gender roles, the move to the suburbs, and the development of the "organization man," set firm boundaries on the wives of corporate executives. Companies were more open about their interest in wives. Some businesses formally interviewed the wives of potential employees, and some even kept dossiers on wives of employees. Others observed wives on a more informal basis. To be sure, there were also companies that professed no interest at all in the wives of employees.

⁵ William E. Leuchtenburg, A Troubled Feast: American Society Since 1945. Revised edition (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 70.

⁶ Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life (New York: Free Press, 1988), 181.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 187.

Those companies which did admit to being concerned about wives often did so in a circumspect manner. Some companies held workshops or seminars for wives, or invited them to the firm on special occasions. Some seminars for businessmen had sessions for wives. Finding printed information on the specifics of what companies said to, or wanted from, wives can be difficult. However, it is possible to locate the equivalent of job descriptions and guidebooks for women to follow. Some were so detailed as to suggest what names to give to children and the types of Christmas cards to send depending on the type of company for which one's husband worked or in what part of the country one was living. Social and gender roles were very rigid in this time, and those for corporate wives were no exception.

The third chapter concerns the years from approximately 1970 to 1990. The rise of the feminist movement made it possible for women to discuss their dissatisfactions with their roles. Psychologists discovered the corporate wife and discussed her problems in detail. The increase of women in executive positions and career occupations in general led to two new concepts, the dual-career couple and the corporate husband. Companies could no longer expect wives of their employees to plan their lives around the husbands' jobs. The increasing dependence of households on wives' income meant that some compromise was necessary.

While this thesis focuses on corporate wives, each chapter will devote some attention to the corporate husband, that is, the husband of the "organization woman." The exact role of the corporate husband is still being defined. The husbands of women politicians have led the way and provided some very public examples of the role in its development. While Kay Orr was governor of Nebraska her husband followed tradition by compiling a cookbook to raise money for renovation of the governor's mansion.⁸ In the same vein, there is an informal Denis Thatcher Society in Washington, D.C., named in honor of the husband of the former British prime minister, for men whose wives have higher profile jobs than they do.⁹ While corporations are as concerned about the husbands of women executives as they are about the wives of male executives, they have not yet decided what they want in and from corporate husbands. Regardless of gender, companies continue to study the spouses of employees and to investigate the spouses of potential employees.¹⁰

⁸ William D. Orr, comp. The First Gentleman's Cookbook (Lincoln, Nebraska: Jacob North Printing Company), 1989.

⁹ See Paul Tough, "Standing in the Shadow: At Last, a Club for the Wallflower Husbands of Important Wives," Savvy Woman 10 (September 1989): 22-23.

¹⁰ Thomas J. Murray, "Checking out the New Corporate Wife," Dun's Business Month (September 1986): 50-52.

CHAPTER 1

TURN OF THE CENTURY TO WORLD WAR II

Although the second half of the twentieth century is regarded as a time of social upheaval and technological change, the first half was equally so. The automobile and the assembly line, two revolutionary changes for the workplace, were introduced in the early 1900s. New devices for the home, shifts in occupational demographics, new ways of viewing family life, and changes in business management, all affected American society dramatically. The early 1900s saw the development of the professional manager, the corporate executive, and the beginnings of a role for his wife.

Changes in Business

The number of white collar workers, which would include businessmen, in the United States has increased throughout the 1900s with the biggest increases in the early years. According to the 1920 census 24.9% of the American civilian labor force were considered "white collar workers," in 1930, 29.41%; in 1940, 31.08%; and in 1950, 36.60%,¹ an increase

¹ Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1975), 139.

of about 11% from 1920 to 1950. The ratio of manual to white collar workers in U.S. manufacturing fell from 11.4 to 1 in 1899 to 5.8 to 1 in 1921; in areas other than manufacturing, the number of clerical workers rose even more dramatically.²

Businesses themselves went through changes in the early 1900s. There was a continuing dispersion of ownership, with individual owners being increasingly replaced by corporations and stockholders. Companies were being run by professional managers, not by the men who had started the businesses, or their descendants.³ The high rate of mergers and takeovers in the early 1900s, especially in the 1920s, created more executive positions and a class of "professional top-executives" who were shifted from business to business. As one executive manual stated

The banker found the professional top-executives enormously useful and important; often interchanging them rapidly; keeping them on one job only long enough to set up efficient executive machinery and establish competent policies and plans.⁴

² Sharon H. Strom, "Light Manufacturing: the Feminization of American Office Work, 1900-1930," Industrial Labor Relations Review 43 (October 1989): 63.

³ Mabel Newcomer, The Big Business Executive; the Factors that Made Him, 1900-1950 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 6.

⁴ J. George Frederick, ed., For Top-Executives Only (New York: Business Bourse, 1936), 39.

Who were these young men who were remaking the industrial landscape? Professional managers had certain characteristics in common that separated them from the majority of Americans. A respected study of executives in the first half of the twentieth century found that executives were more likely to be native-born Americans than foreign born,⁵ more likely to belong to either the Episcopalian or Presbyterian denominations,⁶ and more likely to be college educated than the population as a whole. The disparity between the educational level of executives and the male population in general increased over time. In 1900, 39.4% of executives had some college education, whereas in 1910, only 13.5% of men over the age 25 had had 4 years of high school education or any post-high school education. In 1925, 51.4% of executives had some college education, as opposed to 16.4% of the adult male population in 1920 and 19.1% in 1930. In 1950, 75.6% of executives had some college education, while only 36.4% of the general male population had had four years of high school or more.⁷ One text on executive ability even stated that "Graduation from college is a reasonably sure indication that an

⁵ Newcomer, Big Business Executive, 43.

⁶ Ibid., 47.

⁷ Ibid., 69 and Digest of Educational Statistics, 1993, 17.

individual possesses enough intelligence to become an executive."⁸

The expectations for businessmen's public behavior changed during this period as well. One study which divided executive styles by time period found that the years 1904-1936 marked the end of executive aloofness. "Slowly a new type of top-executive emerged, one who took greater part in public affairs and was more accessible for interviews."⁹ Corporation presidents, like college presidents, were expected to participate in public affairs.¹⁰ As will be seen later, this activism filtered down through the company and executives of all levels became more involved with the community at large. The public and community affairs aspect of corporate work grew to involve the wives of employees as well.

Changes in the Home

While significant change was occurring at the office, there were changes going on in the home as well. In 1900 the proportion of servants to households was 1 in 15; by

⁸ Glen U. Cleeton and Charles W. Mason, Executive Ability: Its Discovery and Development (Yellow Springs, Ohio: Antioch Press, 1934), 74.

⁹ Frederick, ed., Top-Executives, 102.

¹⁰ Newcomer, Big Business Executive, 21.

1950 that number had dropped to 1 in 42.¹¹ In part, this was a result of the introduction of labor saving devices. These allowed a housewife to perform many household tasks herself instead of supervising the work of others. She could clean rugs, clothing and other domestic materials herself or have them taken to an establishment that would do it for her. The introduction of freezers and refrigerators meant that foodstuffs could be stored in the home, and shopping could be done once a week, instead of daily. To give some example of the magnitude of these changes, consider that in 1890 only 5% of the homes in Muncie, Indiana had been wired for electricity; by June 1925, 99% were wired for electricity.¹² This societal transformation affected the distribution of consumer spending. Between 1909 and 1929 the amount spent on rent doubled, food and non-alcoholic beverages slightly more than doubled, and the amount spent on electricity, gas and water almost quadrupled. However, the percentage of overall household consumption expenditures for electricity rose from 1.2% in 1909 to only 1.7% in 1929.¹³

¹¹ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, More Work for Mother (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 99.

¹² Glenna Matthews, Just a Housewife (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 178.

¹³ Historical Statistics, 320.

In part because electricity was so available and affordable, the focus of the housewife turned from production to acquisition, from creating to purchasing. The automobile allowed the housewife to travel conveniently from place to place, for shopping or leisure. One author described the automobile as "the vehicle through which she [the housewife] did much of her most significant work, and the work locale where she could most often be found."¹⁴

Marriage

Societal expectations of a marriage partner were also changing. Although it was always possible, and often encouraged, for two people who respected, liked and esteemed one another, to marry, it is a relatively recent idea for those qualities to supercede the considerations of property and status in mate selection. The idea of a "companionate marriage" developed in the early nineteenth century in the United States.¹⁵ The phrase itself was popularized in 1925 to refer to marriages "held together not by rigid social pressures or religious conceptions of moral duty but by

¹⁴ Cowan, More Work, 85.

¹⁵ Matthews, Just a Housewife, 9-10.

mutual affection, sexual attraction, and equal rights."¹⁶
In fact, one criticism of early executives was that they did not "love their wives acceptably."¹⁷

Although these increased expectations for companionship in marriage might have led to more happiness for some, it led to disillusionment for others. If one could reasonably expect to enjoy married life, or at least be content with it, then what would happen if husband or wife found these expectations unfulfilled? This and other factors led to an increase in divorce rates. In the 30 years between 1890 and 1920, the U.S. divorce rate increased dramatically; the percentage of women who had been divorced doubled and the percentage of men who had been divorced nearly tripled.¹⁸ In 1924 one in seven marriages ended in divorce.¹⁹ In addition to desertion, infidelity and physical cruelty, new grounds for divorce were being accepted. Some of the divorces granted in 1924 were for the simple reason that husband and wife no longer loved each other.²⁰ In 1926 a

¹⁶ Mintz and Kellogg, Domestic Revolutions, 115.

¹⁷ Frederick, ed., Top-Executives, 142.

¹⁸ Historical Statistics, 21.

¹⁹ Mintz and Kellogg, Domestic Revolutions, 109.

²⁰ Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929), 114n.

California court interpreted the word "cruelty" to include mental cruelty and granted a divorce to a man who had charged his wife with causing him "grievous bodily injury and grievous mental suffering."²¹ Dorothy Dix, a popular newspaper columnist who wrote on family issues, summed it up nicely: "We see that no good purpose is achieved by keeping two people together who have come to hate each other."²²

Expectations for married life, and attitudes towards marriage, differed among occupational and social classes as well. However, the primary criteria for a prospective husband in all classes was his potential as a good provider. For wives, criteria differed by social class. This is aptly summarized by the Lynds in Middletown:

In a world dominated by credit this social function of the wife becomes, among the business group, more subtle and important; the emphasis upon it shades down as we descend in the social scale until among the rank and file of the working class the traditional ability to be a good cook and housekeeper ranks first.²³

Things had not changed much when the Lynds revisited Middletown some ten years later: "And it should be borne constantly in mind that, in the heavily organized social world of business class women, if the woman gets to know

²¹ Mintz and Kellogg, Domestic Revolutions, 107.

²² Quoted in Lynd and Lynd, Middletown, 128.

²³ Ibid., 116.

people, the family does".²⁴ In these two statements we can see the beginnings of the expectations for corporate wives. Some of the job requirements for corporate wives also begin to show when the marriage patterns of young businessmen are examined.

In the early 1900s the age of marriage for white collar workers was higher than that for those in other occupational categories. A study done in Madison, Wisconsin, for the years 1937-1943 found that the age of marriage for men in the professional occupations was 26.9 in 1937 and 28 in 1938. For men in proprietor occupations it was 27.2 in 1937 and 27.3 in 1938. For men in skilled labor occupations the age at marriage for these two years was 26.1 and 25.1. Occupation also affected the age of marriage for women. The same study found that women in professional and business occupations married at age 26.8, those in clerical positions at 24.2, and those at home at 22.3.²⁵ The average age of marriage for the nation in both 1930 and 1940 was, for men, 24.3, and for women, 21.5 in 1930, and 21.3 in 1940.²⁶

²⁴ Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937), 276.

²⁵ A. Philip Sundal and Thomas C. McCormick, "Age at Marriage and Mate Selection: Madison, Wisconsin, 1937-1943," American Sociological Review 16 (1957): 40-41.

²⁶ Historical Statistics, 19.

Men in clerical, business and professional occupations were more likely to marry women who lived further away from them than were men in skilled or unskilled occupations. In fact, in a study of marriage licenses issued in Allentown, Pennsylvania, laborers and unskilled workers were the largest percentage of men marrying women who lived within five blocks of them. Men in clerical, business, and professional occupations were the largest percentage marrying women who lived over twenty miles from them and the smallest percentage of men marrying women who lived within five blocks of them.²⁷

A survey of 1920 graduates of Harvard done in 1927, when the men would have been, on average, twenty-nine, found that men in business were more likely to be married than those in other occupations. Almost three quarters (72.8%) of the graduates who had gone into insurance and sales were married; these are the highest percentages found in the study. In fact, of the twelve occupations found in the study those with a 50% or higher marriage rate were all business related except for journalism. Those under 50% were law, ministry, teaching, and medicine.²⁸ The study did

²⁷ Daniel Harris, "Age and Occupational Factors in the Residential Proximity of Marriage Partners," Journal of Social Psychology 26 (May 1935): 261.

²⁸ Henry R. Carey, "White Collars and Marriage Yokes," North American Review 230 (October 1930): 443.

not say whether the men in these occupations tended to marry later or not at all.

There also appears to be some correlation between occupation and marital happiness. In 1939 Ernest Burgess and Leonard Cottrell published a book on predicting success in marriage. One of the factors they looked at was occupation. Marriages in which the husband was employed in large businesses or management, or in which he was an entrepreneur, reported a "good" marriage in 60% of the cases studied. The marital adjustment categories were poor, fair, and good. Only one other occupational group, teachers, ranked higher, and then by only one or two percentage points.²⁹ Friends and acquaintances of couples were asked to rate the marriages as happy, average, or unhappy. In this study, job categories were broken down into specific occupations. The occupation with the greatest percentage of "happy" ratings was chemical engineer, with just over 80% happy; the lowest was laborer with just over 30% rated as happy. Managers had a rating of slightly over 70% happy, corporation officials about 63%, owners of large businesses about 62%.³⁰

²⁹ Ernest W. Burgess and Leonard S. Cottrell, Jr, Predicting Success or Failure in Marriage. (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1939), 138.

