

Full Length Research Paper

In Quest of Excellence, Not Power: Women's Paths to Positions of Influence and Leadership

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Accepted August 18, 2014

Despite the tremendous advancement of women in Western society, they are still exceedingly underrepresented in positions of leadership and policymaking in the public sphere. This study aims to explore the ways women may overcome the traditional barriers on their path to key positions of influence by examining the factors that contributed to the success of women who have reached senior policymaking positions in their organizations. The study combines qualitative and quantitative methodologies, consisting of in-depth interviews with high-ranking women in different spheres of Israeli society, such as parliament members, directors in the public and private spheres, senior military commanders, and the like, along with self-report questionnaires. The findings identify diverse factors that contributed to the rise of these women to the top, including organizational properties, familial features and personal attributes. Practical recommendations for the advancement of women to influential leadership positions are suggested in accordance with the results.

Keywords: Women's leadership, Women policymakers, Leadership and gender

Introduction

Women in Western society have been achieving greater representation in the corridors of power and higher management, where they are increasingly involved in policymaking and rule setting and have growing influence on the shaping of society. This is also true of Israeli society, where unprecedented numbers of women have been reaching key positions in society and state (Almagor-Lotan, 2011). Nevertheless, this representation still falls short of prevailing values of gender equality (Ess-Korlander, 2010).

Accordingly, although the increased ability of women to reach decision-making positions has enabled them to become a notable minority rather than merely a symbolic few, they still do not enjoy adequate representation in the upper echelons, and do not hold sufficient positions of influence and leadership in Israeli politics and the economy (Singh & Vinnicombe, 2004). Only around 15-25% of the top positions in Israel are held by women; this is true for government and parliament, boards of directors in the public and private spheres alike, academia and the army, as well as most other institutions (Almagor-Lotan, 2011; Dunn & Bradstreet, 2012; Kenig, 2013).

This notwithstanding, while their numbers are not great, the women who have made it to the top have apparently managed to overcome barriers that typically impede women's advancement. Hence, it makes sense to carefully examine the conditions that enabled these select women to reach society's

highest echelons. Drawing on their experience might help pave the way for larger numbers of women to attain key policymaking positions. To that end, it is crucial to understand the obstacles that they faced on their way to the top ranks, and to identify the factors that made it possible to overcome these hurdles. This is the focus of the present study, which aims to create a profile of the "trailblazing" women, who might serve as models for all those who aspire to the heights.

Obstacles to the Equal Representation of Women in Key Influential Positions

The equal representation of women has typically been blocked by numerous barriers. One of the main obstacles facing women lies in the norms of the male organizational culture which define the qualities required for advancement according to the male model of leadership (Davidson & Burke, 2011; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kark & Eagly, 2010). These include agentic traits such as ambition, competitiveness, aggression, and control, which are culturally assigned to men. Conversely, there appears to be considerably less appreciation of communal traits, such as empathy, kindness, or concern for the needs of others, generally considered "feminine" (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; Schein, 2001).

In a similar vein, management positions, particularly senior ones, are generally considered to be "masculine" (Schein, Mueller, Lituchy, & Liu, 1996; Schein, 2000). Schein et al.

(1996) identified this phenomenon as “Think manager—think male”. Such widespread exclusion of women from high-ranking positions, demands of women to adopt qualities considered “masculine”, such as competitiveness, aggression, rationalism and independence, in order to make significant progress in the ranks at the organization. Moreover, this gender bias can have a negative impact on women’s ability to see themselves as suitable for top management positions (Kark, Waismel-Manor, & Shamir, 2012; Phillips & Imhoff, 1997). It is also reflected in the disparity between their high capabilities and their low self-confidence (Corell 2001).

The male organizational culture presents women with additional barriers as well. There is evidence that women are held to higher standards than members of the male hegemony (Salas-Lopes et al., 2011). In this particular study, women in the medical professions reported that they had to invest more energy in order to prove themselves and succeed in their managerial careers compared with their male colleagues.