³⁰ Ibid., 140.

Thus, white collar workers, including businessmen, married later, and they married women who lived further away from their place of residence at a higher rate than did non-white collar workers. However, businessmen tended to marry at a younger age than did some other white collar occupations, but, if Burgess and Cottrell are to be believed, their marriages were relatively happy ones.

Businessmen and Their Wives

Who did these young executives marry? They often married someone they met through work, which might explain why they tended to marry women who lived further away from them than did men in other occupations, or they married someone who was familiar with their line of work. One longitudinal study found that business executives married the daughters of business executives 30% of the time and those in small business married women whose fathers had been in small business 56% of the time. Professionals (teachers, lawyers, etc.) and skilled and unskilled workers married women whose fathers had been in the same line of work much more often than they married into any other occupational group.³¹ However, marrying the boss's daughter was not always looked upon favorably. While a son taking the place

³¹ Richard Centers, "Marital Selection and Occupational Strata," American Journal of Sociology 54 (May 1949): 533.

of a father was acceptable, giving positions to sons-in-law might not be.³² It is clear from the occupations that both men and women list on their marriage licenses that professional and white collar workers were more likely to marry each other than someone from any other group.³³

Women who had had some experience in the business world were considered better prospective wives for businessmen, because they would have a better understanding of their husbands' work life. In an address to law students at Northwestern University, Dr. Edward Cornell suggested that lawyers follow the example of the businessman and marry their secretaries.³⁴ One woman wrote that while she had no romantic interest in her boss she found working around men great training for marriage since she became familiar with male habits. She listed three: their bark is worse than their bite, they seldom hold a grudge, and they often vent their anger on someone other than the person with whom they are angry. One piece of advice she offered was "never trade

³² Frederick, ed., Top-Executives, 99.

³³ Thomas C. Hunt, "Occupational Status and Marriage Selection," American Sociological Review 5 (August 1940): 500.

³⁴ "Making Miss Office into Mrs. Home Wife," Literary Digest 107 (December 6, 1930):38.

on your femininity." Tears may sway a man once; they were not likely to do so on a regular basis.³⁵

In an article written in 1921, a young woman explains why she chose to take a job for the year between her college graduation and her planned wedding, instead of spending the year with her mother learning to run a home, as her friends had urged her to do. Her rationale was that she wanted to see what sort of life her husband would lead so that she could be a better wife to him. She lists seven things she learned from this that she would apply to her marriage. One was that housework after working all day was "unbearable" and she would not ask her husband to do it. Another was that she would like to be spoiled after a hard day at work and thus would spoil her husband when he got home.³⁶

There is evidence to support the theory that women who had worked outside the home made better wives for businessmen. In the 1939 study by Burgess and Cottrell the quality or adjustment of marriages was ranked by occupation of wife at marriage. Only 76 of the 526 wives had not been employed at all before marriage. The marriages of teachers had the highest "good" rating, at about 55%. Skilled office

³⁵ "What My Boss Taught Me about Marriage," American Magazine 89 (March 1920): 282.

³⁶ "The Understanding Wife Who Has Been a Business Woman," American Magazine 91 (January 1921): 126.

positions ranked second, with about 45% rated as good, and an additional 20% as fair. There is a three-way tie, between no occupation, other professions, and other, for third place, at 40%. The remaining categories are clerical and semi-clerical work and domestic and unskilled work.³⁷ In the second study of Middletown, published in 1937, it was socially acceptable for business class girls to work between school and marriage.³⁸

A familiarity with the business, or at least with the white-collar working world, was helpful for corporate wives for several reasons. One was that it gave them an understanding of the business environment and the demands made on the men who worked there. It also gave them some background for understanding the social expectations that their husbands' and their husbands' employers would have of them.

The wives of businessmen were expected to realize that their husbands' jobs must come first. In fact wives were often told that if they wanted to enjoy the material rewards of their husbands' success, they must take a back seat to the office.³⁹ This did not stop the wives from complaining

³⁷ Burgess and Cottrell, Predicting, 146-147.

³⁸ Lynd and Lynd, Middletown in Transition, 54.

³⁹ William M. Marston, "Which Should Come First, Wife or Business," Forum 99 (March 1938): 150-2.

about the hours their husbands worked. As Grace Fletcher notes in an article written in 1919

Too much overtime is essentially the problem of the white-collar salaried worker. A contractor who tried to overwork his ditch diggers, especially without extra pay, would soon hear from the union.⁴⁰

Later in the same article, she quotes a judge as saying "Business is the invisible correspondent in many a divorce suit."⁴¹

The successful corporate wife was expected to be intelligent, mobile, socially adept, and understand the demands of her husband's job. One woman, writing of her experiences noted the positive, yet subtle role she had played in his career. She had asked the wives of older executives for advice. After observing her husband in a variety of settings, she persuaded him to upgrade his wardrobe, to lose at cards more often when playing with his colleagues, and to tell interesting stories at parties. She also acted as his "social memory," reminding him who people were, their interests and family relationships.⁴² This was a very important item in the corporate wife's job description. Another wife writes:

⁴⁰ Grace Nies Fletcher, "Is Business Wrecking the Home?" World's Work 58 (May 1929): 86.

⁴¹ Ibid., 87.

⁴² "Confessions of a Businessman's Wife," American Magazine 109 (June 1930): 63.

Men like to be proud of their wives, of their information and readiness in conversation, of their power to interest people and to make friends, and they soon realize that these things are not born of solitude.⁴³

Wives were not the only ones voicing these opinions. Husbands, as well, thought their wives should keep up with current events and be aware of a world outside the kitchen. One man encouraged other men to choose wives who went to lectures and classes and were interested in community activities like the school board, not women who would be just "household servants."⁴⁴ Columnist Dorothy Dix also wrote about the role of a wife in her husband's success. She noted that "a man's wife is the show window where he exhibits the measure of his success" and that "the woman who cultivates a circle of worth-while people, who belongs to clubs, who makes herself interesting and agreeable . . . is a help to her husband."⁴⁵

Business and the Wife

Employers were giving the corporate wife some attention as well. John H. Patterson, president of the National Cash

⁴³ Mary Eads, "Modern Working Women and Marriage," Sewanee Review 23 (October 1915): 410

⁴⁴ William Pelley, "Why I am Glad I Married a Suffragist," American Magazine 89 (April 1920): 49.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Lynd and Lynd, Middletown, 116.

Register Company, was a pioneer in this area, as he was in so many areas of business. One tactic was simple. He tried to keep his sales force from becoming content and complacent with their situation in life. In the words of one biographer

He deliberately tried to make his salesmen dissatisfied with their lot in the world. He encouraged them to live better, to move in a higher social circle and to want new automobiles, better furnished homes and the other luxuries that go with success.⁴⁶

Patterson realized that wives were an important factor in this plan. He often sent groups of executives and their wives to New York or Europe and insisted that the wives purchase a "really fine gown" at company expense.⁴⁷ By giving his employees' families a taste of the good life, he hoped to spur the salesmen on to greater productivity. On one of his own trips to Europe he learned of the relationship between health and productivity, and upon his return he opened a cooking school for the wives of his executives. He required the wife or mother of each executive to attend the school and to learn how to prepare

⁴⁶ Roy W. Johnson and Russell W. Lynch, The Sales Strategy of John H. Patterson (Chicago: The Dartnell Corporation, 1932), 303.

⁴⁷ Samuel Crowther, John H. Patterson, Pioneer in Industrial Welfare (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1923), 234.

nutritious meals.⁴⁸ This was also intended to make the wives feel a part of the N.C.R. family.⁴⁹ In Patterson's own words,

We had devoted not a little attention for many years to the wives of the agents and made many suggestions as to what they might do to help their husbands. We had told of the value of nourishing food, good hours, and avoiding too much social diversion, while we had also given plans for mapping out budgets and coordinating them with income.⁵⁰

However, this was not enough for Patterson. In late 1914 business was in a slump. One of Patterson's ideas for increasing sales was to hold a convention for the wives of his salesmen.⁵¹ The women were asked to leave their husbands at home and attend the five-day convention alone. To Patterson's surprise, nearly everyone who had been invited came. His objective was to make a partner out of the wife of every man in the company.⁵²

The convention motto was "With your help he can succeed." The activities included factory tours, films on how cash registers were made, sales techniques, the importance of dress, and "playlets" showing the importance

⁴⁸ Johnson and Lynch, Sales, 300.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 301.

⁵⁰ Crowther, Patterson, 355.

⁵¹ Ibid., 354.

⁵² Ibid., 356.

of a wife's support.⁵³ Wives were encouraged to help their husbands perfect their sales pitch. When a man practiced his sales demonstration at home, his wife could listen and offer suggestions for improvement. She was also advised to pay attention to the stores where she shopped in order to advise her husband on conditions there. When making purchases, she was to ask for a receipt to encourage the use of cash registers.⁵⁴

Patterson was trying to make the wives a part of his sales force. In short, he was trying to get two for the price of one. He realized that those salesmen who had married intelligent, socially adept, thoughtful women, had almost always profited from that choice. Thus, Patterson tried to teach those skills to his employees' wives, if they did not already possess them.

A speaker at one of the wives' convention was Christine Frederick⁵⁵, household editor for Ladies Home Journal and a firm believer in the use of scientific management in the home.⁵⁶ She later moved into advertising and wrote Selling Mrs. Consumer, which advised copywriters on the best ways to

⁵³ Ibid., 357.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 358.

⁵⁵ Christine Frederick, "Man's Business and the Woman's," The Outlook (February 1, 1928):168.

⁵⁶ Matthews, Just a Housewife, 168-169.

induce housewives to buy. According to Frederick, Patterson went so far as to tell wives exactly how their husbands' sales figures compared with their husbands' colleagues. She thought this was a mistake and would cause domestic discord.⁵⁷ She did, however, think that wives could and did have a profound effect on their husbands' success. Furthermore, she did not think that American women were pulling their own weight in this regard.⁵⁸

Patterson went further than merely holding schools and conventions. He initiated an "incentive plan" to encourage his sales force to be more productive.⁵⁹ He made a list of some items he thought salesmen and their wives would want but might not have purchased. Copies of this list were published in the company newsletter and sent to each salesman and his wife. These items would be given as prizes for sales in excess of the salesman's quota. Each prize "cost" a certain number of points. When a man earned that many points, he was given the item.⁶⁰ Patterson believed that involving the wives of his salesmen, and offering prizes that the wives would want, would induce the

⁵⁷ Frederick, "Man's Business," 168.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Johnson and Lynch, Sales, 303.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 304.

wives to encourage their husbands and assist them as much as possible. It would seem that he was right. The prize system added thousands of dollars annually to the firm's income.⁶¹

Patterson himself did not practice what he preached. He married late in life, at age 44, in 1888. His wife died six years later and he never remarried. His sister and other relatives raised his son and daughter.⁶²

Individual businessmen often recognized that another asset of the successful corporate wife was her social skill. In the original Middletown study, the Lynds noted:

Among the business group, such things as one's circle, the kind of car one drives, playing golf, joining Rotary, the church to which one belongs, one's political principles, the social position of one's wife apparently tend to be scrutinized somewhat more than formerly in Middletown for their instrumental bearing upon the main business of getting a living, while, conversely, one's status in these various other activities tends to be more influenced by one's financial position.⁶³

By 1936, it was not uncommon for wives to accompany their husbands to company conventions and for the company to offer a program of entertainment for the wives in attendance. A 1936 article by Jane Reitel examines a convention from a

⁶¹ Ibid., 306.

⁶² Crowther, Patterson, 221.

⁶³ Lynd and Lynd, Middletown, 81.

wife's point of view. She listed luncheons, field trips to local attractions, and a fashion show as activities that were planned for wives. Reitel's husband had asked her to come because "it gave a man an air of stability to have his wife with him."⁶⁴ Some companies offered etiquette classes for the wives of younger executives, to teach them some of the social arts.⁶⁵

One of the worst sins a corporate wife could commit was to drag her feet at the prospect of moving. This fault is damned by Patterson,⁶⁶ Frederick,⁶⁷ and others. In an article on how a wife can hinder her husband's career, six specific faults are listed. Number three is an aversion to moving. The others included being a mother or daughter more than a wife, comparing her husband to other men to his disadvantage, refusing to make new social contacts, and trying to manage her husband's career.⁶⁸

Making new social contacts, setting the family's social status, and keeping track of social relationships are tasks

⁶⁴ Jane Reitel, "Meet the Convention Wife," Saturday Evening Post 209 (December 26, 1936): 8.

⁶⁵ "Executive Wives: A Factor in Hiring," Printers Ink 280 (August 3, 1962): 20.

⁶⁶ Crowther, Patterson, 359.

⁶⁷ Frederick, "Man's Business," 169.

⁶⁸ "How My Wife Has Hindered Me," American Magazine 96 (July 1923): 190.

that fell to the corporate wife. With the advent of the automobile, one's social contacts were no longer limited to one's neighborhood. This was more true of the business class than the working class.⁶⁹ Clubs (associations with a common, often social, interest) and lodges (fraternal organizations, such as the Elks) became important. Lodges were equally important to the business and working classes. However, clubs other than lodges were more important to the business class, especially business class women, who would find them an excellent vehicle for social networking.⁷⁰ This is related to another item on the corporate wife's job description--public and community activities.

Social Activities and the Wife

Membership in the "right clubs" was seen as a social stepping stone.⁷¹ In the original Middletown study, a greater percentage of business class women belonged to clubs than did working class women, 92.3% to 35.7%. For the men, the percentage was 97.4% for the business class and 56.9% for the working class. None of the business class men and women belonged to labor unions. Lodges were popular with

⁶⁹ Lynd and Lynd, Middletown, 273.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 276-277.

⁷¹ Ibid., 296.

all groups except business class women: 16.2% of working class women belonged to a lodge, while 87.1% of the business class men and 48.7% of the working class men did. Clubs other than lodges, church social clubs, or labor unions were very popular with the business class: 89.7% of the business class women belonged to at least one of these organizations, while 14.6% of working class women, and 76.9% of the business class men and less than one percent of the working class men did.⁷² Membership in one or more organizations was found to be a positive factor in marital happiness.⁷³ Those in the business class were more likely to belong to more than one organization than those in the working class.⁷⁴

In some ways, this reflects the differing view of leisure between the business and working classes. The working class viewed it as a release from work. The business class viewed their organized leisure activities as an extension of the workplace.⁷⁵ It was not unknown for men to be chosen for executive positions because of bonds formed

⁷² Ibid., 308.

⁷³ Burgess and Cottrell, Predicting, 127.

⁷⁴ Lynd and Lynd, Middletown, 528.

⁷⁵ Lynd and Lynd, Middletown in Transition, 245.

on the golf course or at a social club.⁷⁶ This applied to the business class wives as well as to their husbands:

If the leisure of such men tends to be used instrumentally to further their primary business of getting ahead, it also becomes easy under the driving pressure of the 'business game' for the business-class wife to make the leisure of the family contribute to her husband's business activity.⁷⁷

This was more complicated than the task of offering support and encouragement to one's husband. A clear understanding of the business world and of social rules were a necessity to do well in this area. Although most corporate wives were from the business class, and thus familiar with the rules of the game, those who were not had some recourse. In addition to asking friends or relatives what to do, they could turn to established rules of etiquette. One etiquette book stated that "social affairs among the wives of business men which grow out of the business relations of their husbands follow the same rules as almost any other social affairs."⁷⁸ To wit, the wife of the senior man issued the first invitation. Those in subordinate positions could then reciprocate.⁷⁹ The

⁷⁶ Frederick, ed., Top-Executives, 101.

⁷⁷ Lynd and Lynd, Middletown in Transition, 244.

⁷⁸ The Book of Business Etiquette (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1922), 100.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

exception was if the subordinate's wife was more of a social leader than the boss's wife. Likewise those new to a community or company were expected to wait for an invitation from more established couples.⁸⁰ The level of entertaining should be reciprocal. If the senior executive's party was formal, the return invitation should be for a formal dinner; if the first invitation was informal, then the reciprocal invitation should be as well. Mercifully, subordinates were advised not to entertain so lavishly that it would wreck the household budget.⁸¹

The Working Wife

In this early time period, very little was written about the working wife. This did not mean that wives did not work. In 1920, in Rochester, New York, of 54,000 women living with their husbands in an individual home, 24.7% were earning money. However, only 7.5% were working outside the home. The majority of those earning money in the home were taking in lodgers or boarders.⁸² By the late 1930s, this had changed. In the second Middletown study 92.3% of the

⁸⁰ Ibid., 276-277.

⁸¹ Millicent Fenwick, Vogue's Book of Etiquette (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1948), 113.

⁸² Mabel A. Rollins, "Monetary Contributions of Wives to Family Income in 1920 and 1960," Marriage and Family Living 25 (May 1963): 226.

employed married women worked away from home, mostly in industrial settings or in service industries such as waitressing.⁸³ Those married women who worked were primarily doing so because of their husbands' unemployment⁸⁴ or because the family could not live on the husbands' salary.⁸⁵

Married women in white collar occupations were not very common. Some considered their positions to be temporary. One husband wrote of staying home to work on a book while his wife took a job in advertising. They hoped to save up enough money to have a baby within a year and then she would stay home and he, having finished his book, would go to work.⁸⁶ Two women with successful careers wrote articles describing their situations, both in dismal terms. One of these women was married to a musician who could not work because of an injury. She blamed herself for his health problems.⁸⁷ The other's husband had "mysterious" health

⁸³ Lynd and Lynd, Middletown in Transition, 60.

⁸⁴ Lynd and Lynd, Middletown, 27.

⁸⁵ Lynd and Lynd, Middletown in Transition, 54.

⁸⁶ David Bates, "Husband Turns Housewife," Forum 101 (January 1939): 8-10.

⁸⁷ Diana Freeman, "Feminist's Husband," New Republic 52 (August 24, 1927): 16.

ailments that she thought were related to her greater monetary success.⁸⁸

Generally speaking, business class husbands did not like their wives to work, as it might reflect badly on their abilities as providers. However, one or two business class men in Middletown were so wealthy that no one could say their wives, who worked, were doing so out of need. Their jobs were regarded as "playthings."⁸⁹ If business class wives did work, certain occupations were regarded as more acceptable than others. According to the Lynds, a wife who was an artist or taught art might even enhance her husband's status. Occupations which would cause "least loss of caste" were author or reporter (but only of women's issues, not hard news), college teacher, musician, or teacher of music. Occupations which might be regarded as "queer or unnecessary" were lawyer or judge, physician, public school teacher, or real estate agent. Among those occupations that would be "highly disapproved of" for a business class wife were: actor, banker, clerical worker, dentist, photographer, restaurant worker, and nurse.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ "A Career Woman Regrets," Forum 99 (June 1938): 357.

⁸⁹ Lynd and Lynd, Middletown in Transition, 182.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 183-184.

During these years, the corporate businessman's role was formed and the role of the corporate wife developed along with it. The foundation was set as far as the type of woman who made a good corporate wife: one with an active mind, some understanding of the business world, good social skills, and a willingness to move. John Patterson led the way in training and using the wives of his employees to his advantage. Others in the business world would soon follow suit.

CHAPTER 2

WORLD WAR II TO THE LATE 1960S

The Second World War is a great dividing line in twentieth century United States history. Society in the 1950s was radically different from that of pre-war America. There were many changes in the corporate climate and this was reflected in the makeup of the workforce, educationally and occupationally. College degrees became the norm for businessmen. There were many changes on the domestic scene as well. For example, there was a great migration to the suburbs, and the social role of the "suburban housewife" developed. The American suburbs in the 1950s and early 1960s were characterized by conformity. It is not surprising that this extended to the corporate wife. Her role became more ritualized and defined. It was, for many women, a career in itself.

Changes in the Workplace

It is easier in the post-war time period to get a clear picture of who corporate businessmen were. By taking a closer look at the men we can learn more about their wives. Whyte's "organization man" became solidly entrenched in the business community, and he brought his wife with him.

The number of white collar workers continued to increase after the war. In the 1940 census, 16,082,00 workers, 31% of the civilian workforce were considered white collar. In 1950 that number increased to 21,601,000, 36.6% of the civilian workforce. In 1960 white collar workers, 27,244,000 in number, made up 40% of the civilian workforce. This represented an increase of nearly 10% in 20 years.¹ The U.S. census divides white collar workers into four broad categories. They are (1) professional, technical, and kindred workers, (2) managers, officials, and proprietors, (3) clerical and kindred workers, and (4) salesworkers.

Looking at the increase in white collar jobs among male workers, the numbers rise, but less dramatically, showing some indication of the increase of women in the work force, mostly in clerical positions. In 1940, 26% of male civilian workers were white collar; in 1950, 30%; in 1960, 33%.² The number of white collar workers calling themselves "managers" did not increase as much. In 1940, 32% of male white collar workers, 8% of the total male work force considered themselves managers, officials, or proprietors. In 1950, 34% of male white collar workers, or 10% of the male work force, were in this category, in 1960 30% of male white

¹ Historical Statistics, 139. The author has used the 1960 occupational classification for both 1950 and 1960.

² Ibid.

collar workers, still 10% of the male work force.³ This number may be misleading in that engineers, accountants, and salesmen who had moved into managerial positions might still consider themselves engineers, accountants, and salesmen, and thus be represented in categories other than managerial.

This variation in occupational titles is shown, to some extent, in the way the title "vice president" is used in differing kinds of operations. The ratio of employees per vice president was calculated for three types of business in 1955. The range of employees per vice president for the ten largest industries was from 1,418 to 18,602, with 5,878.5 being the average and 2,786 being the median. For the four largest advertising agencies, the range was from 27 to 49, with 35.75 being the average. For the four largest banks, the range was 90 to 145, with 120.5 being the average.⁴ The reason for this discrepancy lies in the amount of contact each type of business has with the public. Customers are impressed with being able to talk to a vice president. Thus, there are more vice presidents in people-oriented areas such as sales, banking, and advertising.⁵

³ Ibid.

⁴ The Executive Life by the Editors of Fortune (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1956), 152.

⁵ Ibid., 153.

In 1950, 20.4% of families were headed by a professional worker, 11.4% by a sales or clerical worker, 43.1% by a craftsman, and 21% by other. In 1960, the professional workers had grown to 26.8% of heads of households, and by 1970 to 30.9%. Craftsmen and "other" decreased slightly while those in sales occupations rose slightly.

Census figures divide the population into five categories according to earnings. In 1950, 38.6% of the households in the highest earning category were headed by a professional worker and 22% in the next highest fifth. Thus, over half of the households in the top two-fifths of U.S. earnings had a professional worker as the primary breadwinner. Those numbers increased. In 1960, 50.5% of those in the top fifth and 27.4% of those in the next highest level were professional workers. By 1970, 54.6% of those in the highest fifth and 38.7% of those in the next highest fifth were in professional or managerial occupations. Of those in the top 5% of family income, most were professional workers, 61.4% in 1950, 72.3% in 1960, and 76.0% in 1970.⁶

Needless to say, becoming a businessman was a popular goal. The publishing world soon caught on. A review of the

⁶ Ibid., 295

cumulative subject index to Book Review Digest, a standard and respected source for locating book reviews, indicates that books on businessmen became increasingly popular during this time period. Below is a table showing how many books were written on the subjects of executives or executive ability, and businessmen, for the years 1917-1961 (the years for which a cumulative index is available). For comparison the number of books indexed under the headings lawyer (or law as a profession), gardening (or gardens), and marriage, is included.⁷

	executives	lawyers	gardens	marriage
1917-1921	2	2	28	6
1922-1926	3	1	31	12
1927-1931	3	4	40	44
1932-1936	5	3	79	30
1937-1941	8	14	74	50
1942-1946	5	11	16	28
1947-1951	18	8	30	33
1952-1956	19	9	43	28
1957-1961	18	11	27	41

As can be seen, the number of books on businessmen increased after the war and stabilized at the higher level. Corporate businessmen also began to show up more often in fiction.⁸

The post-war businessman was more likely to have attended college than had his predecessors. In a comparison

⁷ Book Review Digest H.W. Wilson Co.

⁸ For an overview of this phenomenon see "The Businessman in American Literature," Twentieth Century Literary Criticism vol. 26 (Detroit: Gale, 1988), pp. 1-46.

of business leaders in 1928 and 1950, one difference was education. In 1928 there was not much difference in the percentages of business leaders who had less than a high school education, those with a high school diploma, and those with a college degree, all around 30%. In 1952, however, almost 60% of the business leaders studied had a college degree and the percentages with a high school diploma and with some college were about 20% each. Fewer than 10% did not have a high school diploma.⁹

As has been noted, corporate businessmen usually had higher educational levels than the population at large. This pattern continued. In a survey of business leaders in 1952 nearly 60% had a college degree and another 20% had attended college but had not graduated. Thus almost eight out of ten business leaders had had some exposure to higher education. This was true for fewer than 20% of the general male population.¹⁰

There were also differences between lower level managers (line supervisors) and executives. In a 1962 survey of men in these two categories, in the same age range (35-58), 33% of the executives had graduated from college, 36% had some post-graduate education, and another 21% had

⁹ W. Lloyd Warner and James C. Abegglen, Big Business Leaders in America (New York: Harper, 1955), 48.

¹⁰ Ibid., 35.

attended college but not graduated, for a total of 90% with some college experience. In contrast, 12% of the lower level managers had some post-graduate education, 13% had graduated from college and 34% had attended college but had not graduated, for a total of 59% with some college experience.¹¹

The kind of business a man went into had some impact on the amount of education he needed. There is some evidence to indicate that rapidly expanding industries gave more opportunities to men with less education than the more stable industries did. Within industries, rapidly expanding companies provided more opportunities to men with less education. Thus a man with only a high school diploma had a much greater chance of succeeding in a rapidly expanding company or industry than he would in a stable company or industry.¹² However, even advanced education could not sufficiently prepare men for life in the corporate world. Many business leaders continued their education by taking additional courses, usually on business related subjects. Although company training programs had been around for some

¹¹ Thomas R. Donovan, "Socioeconomic and Educational Factors Influencing the Achievement Level of Individuals in Large-Scale Organizations," Sociology and Social Research 46 (July 1962): 421.

¹² Warner and Abegglen, Big Business, 200.

time, they did not become commonly used until after the war.¹³ In 1952, six out of ten business leaders had reported additional business training. This is in comparison to three out of ten in 1928.¹⁴ General Electric sent recently hired college graduates to a fifteen month training program. In 1953 Fortune magazine estimated that "some companies were spending as much as \$10,000 per trainee and that the average was about \$2,500--then substantially more than the highest business school tuition."¹⁵

The increase in education needed for young businessmen had an impact on the types of women they married, and on the expectations they would have of their wives. As will be seen later, some college or post-high school education or training began to be perceived as a necessity for the corporate wife as well as for the corporate businessman.

Changes in the Home

Family life in the 1950s was dramatically different from family life at any other time in the century. People married younger, had more children and had them sooner.¹⁶

¹³ Thomas C. Cochran, 200 Years of American Business (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 207.

¹⁴ Warner and Abegglen, Big Business, 56.

¹⁵ Cochran, 200 Years, 208.

¹⁶ Mintz and Kellogg, Domestic Revolutions, 178.