An additional major systemic obstacle that perpetuates men’s advantage in the rise to chief positions is the absence of suitable mechanisms that enable women to optimally combine career and family (Davidson & Burke, 2011). In a reality where women are still expected to be the primary caregivers and to take on almost exclusive responsibility for the private sphere, many women experience conflict between work and family (Edwards, 2001; Greenstein, 2000; Lee, Duxbury, & Higgins, 1994). It has been shown that women’s choices of career tracks are frequently affected by their expectation of such a conflict even before they begin their professional track (Mor & Guy, 2006). Accordingly, many choose to place family demands before their personal aspirations and end up compromising on less demanding and prestigious jobs that will allow them to maneuver through their multiple tasks (Steir, 2005). Some may even leave the job if they perceive it as interfering with their home and family commitments (Mor & Guy, 2006). Women’s dual responsibilities may also slow down their professional advancement, as they are perceived as incapable of investing adequately in high-ranking, demanding positions as a result (Tamir, 2007).

Furthermore, women who aspire to a demanding non-traditional career are frequently forced to make concessions in their family makeup (Davidson & Burke, 2011). Some may postpone starting a family until they have established their career or might be satisfied with having a small number of children. Others may even forego having children altogether (Eagly & Carli, 2007). In Israeli society, the option of giving up on having a family is rather constrained by cultural norms that cherish the family above all. Although women are encouraged to participate in the work force, they are also expected to marry and have a number of children. As a result, only a very small percentage (11%) of high-ranking women in Israel do not become mothers, as compared to 40% of the most highly paid women in the US, for example (Kark & Waismel-

Manor, 2011). This puts an additional burden on Israeli women who strive to advance to the highest-ranking positions.

Research has also shown that the conflict around combining work and family tends to create greater emotional strain for women as compared to men, and to have a more detrimental effect on their psychological and general health and wellbeing (Adams, King, & King, 1996). Women also experience guilt and shame about not filling either of their roles properly, above all, their maternal role (Liss, Schiffrin, & Rizzo, 2012). All in all, the greater this conflict, the more they may experience work burnout, thereby contending with an additional barrier to their advancement to the top.

Factors that Promote Women to Positions of Influence and Leadership

Although women continue to encounter serious obstacles on their path to key influential positions, growing numbers of women have been advancing to these ranks. The factors that promote the advancement of women to key positions can be categorized into three levels—societal, familial, and individual. On the societal level, organizational changes that introduce mechanisms for enabling optimal balance between family and career for both genders have been shown to allow women to make greater progress in the ranks of the organization (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Kark & Eagly, 2010). It has also been shown that preparing and training women for leadership contributes considerably to their advancement to policy making positions, as do mentors, advisors, and supporters who supervise their path to leadership ranks (Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010). In addition, as the organizational domain undergoes changes in its perception of preferred leadership qualities, the demand for androgynous leadership and management style increases, creating more opportunities for women’s advancement to senior ranks (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; Kark & Eagly, 2010).

The family level. As the work–family conflict appears to be one of the major barriers to women’s advancement to the highest echelons in the public domain, a meaningful shift in the traditional division of labor within the family is imperative to overcoming this hurdle. Research has shown that emotional or instrumental support at home contributes greatly to the advancement of women in the workplace (Ezzedeen & Grossnickle-Ritche, 2008; King et al., 1995; Salas-Lopes et al., 2011). Expectations within the family for their success and achievement on the job played a meaningful role as well. For example, in a study of female managers in a variety of fields, Aycan (2004) found that about half attributed their achievement of senior management positions to emotional and practical support from their partners, expressed in a more equal division of labor at home. The majority also pointed to roots in their family of origin, emphasizing the importance of nontraditional gender socialization and encouragement to succeed that they received, particularly from their mothers. Similar findings were reported in a study of 744 women faculty members regarding the influence of their partners’ careers: the more the

supportive the spouse, the better the balance between career and family and greater the freedom of the woman to rise in the hierarchy, especially among those aged 35-50 (Gordon & Whelan-Berry, 2004).