In 1940, the median age at first marriage was 24.3 for men and 21.5 for women; in both 1950 and 1960, 22.8 for men and 20.3 for women.¹⁷ According to Mintz and Kellogg, remaining unmarried was perceived as a sign of homosexuality, immaturity, or some other perceived disorder.¹⁸ Because of the rising birth rate and the falling death rate, the country's population increased 33% between 1940 and 1960.¹⁹ Life expectancy for whites in 1940 was 62.1 years for men and 66.6 for women; in 1950, 66.5 for men and 72.2 for women; and in 1960, 67.4 for men and 74.1 for women.²⁰

The rate of home ownership and the general placement of the population also changed. Until 1934, when the government began to guarantee mortgages, the majority of Americans were unable to purchase a home of their own. After the war, Veteran's Administration loans and higher real wages made home ownership realizable for a much greater percentage of the population.²¹ Households with an income of \$10,000 or more rose from 9% in 1947 to 33% in 1968.²²

¹⁷ Historical Statistics, 19.

¹⁸ Mintz and Kellogg, Domestic Revolutions, 181.

¹⁹ Leuchtenburg, A Troubled Feast, 42.

²⁰ Historical Statistics, 55.

²¹ Cochran, 200 Years, 214.

²² Leuchtenburg, A Troubled Feast, 48.

Post-war society was on the move, often to the suburbs. Before the war, the well-to-do usually lived in cities.²³ However, the 1950s were a time of migration and by 1960 as many people lived in the suburbs as lived in cities.²⁴

Suburban life in the 1950s was family centered. Marriage was perceived as a companionate partnership. There were some class differences, however. Many children in middle class households were raised by the methods set forth by Dr. Benjamin Spock.²⁵ While working class mothers used their parents as a resource for information in child-rearing, middle class mothers more often mentioned experts, other mothers, and friends as their information resources.²⁶ The stereotypical white collar suburban wife was forced, by the husband's work-related absences, to play the role of both parents, and the bulk of the responsibility (and blame) for child-rearing fell on her shoulders:

Not only was she responsible for playing with her children and disciplining them, she also had to chauffeur them to and from school, friends' homes, piano and dancing lessons and the doctor. Deprived of stimulating contacts with other adults, the lives of

²³ Mintz and Kellogg, Domestic Revolutions, 183.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Mintz and Kellogg, 187.

²⁶ Mirra Komarovsky, Blue-Collar Marriage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 37.

suburban housewives were characterized by isolation, boredom and loneliness.²⁷

Working class housewives were less likely to be portrayed in such a manner. In her study of working class family life Mirra Komarovsky described the life of the blue collar wife in this way:

There is no chauffeuring of children to and from art or dance classes, no rushing with the children's dinner before the baby-sitter takes over the parent's night out. There are no books to be finished or current magazines to be read²⁸

As was seen in the previous chapter, blue collar wives were expected to be good cooks and housekeepers, but were not expected to maintain intellectual interests. They also did not, as a group, subscribe to contemporary child-rearing theories which called for frequent, if not constant, stimulation and feedback. While there was less activity there was also less stress. Corporate wives had to contend not only with the expectations of suburban white collar life but also with additional requirements of the business world their husbands inhabited.

Businessmen and Their Wives

It was a given that businessmen worked more than an eight hour day. A typical executive's weekday schedule was

²⁷ Mintz and Kellogg, 184.

²⁸ Komarovsky, Blue Collar Marriage, 59.

described in a Fortune article. He got up about 7:00 a.m., ate a large breakfast, rushed to his office by train or auto, worked 9:00 to 6:00, hurried home, ate dinner, and crawled into bed with a briefcase full of work.²⁹ Some worked even longer hours. In the late 1950s, the Young Presidents' Organization surveyed its members. Most worked fifty-three hours a week, not including work time at home, and for some the work week extended to sixty-two hours.³⁰ Of weekday evenings, one evening would involve some business entertaining. Another would be spent at the office or in conference.³¹ However, in a Fortune survey, 90% of executives questioned said they did not work too hard. One man was quoted as saying "Overwork, as I see it, is simply work you don't like. But I dearly love this work. You live only one time and you might as well do something you like."³²

Businessmen were aware that this kind of schedule meant less time with their families.³³ For a man to succeed in

²⁹ Duncan Norton-Taylor, "How Top Executives Live," Fortune 52 (July 1955): 78.

³⁰ Osborn Elliott, Men at the Top (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 115.

³¹ Executive Life, 63.

³² Ibid., 69.

³³ Ibid., 70.

business, he must devote to his work the energy most other men would devote to their family.³⁴ Wives and children must come second, sometimes a distant second.³⁵ Most of these businessmen lived in the suburbs, and the time spent commuting further cut down on time spent with their families. A survey published in Fortune in August 1946 showed that executive husbands were not unhappy with this pattern and wanted their wives to take over more of the child rearing.³⁶ As one company president said: "Don't quote me, but I find it more stimulating, as well as more relaxing, to be at the office than to be at home."³⁷

Sociological studies in the mid-twentieth century found this attachment to work was more pronounced in white collar workers than in blue collar workers. Other than providing the means of earning a living, a job represented something to do for the working class. For white collar workers, it represented a purpose and gave a sense of accomplishment.³⁸

³⁴ Elliott, Men at the Top, 144.

³⁵ Ibid., 131.

³⁶ Whyte, Is Anybody Listening?, 165.

³⁷ Farrell Cross and Wilbur Cross, "If You Want Your Man to Be a Top Executive," Cosmopolitan 149 (July 1960): 63.

³⁸ Nancy C. Morse and Robert W. Weiss, "The Function and Meaning of Work and the Job," American Sociological Review 20 (1955): 198.

For blue collar workers, pay increases and promotions were often due to union contracts and based on seniority rather than on individual accomplishments. Thus, blue collar workers were more likely to get interpersonal satisfaction from non-work activities, such as family and friends.³⁹

In keeping with the conformity of the time, businessmen were encouraged to adhere to certain behavioral standards. Younger businessmen believed this was just a phase and that once they had reached a certain level it would no longer be necessary. This was not the case.⁴⁰ For some companies these expectations were spelled out, such as IBM's "uniform" of dark suits and stiff collars.⁴¹ The young businessmen knew at an early age what would be required of them. Even in college these young men knew what they wanted out of life, including the type of wife they wanted, and for most of them it was the same:

After examining a series of interviews, [David] Riesman concluded that the typical class of '55 senior sought a place on the corporate ladder, planned which branch of the military he would enter (guided missiles was one favorite), and knew what his wife would be like at forty-five ('the Grace Kelly, camel's hair-coat type'

³⁹ Martin Gold and Carol Slater, "Office, Factory, Store -- and Family: A Study of Integration Setting," American Sociological Review 23 (1958): 65.

⁴⁰ Executive Life, 75.

⁴¹ Elliott, Men at the Top, 44.

who would do volunteer hospital work and bring culture into the home).⁴²

The job search process was another place where young businessmen needed to follow the crowd. One article cautioned against wearing argyle socks to an interview or having a mustache or wearing garters.⁴³ Another said that men had not gotten jobs because they drank or smoked too much during the interview. Some were rejected because of physical features, such as their ears or teeth.⁴⁴ One man lost a job because of how he ate a piece of pie.⁴⁵

A wife was definitely a necessity for the young man on the move. Single men were considered suspect,⁴⁶ and divorced men might offend small town sensibilities.⁴⁷ (It is interesting to note that in California divorced men were considered more acceptable than in the rest of the country.)⁴⁸ A divorced man who remarried was acceptable,⁴⁹

⁴² Leuchtenburg, A Troubled Feast, 72-73.

⁴³ Alfred G. Larke, "Picking Executives for Their Big Blue Eyes," Dun's Review 67 (January 1956): 42.

⁴⁴ Perrin Stryker, "How Executives Get Jobs," Fortune (August 1953): 182.

⁴⁵ Elliott, Men at the Top, 106.

⁴⁶ Ninki Hart Burger, The Executive's Wife (New York: Macmillan, [1968]), 125.

⁴⁷ Larke, Dun's Review, 42.

⁴⁸ Susan Margetts, "Divorce Executive Style," Dun's Review 92 (October 1968): 36.

although the second wife might be given the cold shoulder by the wives of her husband's colleagues, especially if they had known the first wife.⁵⁰

What sort of qualities did future businessmen look for in a wife? A college education, or at least some college experience, was a plus. A lack of college experience might lead to an inferiority complex.⁵¹ Or, as another researcher stated,

A college educated wife of a young executive is less likely to feel inadequate, inferior or ill-at-ease. She is more likely to know how to act, what to say, and perhaps most important when to keep quiet.⁵²

In a study of fifty executives' wives in Ohio, all but nine had had some education beyond high school. Nearly a third, or 28%, were college graduates. Five, or 10%, had attended business school and another seven, or 14%, had attended business school and college.⁵³ In contrast, the median number of school years completed in 1960 for white women was 11.0. Half of the women in the study had been married between eleven and twenty years, which would put them, for

⁴⁹ Burger, Executive's Wife, 125.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 117.

⁵¹ Whyte, "Wives," 21.

⁵² Margaret L. Helfrich, The Social Role of the Executive's Wife (Columbus, Ohio: Bureau of Business Research, Ohio State University, 1965) 16.

⁵³ Ibid.

the most part, in the 30-45 age range. The median number of school years completed in 1960 for white women age 30-34 was 12.1 years; age 35-39, 11.2 years; age 40-44, 10.5 years.⁵⁴ Thus, it would seem that, like their husbands, these women were more likely to have a college education, or at least some post-high school education or training, than the white population at large.

A college education, then as now, tended to be a great equalizer. This was one reason for such a large proportion of higher education among the wives of corporate businessmen. Although the businessmen came from all economic classes, college educated men, regardless of their economic origin, were (and are) more likely to marry women of high educational and social levels.⁵⁵ On the other hand, college education for those in white-collar classes increases the chances of marriage to someone in their own class.⁵⁶ Higher education, it would seem, provides a greater range of potential marriage partners for those from lower socio-economic classes but increases the percentage of intermarriage for white collar and professional classes.

⁵⁴ Historical Statistics, 381.

⁵⁵ Warner and Abegglen, Big Business, 192-193.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 194.

Women who had not been to college or business school (or, in rare cases, had not finished high school) were encouraged by their peers (in advice manuals) and by their husbands' peers and superiors (in articles in business magazines) to take courses. Those who could not afford to do so could make use of the public library to further their education. One of the most frequently mentioned wifely sins was being "the wife he left behind," that is, not keeping up with his intellectual and social growth.⁵⁷ Education, whether formal or informal, was one way to avoid this fate. Wives of traveling salesmen were also encouraged to take courses, not only for intellectual stimulation but also to avoid being lonely while their husbands were away.⁵⁸

Some work experience before marriage was also viewed as a plus, especially if it was in a field allied with the husband's profession.⁵⁹ In the Ohio study, only ten of the fifty wives had not worked before marriage; the other forty had had some work experience. The most common occupation was secretary (13), followed by teacher (8).⁶⁰ Business

⁵⁷ Mrs. Dale (Dorothy) Carnegie, How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead (New York: Greystone Press, 1953), 117.

⁵⁸ Mary Mould, "I'm a Traveling Man's Wife," Good Housekeeping 133 (October 1951): 170.

⁵⁹ "Executive Wives" Printers Ink, 23.

⁶⁰ Helfrich, Social Role, 18.

books written for young women touted the workplace as a great setting for husband hunting. One book cited an American Institute of Family Relations study of the marriage prospects of fifteen occupations. The top four were secretary, actress, bookkeeper, and stenographer.⁶¹

It is interesting to note that, contrary to popular belief, marrying the "boss's daughter" did not shorten a man's climb to the top. Men who married women whose fathers had been major executives or owners of large businesses took about the same time to become business leaders themselves as did those who married the daughters of laborers.⁶²

Thus, it would seem that an increased expectation of higher education for corporate businessmen was mirrored by a similar expectation of their wives. Whereas in the pre-war era (as illustrated in the previous chapter), intellectual ability in wives was approved of, in this time period it was regarded almost as a qualification for the job. However, some experience with the business world before marriage was still regarded as positive, and most young women did have some work experience before marriage.

⁶¹ Esther R. Becker and Richard L. Lawrence, Success and Satisfaction in Your Office Job (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 8.

⁶² Warner and Abegglen, Big Business, 202.

Business and the Wife

With the increasing use of standardized and statistical analysis in business, companies were looking at why some men succeeded and others did not. In a study of 244 employees in the Indianapolis RCA plant, the job applications of the men were compared with their job success. Factors such as birthplace, height, hobbies, and number of children were examined. The factor having the greatest relationship with the criteria for success was marital status.⁶³ Wives were regarded as having a great deal of control over, and influence on, their husbands. As Francis J. Curtis, vice-president of Monsanto Chemical Company, said in 1956, "Wives have always influenced husbands and have changed history as often as bacteria!"⁶⁴ Thus, it is no surprise that business in general began to look more closely at the wives of their employees.

The first systematic examination of corporate wives was done by William H. Whyte, Jr., then an assistant managing editor of Fortune magazine. In a series of articles on communication, Whyte devoted two articles to wives. The

⁶³ Willard Kerr, "Prediction of Job Success," Journal of Applied Psychology 33 (October 1949): 443.