The individual level. Experiencing gender-neutral socialization from the youngest ages seems to contribute greatly to the development of androgynous personality traits, which facilitate the advancement to positions of influence in the public domain (Ragins, 1998; Singh & Vinnicombe, 2004). The development of agentic traits, such as achievement-orientation and self-confidence, while also preserving communal traits, such as sensitivity and kindness, makes it easier for women to adapt to the male-defined organizational structure (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Ragins 1998; Singh & Vinnicombe, 2004). Moreover, Kark et al. (2012) found that female managers who possessed androgynous characteristics were more effective in their leadership than those who had either feminine or masculine traits alone. Levels of ambition also have a strong impact on women's progress within the organizational hierarchy, such that the higher they aspire, the greater their chances of reaching the top (Therenu, 2001). Finally, possessing a feminist worldview and feminist self-identification, along with the insistence upon equal division of labor in the home, also emerge as factors that facilitate women's progress to the highest positions in society (Altintas & Altintas, 2008; Hallett & Gilbert, 1997).

The purpose of this research was to further deepen understanding of the factors that promote women to ranks of influence and leadership in Israeli society by investigating the paths taken by women who have already attained high-ranking policy-making positions in this culture. Based on the notion of "learning from success" (Rosenfeld, 1997; Schechter, Sykes, & Rosenfeld, 2008), we set out to sketch a profile of these trailblazing women, in order to draw on their cumulative experience as a reference point for feasible directions of action for the advancement of other women. In other words, the objective of this study was to isolate factors at the individual and organizational levels that have helped select women advance to chief positions and to apply this information to the creation of conditions that will promote greater representation of women in centers of influence in society.

Method

Sample

The qualitative sample comprised 20 women who held positions of influence and policy making in diverse organizations in Israel. Five of them were present or former members of the Knesset (the Israeli parliament); another five served as CEO or deputy CEOs in the corporate world. Two of the participants were senior managers in large media corporations and another two were at the highest levels of academia. In addition, there was a single representative of each of the following: a former Supreme Court judge, a manager of a leading medical institution, and a high-ranking member of the

finance system. The Israeli army and law enforcement authority were represented by three high-ranking officers.

Most of the women in the sample were married or in long-term relationships. Two of them were divorced and not in a relationship, and one had never married. Seventy-five percent (15) of them have one to two children; four of them had a larger number of children, while one of them does not have any children. The ages of the women ranged from 38 to 69, with an average of 56. Most of the women held masters or higher degrees and most were the eldest child in their families of origin. Around 90% (18) of the participants were Jewish, while the remaining two were Arab—one being Muslim and the other Christian. Approximately two-thirds of them defined themselves as feminists, and only three explicitly rejected this definition.

The comparison group comprised of 60 women divided into three subgroups: junior managers, therapists, and low-ranking salaried employees. These women were recruited from the community by way of convenience sampling. Women from various social and professional circles were invited to participate in the study, and to also extend a similar invitation to their networks. Their level of education was fairly high: 43% held master's degrees, 35.4% held bachelor's degrees, 11.4% were Ph.D.'s and only 2.5% had acquired a high-school education or less. The average age of this group of women was 47, with ages ranging from 26 to 66. Most of the women (68.8%) were married, 5.2% were single, 14.3% were divorced, 4.7% were widowed, and the rest (7%) did not note their marital status. Somewhat over a third of the women (37.3%) had three children, 29% were mothers of two children, and the rest were divided evenly between less than two and more than three children (17% each), with a maximum of six. The distribution of their order of birth was even, with about one-third in each category (eldest, middle, and youngest).

Measures

The qualitative instrument. We employed a semi-structured in-depth interview comprised of questions regarding factors that may have helped these senior women to reach the top, including why they were interested in these positions of influence, actions that led to their ability to overcome barriers encountered within and outside of the organization; work-family conflict and balances, including the division of labor within the family; characteristics of family of origin; views on feminism and women's rights; and recommendations for action that could help other women reach the highest ranks in society, in equal proportion to their percentage in the population. A free-flowing conversation, in which the women could bring up any topic they wished, was also made possible in all interviews.

The quantitative questionnaire. Personality traits were assessed using the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem 1974), which measures "masculine," "feminine," as well as androgynous personality traits, expressed as the ratio between the two former sets of characteristics. The questionnaire

presents respondents with 60 personality traits (20 “masculine,” 20 “feminine,” and 20 gender-neutral). The respondents are asked to rank each trait on a 7-point scale with respect to the degree that each characteristic fits them, where 1 denotes “not at all” and 7, “always or almost always”. Examples of the “masculine” traits include achievement-orientation, ambitiousness and assertiveness. Examples of the “feminine” traits include gentleness, sensitivity to the needs of others, and warmth. The androgyny score was determined by the ratio between the “feminine” and “masculine” scores. The more negative the ratio, the greater the weight of the masculine traits; the more positive the ratio, the greater the weight of the feminine traits. In addition to this instrument, the comparison group also completed a demographic questionnaire, inclusive of items pertaining to the division of labor in their families, for the purpose of comparison with the interviewees. Examples of these questions include: “What percentage of the responsibility for the domestic sphere lies upon you in comparison to your spouse (out of 100%)?” or “Do you consider yourself to be a career woman” (possible answers being ‘yes’, ‘no’, or ‘maybe’).

Procedure

The data was collected using mixed methods—both qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative research design was based on a semi-structured interview, consistent with the “learning-from-success” method, which aims to further future success by drawing on elements of past successful endeavors in a given domain (Rosenfeld, 1997; Schechter, Sykes, & Rosenfeld, 2008). The quantitative part of the research was intended to identify personality differences between the women that had reached positions of influence and leadership and those in the three comparison groups.

The interviewees in the qualitative part of the research were recruited by way of invitations that requested their participation in the study. Such appeals were sent to 50 of the highest-ranking women in Israeli society in diverse fields of activity. The invitation letter described the purpose and importance of the study, while emphasizing the value of their participation. Slightly less than half of the women who were approached (20) expressed their agreement to participate in the research. The researchers and trained research assistants conducted in-depth interviews with the women who consented. Each interview took about an hour and a half to two hours, and was held at a location and time chosen by the interviewees. It ended with the administration of the quantitative instrument. To maintain anonymity in the quantitative part of the study, the questionnaires were not identifiable by name, but merely by group membership, and were placed directly by the interviewees into a blank envelope that was immediately sealed.

The participants in the comparison group were recruited using the snowball technique, with the questionnaires being distributed to a list of contacts of the researchers and others. The participants received and returned the questionnaire by e-mail, completing it in the privacy of their homes. To preserve the anonymity of the participants, as promised, the

questionnaires were unmarked by name, printed immediately upon receipt of the e-mail, and placed blindly in an envelope in random order before any examination of the forms took place. Using this method, we received over 100 completed questionnaires, which we divided into the three groups of occupations. In order to match the number of participants in each group to the number of the interviewees, we randomly chose 20 participants from each category to form the final comparison sample.

Results

Qualitative Findings

Content analysis was used to analyze the interviews, so as to shed light on the various factors that contributed to the advancement to influential, policy-making positions. The factors that emerged can be grouped into three levels—organizational, familial and personal—although the central focus of most of the interviewees was on the latter. Reference was also made to the price these women were ready to pay for leading such high-powered careers and to concluding recommendations for the training of future generations of female leaders.

On the organizational level, some of the respondents spoke about the importance of mentors (men and women) who led them to success, or colleagues and/or professional partners, mainly women, who served as an important source of support: “It is very important to have a mentor... who will be there for you, actively show interest, help you to express yourself, and truly care” as well as “My management is made up entirely of women ... I tell you, the experience of working with women is amazing.” Mastering the rules of the male organizational culture, through determination not to accept any gender-based discrimination or to worry about how others perceive their gender-appropriateness, also helped them get ahead: I understood that if I wanted to advance, I had to play by the boys’ rules. The boys’ rules mean organizing and raising money” and, “People often view me as being masculine, but that doesn’t bother me.” At the same time, quite a few believed that they brought added value to their jobs by actually not adopting those rules entirely: “I think that my management is less rigid, softer, and more attentive to the employee.”, as well as by their ego free conduct “I never bother myself with ego considerations but only with the tasks at hand”. In a similar vein, many identified their ability to be overcome stereotypic expectations as key to their advancement: “Assertive women are often seen as aggressive, but I was successful in separating between the two” or “I was the first to prove that women can be assigned tough diplomatic missions that were previously considered suitable for men only”.