⁶⁴ "Three Views on the Role of the Executive's Wife," Harvard Business School Bulletin (Spring 1956): 20.

importance of the subject is illustrated by the following quotation attributed to an unnamed executive:

We control a man's environment in business and we lose it entirely when he crosses the threshold of his home. Management, therefore, has a challenge and an obligation to deliberately plan and create a favorable, constructive attitude on the part of the wife that will liberate her husband's total energies for the job.⁶⁵

This was the opening salvo in what would become a veritable flood of information on, about, and for corporate wives. Whyte found that corporate officials described the ideal corporate wife as "highly adaptable, highly gregarious, and [one who] realizes that her husband belongs to the corporation."⁶⁶ The rules of the game were defined as:

- * Don't talk shop with the Girls, particularly those who have husbands in the same department.
- * Don't invite superiors in rank; let them make the first bid.
- * Don't turn up at the office unless you absolutely have to.
- * Don't get too chummy with the wives of associates your husband might soon pass on the way up.
- * Don't be disagreeable to any company people you meet. You never know ...
- * Be attractive. There is a strong correlation between executive success and the wife's appearance.
- * Be a phone pal to your husband's secretary.
- * Never--repeat, never--get tight at a company party (it may go down in a dossier).⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Whyte, "Wives," 86.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 88.

Above all, a corporate businessman and his wife should never step outside the established social pattern for their perceived class. Never drive a better car than the boss. Never dress too well. Keep up with the Joneses, but never pass them by.⁶⁸

The articles themselves became news and were written about in Time⁶⁹ and other publications. Some of the responses were less than flattering to the business world; for example, Juanita Tanner asked,

Does anyone seriously suppose that a demand for wives who will keep up with husbands described as willing to knock themselves out in the company's interest can do other than produce women able to outdo their husbands in yessing management?⁷⁰

John S. Handy, Sr., who headed an established executive search firm, said that what most companies wanted in an executive's wife was,

a wife who will provide a different world for her man, by offering distractions and avoiding as much discussion of business as possible. She should provide a frictionless home, help him form cordial friendships (though the worst thing she can do is to openly try and promote him through these contacts), and she should help him save money.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ "Don't Be Disagreeable, Executive's Wives," Time 58 (November 12, 1951): 105-106.

⁷⁰ Juanita Tanner, "Corporate Cupid," Nation 174 (March 1, 1952): 205.

⁷¹ "Executive Wives," Printers Ink, 25.

George Fry and Associates, a management consultant firm, described the ideal corporate wife as one who was (1) adaptable, (2) understood the problems of the husband's job and tried to sooth him, and (3) was able to entertain. She must also be "a model of efficiency, patience, and charm."⁷² Even those who did not approve of formal evaluations of wives thought that wives should have some knowledge of their husbands' work (yet not so much that the wives meddled or pushed their husbands) and if the husbands worked in a small town or entertained frequently, then the wives should be tactful, gracious, and amiable.⁷³

In 1959 Max Forster, of International Minerals & Chemical Corporation, and his wife Margaret, assistant dean of women at Purdue University, gave a presentation entitled "Executive Sweet--The Unique Role of the Management Wife" at the National Management Association in Detroit.⁷⁴ Their main points were that as a man moves higher up the corporate ladder, his wife is more likely to become the only person with whom he can honestly talk about his business, that the management wife must be able to meet the social demands of

⁷² "Blueprint for an Executive's Wife," Newsweek 44 (October 4, 1954): 81.

⁷³ "The Executive Wife: The Facts Contradict the Fiction," Time 69 (March 4, 1957): 88.

⁷⁴ "Spouses Parley on Wives' Role," Chemical Week (November 7, 1959): 56.

her husband's job, and that mutual respect is necessary for a successful marriage.⁷⁵

Business was not content merely to outline the positive and negative qualities of a good corporate wife. In the original Fortune study, roughly half of the companies contacted had made "wife-screening" a regular practice. One company estimated that it turned down 20% of otherwise acceptable trainee applicants because of their wives.⁷⁶ Of the 300 top-ranking executives who made up the Dun's Review President's Panel in 1965, two-thirds thought it highly desirable or necessary to meet a man's wife before he was appointed to a high executive position.⁷⁷ Many of the wives themselves thought companies should consider the wife when hiring a man. In a 1957 survey of 4,000 executives' wives, 55% thought a company should interview wives.⁷⁸ Some of the factors looked at were how the wife behaved towards her husband (nagging, for example), how she felt about the

⁷⁵ Ibid., 57.

⁷⁶ Whyte, "Corporation and the Wife," 109.

⁷⁷ W. R. Roberts, "Executive Wives and Trouble; Presidents' Panel Report," Dun's Review 85 (January 1965): 76.

⁷⁸ Russell Chappell, "Sizing Up Executives' Wives," Newsweek 49 (May 13, 1957): 93.

company, how the couple dealt with money, and how she handled alcohol.⁷⁹

The ways wives were evaluated varied from company to company. Some invited the wife of a prospective employee to informal gatherings or parties; others held more formal interviews.⁸⁰ For example, one company owner and his wife invited prospective executives and their wives to the Country Club.⁸¹ At times, a couple was invited to spend the weekend with a higher ranking executive and his wife. One advice book for executives' wives devoted an entire chapter to these weekends, which on the surface were social invitations but were more likely to be an evaluative procedure for both the executive and his wife before the husband was appointed to a more important position.⁸² Wives were often invited to join their husbands on out-of-town interviews, or to visit the city and the company before moving if relocation was involved.⁸³ One young man lost a

⁷⁹ Whyte, "Corporation and the Wife," 110.

⁸⁰ "Help Your Husband Get Ahead," Changing Times 11 (November 1957): 41.

⁸¹ R. E. Dumas Milner, "Before I Hire Your Husband, I Want to Meet You," Good Housekeeping 142 (January 1956): 98.

⁸² Edith Heal, The Young Executive's Wife: You and Your Husband's Job (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1958), 131-137.

⁸³ Burger, Executive's Wife, 127.

job because of the way his wife was dressed at a company picnic, where he and his wife were to be checked over before he was given a promotion. His wife wore a strapless dress, a far less conservative style than that favored by the boss's wife.⁸⁴

Some companies held formal interview sessions. Others talked to the woman's friends and neighbors.⁸⁵ A few took the extreme step of hiring private investigators to look into a wife's background.⁸⁶ Although psychology tests were often used in the evaluation of male employees, they were seldom, if ever, used to evaluate wives. Dr. W. F. McDowell, director of sales management at New York University, said, "Women are often sly and can figure out which answer the tester is looking for."⁸⁷

Wives were more likely to be interviewed or investigated when the husband was being considered for (1) an overseas assignment, (2) a position that required the wife to have contact with clients, or (3) an executive

⁸⁴ Martin Scott, "Executive's Wife," Cosmopolitan 139 (September 1955): 46.

⁸⁵ Burger, Executive's Wife, 126.

⁸⁶ Scott, "Executive's Wife," 48.

⁸⁷ C. P. Prahalis, "Executive Sweet," Sales Management 102 (May 15, 1969): 59.

position in a small town.⁸⁸ Some companies sponsored special seminars for the wives of men being sent overseas.⁸⁹

The emphasis on socializing in some corporate departments led to more intense scrutiny of wives in those areas than in others. Advertising, marketing, and sales are mentioned as being particularly tough on wives. Since increasing numbers of men in top management positions came from these backgrounds, the wives of men in these areas received attention early in their husbands' careers.⁹⁰

Formal Training of Executive Wives

Since there was an increase in the number of books written for and about executives in this time period, it is not surprising that books began to appear for the wives of businessmen as well. Two examples are How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead by Mrs. Dale (Dorothy) Carnegie⁹¹ and The Young Executive's Wife by Edith Heal (Mrs. Stephen Berrien).⁹² The Carnegie book was intended for blue collar

⁸⁸ Ibid., 59 and Elliott, Men at the Top, 109.

⁸⁹ "That Glittering Overseas Investment, the Executive Lady," Fortune 73 (June 1966): 132; and Burger, Executive's Wife, 192.

⁹⁰ "Executive Wives," Printers Ink, 19.

⁹¹ Carnegie, How to Help.

⁹² Heal, Young Executive's Wife.

as well as white collar wives, but much of the advice was aimed at the wife of an upwardly mobile man. Heal summed up her purpose in this way:

The corporation cannot remain a stranger to you if you are to have an intelligent awareness of your husband's life in it. That is the real reason for the book and my attempt to bring the corporation into clearer perspective.⁹³

Business organizations, such as the Young Presidents' Organization, and schools, such as the Harvard School of Business, offered formal training sessions for the wives of executives. The Young Presidents' Organization sponsored a five-day workshop each year for members' wives, with attendance limited to fifty women. The objectives were for the women to learn to communicate effectively with their husbands, get a clearer image of themselves, and understand their husbands' goals.⁹⁴

Some of these workshops were held in conjunction with training sessions for their husbands. One example is a course in salesmanship sponsored by the Sales Managers Club of the Boston Chamber of Commerce in the Spring of 1952. The course lasted five nights, and five hundred salesman and sales executives attended. On the last night, wives were invited to attend a special program. The focus was on

⁹³ Ibid., 9.

⁹⁴ Toni Howard, "Will Success Spoil Your Marriage," McCalls 90 (July 1963): 112.

helping their husbands develop more intelligent and intensive sales efforts. The speaker, Dr. David Guy Powers, "urged wives to make their husband see himself as the man he wants to be."⁹⁵ Rockwell Manufacturing Company sponsored a series of information meetings at conventions, sales meetings, and other company functions. Wives learned about the company and their husbands' jobs. Company president A. Clark Daugherty was among the instructors.⁹⁶

Others courses were designed just for wives. Radcliffe College held an early, if not the first, program of this kind. This course was based on a one-year graduate women's program in business administration, and was sponsored by the New England chapter of the Young Presidents' Organization.⁹⁷ In January 1962, thirty wives of Boston-area executives attended this twelve week, sixty-hour seminar, taught by Harvard Business School faculty, in January 1962. It was entitled "Understanding of Management" and used the case study approach to explain marketing, management and finance. The objective of the course was "to help the executive wife understand her husband's business so she can be more

⁹⁵ Carnegie, How to Help, 50-51.

⁹⁶ Barry Kimmelman, "Executives' Wives -- The Need for a Positive Company-Sponsored Approach," California Management Review 11 (Spring 1969): 10.

⁹⁷ "Wives Learn Executive Worries," Business Week (January 13, 1962): 47.

knowledgeable and sympathetic when he brings home his office problems."⁹⁸ These courses were not universally popular.

One company president is quoted as saying:

I think it's fine if at a party a wife of one of my men says something clever that shows she understands what her husband is doing. But the last thing I want is some lady who has just taken a course to buttonhole me and say something like 'Look here, I'd like to tell you what's wrong with your distribution pattern.' And don't think it doesn't happen."⁹⁹

Since it was becoming more common for wives to accompany their husbands to business conventions, formal sessions for wives were often added to convention programs. In 1965 the New York City Convention Bureau estimated that 30% of the delegates at the 1,026 conventions held in the city, brought their wives and families.¹⁰⁰ Many conventions prepared special printed guides or brochures outlining the planned activities for wives attending.¹⁰¹ When conventions were held at resort areas such as Miami Beach or scenic inns like the Greenbrier (White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia), the percentage of delegates bringing their wives was as high

⁹⁸ "Executive Wives," Printers Ink, 20.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 23.

¹⁰⁰ Lewis E. Lachter, "Wife's Role in the Manager's Career," Administrative Management 27 (September 1966): 52+.

¹⁰¹ Burger, Executive's Wife, 102.

as 85%.¹⁰² Insurance companies were especially pleased for wives to attend conventions, but for personal not professional reasons. As a vice president of the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company said, "An unhappy marriage ruins an insurance man."¹⁰³ It was his belief that at the convention the wives would talk to each other and each would learn that hers was not the only husband who had to work late.¹⁰⁴ Salesmen's wives were often invited for similar reasons. Special sessions were planned so the wives of traveling salesmen could gather and talk about their problems and listen to possible solutions.¹⁰⁵ The Electrolux Corporation invited wives to evening branch meetings or to annual sales meetings, not only to help the wives understand the business, but also because "the company doesn't believe in a man loose on the town."¹⁰⁶

I.B.M. also sought to integrate wives into their conventions. In at least one year, 1951, the company held regional conventions instead of a national one. One reason

¹⁰² "Convention Wives -- Help or Hindrance," Newsweek 61 (May 13, 1963): 82.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Mould, "I'm a Traveling Man's Wife," 170.

¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth Honor, "Help Your Husband Get Ahead," Cosmopolitan 144 (February 1958): 46.

was to allow more wives to meet people from the company's World Headquarters. As one wife said, "The company just won't let you be lonesome."¹⁰⁷ The company was clearly interested in the wives of its employees. In a 1955 article, an I.B.M. personnel executive was quoted as saying "Yes, we like to meet a man's wife before we make up our minds about him."¹⁰⁸ Thomas J. Watson, the founder, said "Our wives are all part of the business."¹⁰⁹ It is not surprising to learn that Watson, before starting I.B.M., was a long-time employee and protege of John Patterson.

Some individual companies sought to educate the wives of employees by holding "Wives' Day" or similar functions. One company profited handsomely by hosting a wives' day. One of the wives, after observing how some of the machinery worked, told her husband about an idea she had for an improvement. He passed the idea on to his boss, who implemented it. Production increased 20%. The husband received a \$350 bonus.¹¹⁰ Aerojet-General Corporation, in Sacramento, started a Wives' Tour Program involving nearly 8,000 employees and their wives. Small groups, arranged by

¹⁰⁷ Whyte, "Corporation and the Wife," 111.

¹⁰⁸ Scott, "Executive's Wife," 48.

¹⁰⁹ Whyte, "Corporation and the Wife," 111.

¹¹⁰ Carnegie, How to Help, 67.

division or department, were scheduled during working hours. Wives saw a film about the company, toured major plant locations, then their husbands' departments or assembly lines. The women lunched with their husbands, and afterwards they participated in more tours and a question and answer period.¹¹¹

Some companies used a less direct approach and sponsored company magazines or newsletters directed at wives.¹¹² Others put more effort into having the wives spur their husbands on to higher efficiency, especially the wives of salesmen. The prizes in sales contests might be kitchen appliances rather than more masculine items.¹¹³ One woman received a single earring in the mail, with the promise of its mate if she located three prospects for her husband.¹¹⁴

Not all companies showed such an interest in the wives of their employees. Some preferred that wives be neither seen nor heard.¹¹⁵ One corporate representative stated

¹¹¹ Joseph J. Lipper, "Wives Tour Program Cements Corporate Relations," Public Relations Journal 23 (July 1967): 28.