A lot more was said about the personal and familial factors that contributed in their view to their ascent to key influential positions. On the personal level, most attributed to themselves a conglomeration of both gender-congruent and incongruent personality traits, adding up to a rather androgynous

presentation. The “gender-appropriate” traits referred primarily to communal features such as sensitive management skills and the ability to communicate through dialogue and listening: “I think that it’s the aspects of emotional intelligence and the ability to manage people through positive feedback that succeeded in getting the most from them.” On the opposite side, they also described agentic traits of resoluteness, assertiveness, ambition, courage, self-confidence, belief in themselves, and commitment to hard work: “I am very determined and unyielding, independent, stubborn ... I am opinionated, well-developed in my thoughts, willing to swim against the current,” or “So I decided I wouldn’t give in to them, and I would persist, and ultimately this worked, you know, in the end, it worked.”

In addition to their gender-balanced personalities, many of the trailblazing women also identified themselves as feminists: “Naturally I am a feminist, and very proud to be, since feminism for me is equality, so if I weren’t a feminist what have I been doing all these years” or “I began identifying myself as a feminist in my twenties, when I started standing up for what I believe in.” However, others did not define themselves as feminists, even though they usually endorsed its causes of gender equality: “I don’t know if I define myself as a feminist...but I do believe in gender neutral socialization and equal opportunities and pay for both sexes.”

The family level, past and present, emerged as extremely significant in facilitating their advancement to the highest ranks. Many of the participants identified family of origin as the foundation for their high self-esteem and confidence, as well as their aspiration to excellence. Most of them came from egalitarian families where they witnessed a model of equality in their parents’ and grandparents’ division of labor: “I always saw my grandparents managing the household and there I learned that women’s status is exactly the same as men’s. The same was true of my mother and father.” Children of both sexes received equal treatment, as their parents educated them equally toward excellence, achievement, and self-confidence: “I was educated towards excellence in everything,” and also: “All of us [brothers and sisters] received the same words of encouragement” or “I was always expected to be the top student.”

The women noted that a strong and independent mother figure set a good example for them: “My mother was also a very independent and opinionated woman, and very well educated,” or “The truth is that my mother is also a pediatrician; in the previous generation this was less common.” Some of the women had supportive, encouraging parents, who recognized their abilities and educated them to be self-confident, with the fathers playing a central role in this: “My father was always encouraging; in general he thought I was God’s gift to humankind and a shining star,” or “I grew up in a home with an open, egalitarian father, who educated me to overcome all obstacles ... he was very proud of me.” Mothers also

contributed their part: “For my mother I was ‘queen of the universe.’”

In contrast, some of the women had experienced a harsher childhood, characterized by economic hardship and a fight for survival, absent or ill parents, and the like. They spoke of how their difficulties transformed them into survivors and fighters: “I’m not afraid of anything. I had enough blows as a child to not be afraid of anything,” or “I had a very complex childhood. It’s no secret and it surely had an impact. To stand on my own, to fight, to be independent.”

The families created by most of the interviewees in their adulthood also contributed very significantly to their advancement. Their reports focused on two realms: marriage and motherhood. With regard to marriage, the decisive majority of the married women reported that their partner fully shared the domestic responsibilities with them, thereby freeing them to devote equally to their professions: “Fortunately for me, I have a partner who is very egalitarian, it is not that he does whatever I tell him—he actually shares the responsibility,” and: “My partner freed me, we pretty much divided [all responsibilities] equally.” Nearly all the respondents indicated that without their partners’ collaboration they would not have been able to have such a career: “I say this, you know, I put it on the table as clearly as possible. I don’t think I could have done this if I didn’t have a partner who was this supportive,” and also “Without my husband’s enormous support, I wouldn’t have succeeded.” Some of the interviewees described sacrifices their partners made for the sake of their (the women’s) careers: “He’s simply an amazing, supportive partner and he never thought that I should give up on my plans so that he could carry out his. On the contrary: he would make concessions for my sake.”