¹¹² Whyte, "Corporation and the Wife," 111.

¹¹³ Ibid., 150.

¹¹⁴ A. Lake, "I Hate My Husband's Success," McCalls 85 (July 1958): 104.

¹¹⁵ Whyte, "Corporation and the Wife," 150.

Let me explain. As long as the wife of any of our executives doesn't get her picture on the front page of the paper for murder or drunken driving, we don't care about her. It just doesn't matter.¹¹⁶

One company owner, speaking of men who had married the "wrong women" said, "... if he can keep his wife under control, he can keep his job."¹¹⁷ There were some husbands who also preferred that their wives play a more home-centered role.¹¹⁸

Transferring the Wife

Executives were transferred frequently during the 1950s and 1960s, but especially in the mid and late 1960s. For example, in 1966 Union Carbide moved 1,200 of its executives; in 1961 they had moved only 600.¹¹⁹ The attitude of a man's wife was considered crucial in the success of a transfer. Preparing a man for a transfer and a new position was costly. It was estimated that recruiting and training an engineer for a specific job cost from \$500 to \$20,000. One company spent six months and \$6,000 readying a man for a new job in a new town. Just before the

¹¹⁶ Burger, Executive's Wife, 135.

¹¹⁷ Milner, "Before I Hire Your Husband," 100.

¹¹⁸ "Three Views on the Role of the Executive Wife," Harvard Business School Bulletin (Spring 1956): 23.

¹¹⁹ "Corporate Nomads," Time 90 (September 29, 1967): 56.

move was scheduled, he decided he could not accept the position because his wife would not go with him.¹²⁰ Situations like this were used as examples of potential problems and as a rationale for interviewing or investigating wives. This was especially true in transfer situations. Companies were urged to make sure that the wife knew a move was required or long hours expected if her husband took a new position. Arthur R. Pell, vice president of Harper Associates, Inc., was quoted as estimating that wives presented a problem in 15% to 20% of relocations.¹²¹

Regional differences could still have a big effect on transfers. Wives were used as a reason for refusing to accept a potential transfer:

One firm, located in a small southern town, rejected a man because 'his wife was too intelligent; she wouldn't fit in here.' A northern company turned down a candidate whose wife came from the south -- 'We didn't think she'd be able to stand all the snow we get.'¹²²

One wonders if these were the real reasons for rejecting a potential candidate or if the wife was merely used as an excuse.

Edith Heal devotes a chapter in her book to the differences between being an executive's wife in the big

¹²⁰ Maurice F. Ronayne, "Why Not Interview the Wives," Office 48 (September 1958): 12.

¹²¹ Prahalis, "Executive Sweet," 60.

¹²² "Executive Wives," Printers Ink, 20.

city, in the suburbs, and in small towns. If one were to live in the suburbs, for example, she suggested having the liquor store deliver rather than be seen struggling to get the bottles out of the car. She also warned her readers to beware of beauty shop gossip.¹²³ Her advice on small town life is even more restrictive. For example, "In the cosmopolitan suburb you might announce the birth of your child with a witty card. Here you will use the Tiffany pattern."¹²⁴ She also suggested giving the child a conservative name, such as John, Jr., or John III.¹²⁵

While in the pre-war era companies seemed to be taking some interest in the wives of employees, here they seemed to be trying to educate and evaluate them. In addition to having an active mind and maintaining a happy home, a wife was also expected to learn something about the nature of her husband's work and to accept the time and energy it required of him. If her husband worked in people-oriented areas, was likely to be promoted, or was in a field which often led to upper level management, she could expect to be interviewed or formally examined for flaws which could be a detriment to her husband's career. If she was unaware of the ways she

¹²³ Heal, Young Executive's Wife, 111.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 117.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

could help her husband, there were classes she could take and books she could read which would spell them out for her.

Social Activities and the Wife

Perhaps the wife's most important contribution was in the social sphere. As one researcher stated, "Essentially, it is the wife who translated the economic success of the member of the business elite into social success."¹²⁶ Mrs. Carnegie voiced a similar opinion:

Every wife has the same responsibility of training herself to live up to the social requirements of her husband's career. Whatever a man's occupation his chances of getting ahead are increased by his wife's ability to get along well with others, and her adaptability to social demands.¹²⁷

One group of executive wives estimated that they entertained once a week or once every other week.¹²⁸

As husbands moved up in the ranks, wives had to learn what Whyte called "social professionalism."¹²⁹ As several sources noted, since a man could not easily socialize with his subordinates, his wife should not socialize with their wives. When a man was promoted, his wife had to abandon her friendships with the wives of his former colleagues, now his

¹²⁶ Warner and Abegglen, Big Business, 187.

¹²⁷ Carnegie, How to Help, 116.

¹²⁸ Helfrich, Social Role, 43.

¹²⁹ Whyte, "Wives of Management," 204.

subordinates, and form new social bonds with his new peers.

As one plant manager's wife said,

It's tough. You have got to leave behind your old friends. You have to weigh the people you invite to parties. You have to be careful of who you send Christmas cards to and who you don't. It sounds like snobbery, but it's something you have to do. You have to be a boss's wife.¹³⁰

In the early 1950s one company set up a "finishing school" to assist wives in learning these skills. "As soon as the husband hits the \$8000-to-\$10,000 bracket the wife becomes eligible for the grooming."¹³¹

A wife was expected to be her husband's "social memory," to remember who was who, and who their wives and children were. Some wives kept "card catalogues":

She carries the catalogue, which contains the names of some six hundred customers and their wives to conventions. When she meets a couple she makes out a card for them, and jots down new entries whenever she sees them again. 'Dined with them at the Hawaiian spot in Miami Beach,' one entry reads. 'He just caught large swordfish. Remember to mention it next time. She worried over son's broken arm. Must send gift.'¹³²

When this woman's husband was scheduling a meeting with a client he would call her and get information on the man's family. She would prompt him on what to ask about, or provide details of his, or their, last meeting with the

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Whyte, "Corporation and the Wife," 150.

¹³² Lake, "I Hate," 105.

client.¹³³ Another wife kept track of customers' birthdays and made a point of sending them cards.¹³⁴ More than one corporate wife mentioned the influence of her husband's employer in the sending out of Christmas cards. Heal suggests the kinds of cards one should send:

If it [the company] is the family type, don't send sophisticated angels; choose Michelangelo's. If you are in a Madison Avenue atmosphere, forget Grandma Moses and holly.¹³⁵

She, and others, mentioned that the husband's secretary would provide a list of other company people who should receive a card.¹³⁶ One wife complained of having to sign cards going to five hundred strangers.¹³⁷

Another social duty of the wife was to act as his "salesman." Cushman Bussell, head of the Chicago Bar Association, urged young businessmen attending a meeting of the Chicago Junior Association of Commerce to "Get your wife

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Terry Treiber, "NHAW Ladies Workshop Decides There's No 'Ideal' Wife -- If There Was, There Would Be No Ideal Setting For Her," Air Conditioning, Heating and Refrigeration News 91 (December 12, 1960): 24.

¹³⁵ Heal, Young Executive's Wife, 39.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 40, and Ethel McLemore, "Manifesto From a Corporation Wife," Fortune 45 (March 1952): 83.

¹³⁷ Lake, "I Hate," 25.

under control." He went on to say "She can sing your praises as you never could with good taste."¹³⁸

Some businessmen took advantage of their wives' social skills as "ice breakers" in creating relationships with potential clients. Stuart G. Keiller, general sales manager of Firestone Synthetic Fibers Company, noted that his wife's attendance at an Atlantic City convention was a positive influence with the formerly evasive head of a large textile firm. "In cold terms the rapport we developed in fifteen or twenty minutes would have taken months for salesmen to establish."¹³⁹ Francis J. Curtis, vice president of Monsanto Chemical Company, said, "It could be that here is the opportunity for the so-called beautiful but dumb type. Everybody can't be brainy, but social charm has many opportunities."¹⁴⁰

The involvement of wives in civic and social organizations was viewed in a positive light. One brush manufacturer called wives "our public relations experts in this city."¹⁴¹ Heal suggested discretion and tact in the choice of organizations and causes. "In a small town,

¹³⁸ Carnegie, How to Help, 219.

¹³⁹ "Convention Wives: Help or Hindrance?" 83.

¹⁴⁰ "Three Views," 20.

¹⁴¹ Scott, "Executive's Wife," 49.

working for birth control or civil liberties may be misunderstood," she warned.¹⁴²

Here, again, the business world was trying to get two for the price of one. A wife's friendships, volunteer work, and leisure activities should all be designed to assist her husband's career, through assisting his employer.

The Working Wife

Mrs. Carnegie summed up the standard business world's view of the working wife: "Helping a man attain success is a full-time career in itself. You just can't hope to do it unless it is important enough to claim all your attention".¹⁴³ Many corporate executives agreed. One corporate spokesman said in 1962:

A wife with an independent income stifles a man's ambition; because she is helping out with expenses, she eliminates his competitive spirit to go after bigger things.¹⁴⁴

However, women were joining the work force in record numbers, and although most were in clerical jobs, some were making inroads on the executive suite. In 1966 women made up 36% of U.S. workers. They were 50% of the executives in U.S. department stores, 25% of the executives in insurance,

¹⁴² Heal, Young Executive's Wife, 151.

¹⁴³ Carnegie, How to Help, 111.

¹⁴⁴ "Executive Wives," Printers Ink, 23.

and 11% of the bank officers.¹⁴⁵ The wives in middle income households were more likely to work than those in the highest or lowest income brackets.¹⁴⁶ The more education she had, the more likely a woman was to work.¹⁴⁷

It might then be logical to expect that the college educated wives of businessmen, especially those in the middle income brackets, would be working in great numbers. This was not the case. Women who were married to men in business or the professions were less likely to work than those who were married to academics or men who worked in the humanities or social sciences.¹⁴⁸ This was during a time when college teachers, professional workers, and managerial workers earned, on average, a very similar salary.¹⁴⁹ In March of 1959, 32.3% of married women were in the workforce. However, only 26.7% of the wives of salaried managers, officials, and proprietors (except farm) were working. Only

¹⁴⁵ "Women at the Top," Newsweek 67 (June 27, 1960): 76.

¹⁴⁶ Mary Dublin Keyserling, "The Working Wife: Who is She?" Management Review 56 (April 1967): 8.

¹⁴⁷ Vera C. Penella, "Marital and Family Characteristics of Workers," Monthly Labor Review 87 (February 1964): 153.

¹⁴⁸ Alice S. Rossi, "The Working Wife: How Does She Live? What Does She Want?" Management Review 56 (April 1967): 12.

¹⁴⁹ Historical Statistics, 175 and 304.

one other group, self-employed professional, technical, and kindred workers, had a lower percentage of wives in the work force.¹⁵⁰ For the wives of corporate businessmen, there were differences between those married to men in lower and higher ranking positions. In a study of fifty executives' wives, published in 1965, 71% of the wives of top level executives had not worked since marriage, versus 41% of the wives of lower level executives.¹⁵¹

Once again, certain occupations were more acceptable than others. In the 1965 study, most of the working wives were teachers or secretaries.¹⁵² One woman wanted to resume her career as a model but could not because it would "clash" with her husband's image.¹⁵³

Some married women did work in business and the professions. One executive, whose wife had dropped out of law school to follow him to a new job, encouraged her to finish her law degree after their children were in school.¹⁵⁴ In one article the problem of a pushy wife was

¹⁵⁰ Jacob Schiffman, "Family Characteristics of Workers, 1959," Monthly Labor Review 83 (August 1960): 832.

¹⁵¹ Helfrich, Social Role, 19.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Toni Howard, "Will Success Spoil Your Marriage," McCalls 90 (July 1963): 89.

¹⁵⁴ Burger, Executive's Wife, 74-75.

reported as solved when she went back to work, even though she earned more than her husband.¹⁵⁵

Several married women executives mentioned that an unselfish and understanding husband was a necessity.¹⁵⁶ Heal offered special advice for women whose husbands' worked for women. This included finding out if the boss used her maiden name at work and, if so, to be sure to address any social correspondence to her in her married name.¹⁵⁷ Heal also warned working wives to soft pedal their own successes when talking with their husbands' colleagues.¹⁵⁸

In some of these two career marriages is the beginning of an acknowledgement of the "corporate husband." In 1949 Reader's Digest included an article condensed from the Canadian Home Journal in which a man described the awkward situations that arose from his wife's employment.¹⁵⁹ When Heal reminded women to find out if working women were using their husband's name, she noted that no man liked to be

¹⁵⁵ Chappell, "Sizing," 95.

¹⁵⁶ Katharine Hamill, "Women as Bosses," Fortune 53 (June 1956): 219; and Doris Merritt, "Discrimination and the Woman Executive," Business Horizons 12 (December 1969): 21.

¹⁵⁷ Heal, Young Executive's Wife, 66.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 178.

¹⁵⁹ "Plaint of a Career Woman's Husband," Readers' Digest 55 (August 1949): 6-9.

called by his wife's maiden name.¹⁶⁰ Although wives often accompanied husbands to conventions, the reverse was unusual. Mrs. Edgar T. Sloan of Hartford, Connecticut, wife of the vice president of the Connecticut Bank and Trust Company, was a trustee of the National Society of Crippled Children and Adults. She took her husband along to the society's convention. "He hated it," she said. "He was superfluous."¹⁶¹

From college to conventions to Christmas cards, the role and expectations of the corporate wife were at their peak in the 1950s and 1960s. Wives were often investigated and interviewed before their husbands were promoted or hired, even though they had no official standing with their husbands' employers. This intrusion into the private lives of employees was accepted, if not always appreciated. Companies seemed to regard wives as adjunct employees, to the point that companies wanted to train and evaluate them, just as if they were on the payroll. However, social forces were developing that would have an effect on how corporate wives were viewed and how they viewed themselves.

¹⁶⁰ Heal, Young Executive's Wife, 66.

¹⁶¹ "Convention Wives," 83.

CHAPTER 3

THE LATE SIXTIES TO 1990

The biggest change personnel change for the business world after the mid-1960s was the tremendous increase in the number of women working outside the home. A corollary to this was the increase in dual-career families, where the wives not only worked but also viewed their jobs with the same drive and attachment that was previously seen primarily in men. Women were not the only ones to see and accept these changes. A survey of male college students in the late 1970s showed that 90% expected their wives to earn as much as they did.¹ Such shifts in attitudes and behaviors could not help but dramatically affect the relationship between the corporate world and the corporate wife.

Changes in the Workplace

White collar occupations continued to take up a larger percentage of the civilian workforce. In 1970 about 47.43% of the civilian workforce was classified as white collar. Only 8.09% of the total workforce were considered managers, officials, or proprietors. If one considers only the male

¹ Cathleen E. Maynard and Robert A. Zawacki, "Mobility and the Dual-Career Couple," Personnel Journal 58 (July 1979): 468.

workforce, the number of workers in that category climbs to 10.89%.² In a March 1988, census report, 10.93% of all families contained a householder employed in an executive, administrative or managerial position. The categories used in the 1988 report are more detailed and do not compare directly with the 1970 statistics, but they do show a small increase in the executive workforce.³

Business and management became an increasingly popular field of study in this time period. In 1970/71 about one in eight undergraduate college degrees was awarded in business and management. This figure increased steadily and in 1988/89 almost one in four undergraduate college degrees was awarded in those fields.⁴ Women's enrollment in business classes grew at an even faster rate than men's. In 1970/71 ten times more men than women graduated with degrees in business. In 1988/89 the number of men and women who received undergraduate business degrees was almost equal. There was a similar increase in the number of women receiving graduate business degrees. In 1970/71 the ratio

² Historical Statistics, 139.

³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 437. Household and Family Characteristics: March 1988 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 54.

⁴ National Center for Educational Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics 1991 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1991), 255.

of men to women receiving masters degrees in business was over twenty to one. In 1988/89 it was less than two to one.⁵ These numbers represent a rapid and steady increase in the number of women entering the business world.

Another interesting change in the workplace during this time period is the acknowledgement that employees were meeting and marrying each other. Furthermore, while this had happened in the past, women were no longer quitting their jobs after marriage. This phenomenon led some companies to either develop or dissolve nepotism rules. This will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Changes in the Home

One of the changes in the home life of business executives was that it no longer always included a wife. The per capita divorce rate was climbing, and the business community was not exempt. Divorce was a topic of conversation in business magazines in the late 1970s and many of the articles gave advice on topics such as property settlements and no-fault divorce. As a Price Waterhouse spokesman said, "Unfortunately even the hardheaded

⁵ Ibid., 275.

businessman is a romantic when it comes to marriage."⁶ In a survey, three-quarters (77%) of Fortune 500 CEOs said that being single or divorced would not affect a man's promotability. However, the researcher pointed out that this question may not have been answered truthfully because of anti-discrimination laws.⁷ In a similar survey, 61% of the heads of management level personnel agencies across the United States indicated that divorce was not a liability. This indicates, to some degree, that the expectations for a wife's involvement in her husband's career had diminished. However, those in sales were thought to be at a particular disadvantage if divorced because they would lack the "proper domestic base for entertaining clients and projecting a sense of long-term stability."⁸

Those corporate businessmen who were married were adjusting, as was much of American society, to the number of married women working. In 1980, in 40% of all married-couple families both husband and wife were employed.⁹ By

⁶ Kathleen K. Wiegner, "High Cost of Leaving," Forbes 123 (February 19, 1979): 49.

⁷ Maryanne Vandervelde, The Changing Life of the Corporate Wife (New York: Mecox Publishing Co., 1979), 94.

⁸ "Marital Status: What Difference Does it Make?" Management Review 69 (November 1980): 7.

⁹ A. C. Kilpatrick, "Job Change in Dual-Career Families, Danger or Opportunity," Family Relations 31 (July 1982): 363.

March 1988, this figure had risen to 52.14%.¹⁰ Perhaps in recognition of this, the general public, as well as the business world, began to change their expectations of wives' contributions to their husbands' careers. In 1977, a public opinion poll asked the question "Is it more important for a wife to help her husband's career than to have one herself?" 57% agreed or strongly agreed, 43% disagreed or strongly disagreed. In 1989, in answer to the same question, only 27% agreed or strongly agreed, 72% disagreed or strongly disagreed.¹¹

Businessmen and Their Wives

Once again the wives of corporate businessmen were more likely to be college educated than the female population at large. In a 1972 survey of 166 executives' wives, 29% had an undergraduate degree, and an additional 14% had an undergraduate plus other training or an advanced degree. Only 13% had no education beyond high school. Another 43% had some training beyond high school but not a college

¹⁰ Household and Family Characteristics: March 1988, 96.

¹¹ An American Profile -- Opinions and Behavior, 1972-1989 (Detroit: Gale, 1990), 547.

degree.¹² This was at a time when the average level of education for white women (and the greatest majority of corporate wives were white) was 12.2 years. In fact, nation-wide, only 18.7% of the white female population had one or more years of college.¹³ Although younger women tended to have more education, the median years of school completed in 1970 for white women ages 25-29 was only 12.5.¹⁴

Other studies verified that the wives of executives were more highly educated than was the general female population. Lois Wyse found that 80% of the "Mrs. Successes" she surveyed had attended college and 55% had earned bachelor's degrees.¹⁵ Even in the lower executive levels, wives had some post-high school training. In a survey of 248 managers, above first-level supervision, the husbands had 14.3 mean years of education, their wives had 13.4 mean years.¹⁶ In fact, only 22% had no post-high

¹² Margaret L. Helfrich and Barbara J. Tootle, "The Executive's Wife: A Factor in Promotion," Business Horizons 15 (August 1972): 91.

¹³ Historical Statistics, 380.

¹⁴ Ibid., 381.

¹⁵ Lois Wyse, Mrs. Success; a Report (New York: World Publishing Co., 1970), 28.

¹⁶ A. W. Stoess, "Conformity Behavior of Managers and Their Wives," Academy of Management Journal 16 (Sept. 1972): 435.

school training. A complete breakdown of the subjects studied by Wyse was not given but 17% had been trained as teachers and 14% as secretaries.¹⁷

In the Helfrich and Tootle study, only 21% of the 166 wives had not worked before marriage; thus almost four out of five had been part of the labor force before marriage. Of the 166 women, the two most popular pre-marital occupations had been secretary (29%) and teacher (15%).¹⁸ These occupations were also seen in executive wives in the previous chapter. Thus, once again, the corporate wife was more highly educated than the female population at large, and she had had some experience with the working world.

How did these women feel about their husbands' work? Helfrich and Tootle found that the most frequent complaint, mentioned by 30% of the wives, was the husband's absence on trips or working late.¹⁹ One way that wives combatted this type of absence, at least for trips away, was to accompany their husbands. The manager of the O'Hare Inn, the Chicago airport hotel, estimated that 50% of executives traveled with their wives.²⁰ Some of this travel was not just for

¹⁷ Wyse, Mrs. Success, 61.

¹⁸ Helfrich and Tootle, Business Horizons, 91.

¹⁹ Ibid., 92.

²⁰ George Berkwitz, "Corporate Wives, The Third Party," Dun's Review 100 (August 1972): 62.

personal reasons. Some men found their wives to be excellent temporary secretaries (who could be trusted to keep business matters confidential). Other wives had specific skills. Those with a facility in other languages could be especially valuable on international trips.²¹ The business world was still getting two for the price of one.

Business and the Wife

Even so, the corporate world still tended to regard wives as almost a necessary evil. Dr. Leon Danco, professor of business administration at John Carroll University, who conducted seminars for businessmen and their wives, summed it up this way:

The wife naturally has claims upon her husband's time. And the husband is torn between the two [work and his wife]. Where the wife doesn't understand the claims on the husband's time, and the responsibilities which cause his preoccupation with it, bad situations can develop.²²

Two other researchers studied the influence of wives on their husbands' career choices, using men who had left sales positions as the sample. The study found that at least 17.1% of the men had left their jobs because of their wives' dissatisfaction with it. The primary reason wives gave for

²¹ "Power Behind the Throne?" Industry Week (January 18, 1971): 30.

²² "Eternal Triangle -- Man, Wife, and Work," Industry Week (January 25, 1971): 33.

this was that their husbands were not home enough.²³ The researchers commented that "the modern businessman's wife frequently chooses to ignore the demands placed upon her by the corporation."²⁴

The desired qualities in a corporate wife continued to follow a traditional pattern. In a survey of the Fortune 500 company chiefs, sense of humor was listed as the most important quality of a good corporate wife; concern about her own identity was the least desirable.²⁵ Graciousness, intelligence, adaptability, and friendliness were the other top ranking qualities. Gregariousness (talking too much or being verbally aggressive), independence, creative thinking, punctuality, and the ability to be a skilled conversationalist were the other low ranking qualities.²⁶

Businesses continued to "screen" or interview wives of prospective employees, and wives could still be a critical factor in hiring. The screening could take the form of an actual interview or an informal conversation over a meal.

²³ Marvin A. Jolson and Marton J. Gannon, "Wives -- A Critical Element in Career Decisions," Business Horizons (February 1972): 86.

²⁴ Ibid., 84.

²⁵ Vandervelde, Changing Life, 8.

²⁶ Ibid., 68.

Norma Upson, a corporate wife, described the wife's influence in this way:

Had you not been the kind of woman whom they felt would be an asset to your husband, the chances are great he would have been bypassed for his position. Most corporations highly value the support, loyalty, understanding, and flexibility of the wives of their men. They know from bitter experience that unless a man's domestic life is tranquil he cannot bring his total effort to his work.²⁷

In the mid-1980s one recruiter judged the wife of a potential employee on four items: her support of her husband's career, her willingness to relocate, her ability to handle stress, and her abilities as a mother.²⁸ Another recruiter said "You're hiring a family, not just an executive."²⁹

Another potential problem that businesses had to face was the fact that their employees were dating and marrying each other. Since some corporations had policies against nepotism, one spouse would then have to leave. In response to the problem, nepotism rules started to loosen up. Citibank dealt with this particular difficulty fairly early. In 1972 the company began actively recruiting women managers. At the time it had a rule against employing

²⁷ Norma Upson, How to Survive as a Corporate Wife (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1975), 188.

²⁸ Murray, "Checking Out," 51.

²⁹ Upson, How to Survive, 188.

relatives of senior officials, vice presidents and above. In response to the inevitable managerial marriages, the rule was changed in 1974.³⁰ In fact, in the late 1970s Citibank began transferring spouses together when both partners reached officer status.³¹

The opposite was also true. Sometimes a wife's job could put her at odds with her husband's employer. Katherine McKenzie, wife of the executive vice president of Georgia Power Company, became a full time environmental lobbyist in 1978. When she became involved in a land development controversy her husband was warned that the utility company could suffer for it. In this case, any potential conflict was diffused by the president of Georgia Power, who told McKenzie to continue with her work and the utility would handle any political pressures that might result.³²

Formal Training of Corporate Wives

In the early 1970s, the corporate view of formalized education for corporate wives was similar to that in the

³⁰ "Company Couples Flourish," Business Week (August 2, 1976): 54.

³¹ Maynard and Zawacki, "Mobility," 470.

³² "The New Corporate Wife Goes to Work," Business Week (April 9, 1979): 88.

1960s. At conventions and conferences, sessions were set up for wives to learn about their husbands' work. In the early 1970s, the American Bankers Association started having serious programs for wives at their conferences instead of the traditional fashion show or shopping expedition. They were so popular that sessions for wives were regularly scheduled. State associations followed their example. The Colorado Bankers Association even held a session for wives on kidnapping and extortion.³³

Businesses and professional organizations were not the only ones to take an interest in the corporate wife. Universities also offered classes and workshops for the wives of executives; these were usually in conjunction with programs offered for the executive himself. The University of Chicago's Management Development Seminar offered sessions for interested spouses on three mornings during the last week of the seminar. The subject matter was similar to that in the executives' program. Similarly, Dartmouth College's Dartmouth Institute invited spouses to participate in all class and discussion sessions.³⁴ At the University of North

³³ Joe Asher, "Changing Role of the Banker's Wife," Banking 66 (July 1974):73.

³⁴ Yvonne Carlton Haeberle, "University-Based and Corporation-Based Educational Programs for Partners of Corporate Executives," (Ed.D. diss., Indiana University, 1981), 20.

Carolina's Executive Program, spouses were invited for one weekend session. At the University of Pittsburgh's Management Program for Executives, spouses were invited for the final three days.³⁵

In the 1982 edition of Bricker's International Directory of University Executive Development Programs, twenty-three universities and colleges were listed as having some type of structured education for spouses.³⁶ Some offered more than one program, with a total of twenty-eight social and substantive executive partners' programs.³⁷ Most of these sessions for spouses were comprised of substantive as well as social functions.³⁸ The most common topics were general management, self or personal management, economics, and women's concerns and affairs.³⁹ The programs were usually well-attended. In a survey of universities offering executive partners' programs, only 4% of the programs reported that fewer than half of the eligible spouses attended.⁴⁰

³⁵ Ibid., 22.

³⁶ Ibid., 3.

³⁷ Ibid., 87.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 190.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 95.

New technologies were also enlisted in the education of corporate wives. BNA Communications produced films that showed wives how to dress, entertain, and keep a happy home.⁴¹

The types of books corporate wives wrote were very different in the 1970s than in earlier years. In Norma Upson's How to Survive as a Corporate Wife, she focuses less on the wifely social scene and more on such survival skills as financial management. In fact, she cautions against becoming involved in corporate politics.⁴² She includes only three pages on the "do's and don'ts" of going to meetings and conventions with husbands.⁴³ Another book on corporate wives included a study of Fortune 500 CEOs and their wives. In addition to having a Ph.D., the researcher was herself a corporate wife; her research findings are augmented by her own personal experiences.⁴⁴

Transferring Employees

Employee transfers become more difficult when there are two careers in the family. A 1975 Dun and Bradstreet survey

⁴¹ Vandervelde, Changing Life, 187.

⁴² Upson, How to Survive, 62.

⁴³ Ibid., 63-66.

⁴⁴ See Vandervelde, Changing Life.

of 617 firms found that employees at 42% of the businesses refused to relocate. Merrill Lynch estimated in 1978 that 30% to 50% of the 200,000 to 300,000 employees asked to transfer would object. In 1968 that number was 10%.⁴⁵ The Borden Company transferred its headquarters from New York to Columbus, Ohio, in 1971. Over 1,000 executives and professionals were encouraged to move with the company and were guaranteed their jobs if they would do so. Just over half agreed to the move. Company officials cited the objections of wives as a main reason why so many stayed behind.⁴⁶ In fact, only two people had any real influence on a male executive's decision to transfer. Wives were listed as the most important or above average in importance by 55% of executives. His immediate supervisor came in second with 35%.⁴⁷

There were differing views of how a woman's employment affected her family's mobility. Some found that a wife's employment was not a negative factor in the likelihood of a family move, but that the nature of the husband's occupation

⁴⁵ Maynard and Zawacki, "Mobility," 469.

⁴⁶ Berkwitt, "Corporate Wives," 61.

⁴⁷ Edward A. Schwarzkopf, "Exploring the Male Mobility Myth," Business Horizons 23 (June 1980): 43.

affected it greatly.⁴⁸ Others found that a wife's participation in the labor force had a significant factor in a household's mobility.⁴⁹ Recruiters were told that they would increasingly need to consider the job needs of spouses when trying to hire new employees.⁵⁰ Although working wives were becoming more acceptable, a more traditional approach was still quite evident. A husband/wife team of psychologists who spoke frequently on executive marriage stated the problem this way:

Also, when the wife begins her own career or education pursuits, this complicates the husband's life. He may not feel as free to accept a relocation if this uprooting will interrupt his wife's goals. For this reason, some husbands prefer, and corporations may even encourage, the stay-at-home role for the wife.⁵¹

Relocation companies, which handled moving and real estate details for businesses transferring employees, began to take more interest in the opinions of wives, whether they worked outside the home or not. Richard M. McMahon, Vice

⁴⁸ R. Paul Duncan and Carolyn Cummings Perrucci, "Dual Occupation Families and Migration," American Sociological Review 41 (April 1976): 260.

⁴⁹ Maynard and Zawacki, "Mobility," 469.

⁵⁰ Maynard and Zawacki, 471; and John Paisos and Miriam Ringo, "A New Dimension in Executive Recruiting," California Management Review 14 (Spring 1972): 20.

⁵¹ Thelma D. White and Peter E. Gahlhoff, "The Executive Marriage -- in Sickness and in Wealth?" Management World 8 (February 1979): 8.

President of Area Consultants, Inc., said of one particular couple's decision to relocate,

It was her decision all the way. Yet a few years ago such a decision would probably have been made by the executive with no interference from his wife, because it was his career at stake. She might not have even been there when he went house hunting.⁵²

He used the couple as an example of how things had changed to show the increasing influence of the wife's opinion. He also noted that a number of companies had changed their relocation policies to include wives more often. Examples of this were the use of brochures, audio-visual displays, and all-expense-paid trips to the new area.⁵³ After surveying 395 employees who had been transferred for job reasons in 1983, Equitable Relocation Management concluded that if an employee's spouse was not enthusiastic about a move the company should consider transferring another employee.⁵⁴

If a move was made, however, it was still considered the wife's job to adjust. One article suggested that one way of becoming acquainted with new neighbors after a move

⁵² Berkwitt, "Corporate Wives," 61.

⁵³ Ibid., 62.

⁵⁴ E. Snow, "Spouse's Attitude Influences Move," Personnel Journal 63 (November 1984): 30.

was for the wife to simply go door to door and introduce herself and her children.⁵⁵

Social Activities and the Wife

While working for pay might be frowned upon, volunteer work was still acceptable, if not outright encouraged. A city manager's wife, who was also a teacher, summed up the feelings of many executive wives in the following statement:

Sometimes, I suspect, the only acceptable excuse for turning down the chairmanship of the church bazaar or the office of president of the PTA Council is to be pregnant, have cancer, or have a job.⁵⁶

Wives who volunteered did not limit their activities to local church and social organizations. Margaret McNamara, wife of Robert McNamara, started the "Reading is Fundamental" program. Frances Loeb, wife of investment banker John Loeb, served as New York City's Commissioner to the United Nations. Although this was a volunteer position, she had a staff of seventeen paid workers and eighty volunteers. Polly Brown, whose husband Edward was the

⁵⁵ Theodore D. Bell, "Corporate Wives Can Win Friends in a New Community," Personnel Journal 56 (January 1977): 8.

⁵⁶ Phyllis Banta, "Dealing with Dual Careers," Public Management 58 (March 1976): 12.

president of the National City Bank of Minneapolis, served as the first woman chairman of the Guthrie Theater.⁵⁷

In the Helfrich and Tootle survey of 166 executive wives, 56% considered social and civic participation one of their basic duties. The higher the husband's position, the larger the number of civic organizations with which the wife associated.⁵⁸ Lois Wyse provides some breakdown of the way the women she surveyed participated in civic or social organizations:

20%	health fund drives
18%	PTA
14%	some kind of political action committee
11%	hospital volunteers
7%	League of Women Voters
6%	Little Theater
4%	paid professional jobs ⁵⁹

Business entertaining was also still a part of the corporate wife's job description. In the Helfrich and Tootle survey, 60% of the wives indicated that they entertained their husbands' business associates.⁶⁰ In the Wyse survey, only 9% of the wives never invited their husbands' business associates to parties in their home (7%

⁵⁷ Eleanore Carruth, "Some Executives Wives are Executives Too," Fortune 88 (December 1973): 116-119.

⁵⁸ Helfrich and Tootle, Business Horizons, 93.

⁵⁹ Wyse, Mrs. Success, 64.

⁶⁰ Helfrich and Tootle, Business Horizons, 93.

never invited relatives). Almost all of the wives (95%) entertained mainly at home.⁶¹

Maryanne Vandervelde's study of the attitudes of Fortune 500 CEO's in 1975 found that the ability to entertain well ranked fourth or fifth in the characteristics of a good corporate wife.⁶² When asked how many social events the average wife would be expected to host in a given year, 69% said five or less, another 21% said six to ten. When asked how many business/social events the average corporate wife was expected to attend in a given year, 41% said five or less, another 37% said six to ten, 14% said eleven to fifteen.⁶³

The Working Wife

As in earlier time periods, the wives of businessmen were less likely to work outside the home than women married to men in other occupations.⁶⁴ This is surprising since, overall, the highest percentage of married women entering the workforce were married to men with "above average"

⁶¹ Wyse, Mrs. Success, 166.

⁶² Vandervelde, Changing Life, 77.

⁶³ Ibid., 90.

⁶⁴ Winter, David G., Abigail J. Stewart, and David C. McClelland, "Husband's Motives and Wife's Career Level," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 35 (1977): 164-165.

incomes.⁶⁵ Thus, corporate wives were an exception. Perhaps they worked outside the home less often than other women in their educational and economic class because of the demands of their husbands' work. Even so, they were still entering the workforce in significant numbers. In the Helfrich and Tootle study of 166 executives wives, over half, 56%, had worked at some point after marriage. Once again the most popular occupations were secretary and teacher.⁶⁶ Some corporate wives were executives themselves. In a 1975 comparison of husband's and wife's occupation (where the wife was employed outside the home), 11% of the wives of managers and administrators were themselves in managerial or administrative positions, although this includes family businesses.⁶⁷ In a 1986 survey, 25 to 33% of the wives of top executives had careers of their own.⁶⁸

The Corporate Husband

The increase in the number of women holding corporate

⁶⁵ Paul Ryscavage, "More Wives in the Labor Force Have Husbands with 'Above-Average' Incomes," Monthly Labor Review (June 1979):40.

⁶⁶ Helfrich and Tootle, Business Horizons, 91.

⁶⁷ Howard Hayghe, "Families and the Rise of Working Wives -- an Overview," Monthly Labor Review (May 1976): 17.

⁶⁸ Murray, "Checking Out," 50.

managerial positions led to an increase in the number of "corporate husbands." It is clear that much less was expected of them than of corporate wives. In a survey of managers and executives from across the country, five situations were presented, each with a male and female protagonist. In one of the situations, a spouse balks at attending cocktail parties given by company executives. A wife was expected to attend such events without complaining by 69% of those surveyed while the same was expected of husbands by only 46% of the respondents. Even though there was a distinct difference, it is still interesting to note that almost half of the survey participants expected a husband to be socially supportive of his wife's career.⁶⁹

Corporate husbands were invited to executive partners' programs. In 1980, 60% of the university-sponsored executive partners' programs enrolled at least one male spouse.⁷⁰ Don Manns, whose wife was director of advertising sales at the Washington Post, attended newspaper industry conventions for over 15 years. "I've been very much accepted. I never felt uncomfortable with the wives," he said. He also thinks his attendance allowed him to develop

⁶⁹ Benson Rosen, Thomas H. Jerdee and Thomas L. Prestwich, "Dual-Career Marital Adjustment: Potential Effects of Discriminatory Attitudes," Journal of Marriage and the Family 37 (August 1975): 569-570.

⁷⁰ Heaberle, "University-based," 97.

relationships that were helpful to his wife and her employers.⁷¹

Expectations for corporate wives diminished during the 1970s and 1980s, and wives were consulted much more frequently on transfer decisions. The changing social roles of women, and their increasing attachment to their own jobs, no doubt contributed to these changes. Women with careers of their own would not be as willing to act as volunteers for their husbands' employers. An increasing acceptability of divorce meant that not all corporate businessmen could be expected to supply an additional (but unpaid) employee in the guise of a wife. Nor were most husbands of women executives willing to take on the duties formerly associated with a corporate spouse.

⁷¹ Debra Gersh, "Conventions and the Male Spouse," Editor & Publisher 122 (January 21, 1989): 16.

CONCLUSION

Corporate wives have had considerable influence on the corporate world. At times this has been direct and verifiable, such as John Patterson's use of wives to increase the productivity of his salesforce. At times it has been indirect, such as the emotional support and encouragement a wife might offer her husband. The corporate world discovered that these women, often educated, with some understanding of the business world, could be used to enhance corporate productivity, and therefore profits. Employers began to take an interest in the wives of their employees. The corporate world has maintained an interest in the wives of its employees, although the attitude towards wives has changed through the years. To be sure, employers were also interested in the husbands of their women executives, but there have been considerably fewer of them.

In the first part of the century this interest was, for the most part, informal. The expectations for the wives of corporate businessmen were vague. Like most wives, they were expected to provide a good home life, and to be a sounding board and cheerleader for their husbands. However, they were also expected to have an educational background similar to their husbands'. It was thought helpful if a corporate wife had worked a few years between school and marriage. This would give her an understanding of the demands made on her husband by his job. It would also teach

her some of the ways she could assist her husband, even if it were only to keeping domestic distractions to a minimum, or to be understanding of his long hours at the office. If her husband's work involved meeting with the public, then she should be a gracious hostess. With rare exception, however, her participation in her husband's career was a private matter. A man might be lucky enough to have a wife who had the knowledge and will to assist him in his work, but the corporate world, still developing the concept of organizational climates and cultures, did not demand such work of her as yet.

However, as the business world grew and standardized during the post-war period, the rules became more rigid. A college education became the norm for young businessmen, and some post-high school education was recommended for his wife as well. Companies began to treat the wives of their executives as if they were employees. Wives were considered a factor when companies considered men for promotion or employment. Companies offered formal training sessions, for wives of employees as well as the employees themselves. Executives, like many other white collar workers, saw their leisure time activities as an extension of the workplace. This was also true for their wives. A corporate wife was still expected to entertain her husband's clients, prospective clients, and colleagues. She was also expected

to break those social relationships should he be promoted or change jobs. She was encouraged to be active in social and civic activities, provided they were not controversial, as this could be good public relations for the company. A good corporate wife put all her energy into her husband's career. Wives of businessmen worked after marriage less often than wives of men in other occupations, even those with similar salary ranges. Wives of higher ranking businessmen had a lower rate of employment after marriage than wives of lower ranking men. Thus, it would seem that those men who made it to the top did so, at least in part, because their wives devoted all their attention to his career, or to their domestic life.

In the late 1960s corporate and social attitudes shifted somewhat. Women were entering the workforce and showing the same attachment to their jobs that was previously seen primarily in men. Many women were no longer willing to act as an unpaid laborer for their husband's employer. In fact, the educated women who might, in earlier years, have been content to be a corporate wife, were now becoming executives themselves. Companies still took an interest in the wives of their employees but the emphasis was slightly different. The increase in two career couples meant that more and more businessmen, and their employers, could no longer expect wive^s_^ to be willing to give up their

jobs and move, or to be available to entertain socially or be active in volunteer activities. Image remained important to the corporate world and wives were still encouraged to be supportive of their husbands' work and conform to certain behavioral standards. However, the corporate world no longer expected to get two for the price of one.

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