The equal division of labor with the partner also helped balance career and parenting. The knowledge that in their absence, their partner would fill their place was particularly relieving: “My partner was a real partner in caring for the children. This is an essential condition and it’s rare. He would come home at four or five and he was more flexible than I was.” Nevertheless, some of the women reported an inner conflict due to the clash between their professional and maternal roles, including awareness that their children would prefer them to be home. However, in the same breath they described effective ways of coping with these feelings of guilt: “You’ll be torn, every once in a while you’ll cry about what a ‘bad mother’ you are. The practical response is to figure out solutions as you go along,” or “The girls want me to be home more. So I share everything I do with them so they can feel a part of it and be proud.” Another thing that helped was focusing on the benefits the children derived from their work: “When the children were young there was undoubtedly a price, but I rationalize the situation by believing that it helped them develop character.”

It is important to note that not all the women shared this maternal guilt, finding various angles to free themselves of it, while focusing on the upside of it all: “I have no guilt. I have

none because I have no reason. I look at my friends who were busy with other things, and believe me I was a thousand times more involved in my children's lives," or "I think many mothers talk about pangs of conscience but I never felt guilty that I wasn't at home... never; I did the very best I could."

The motives for advancement cited by these women revealed that the majority did not reach their high positions out of an intention to reach the top of the pyramid or a desire for power over others and control. Actually, a substantial portion of the women noted that they did not plan their organizational rise or even expect to get so far, but simply found themselves being handed these positions: "Suddenly I found myself here—I didn't plan it, it wasn't the career that I had planned at that stage," or "I didn't set a goal to get here, my life just rolled along, and I was lucky to be in the right place at the right time." They were not motivated by an ambition to amass power over others either "it wasn't the power or dominance of being at the head of all this... that I really wanted." Nor were they motivated by ego: "I succeeded as a woman precisely because I'm not egocentric and I don't dwell on matters of ego, but only on the tasks that I want to perform." Most of the women reported that their promotions arose primarily from their tendency to do their work as well as possible: "[My motivation] will always be to conquer the peak, but my own peak—to do my very best ... what helped me is that I simply wanted to succeed in my work," or "my history is that I always attempt to do my utmost and maybe even some more" and/or to promote values and ideals: "I always fought for my views and ideology," or "I can define myself as a woman who wants to lead change."

As part of the examination of the factors that made it possible for these women to overcome the obstacles on their way to leadership positions, we must also take count of the prices they were willing to pay. In fact, most identified the willingness to pay these prices as a determining factor in enabling their advancement to the top. The majority referred to the inevitable familial price: "I think the price relating to the family is The Price," or "To my mind, the willingness to pay this price distinguishes those who made it to the top from those who didn't." Some referred to their willingness to pay the price that arose from their multiple roles: exhaustion, lack of time for themselves or their families and friends: "As a mother you rock the cradle with your foot, make an egg with one hand, and talk on the phone with the office with the other hand," or "There is a price in respect to your social life, time to read, time to do other things," and also "You have to be willing to pay this heavy and painful price [of long hours of absence from the home]. Those who don't succeed in coping with this frustration quit halfway."

At the end of each interview, we asked the participant to offer her own recommendations for increasing women's representation in the corridors of power and influence. Some of them identified the need for system-wide structural changes that would promote women: "If the political sphere were more egalitarian, more woman-friendly, I think we would see many

more women in the system. It's necessary to make the system more accessible to women." They also ascribed central importance to the advancement of women in the organization and spoke of the ways in which they promoted other women based on solidarity and support "I can't tell you that I promote women solely because they are women. But I push women... and each woman here is the best, unequivocally." The need to find proper solutions for balancing work and family was also indicated by many: "Regarding the combination of work and family, you have to find the right mix."

Another recommendation that was echoed in many of the interviews referred to the training of future generations of women leaders: "I would have as many preparatory workshops for women as possible ... I would organize all sorts of training courses to familiarize them with the political arena," or "I believe in the idea of looking for potential female leaders ... enabling, directing, and providing opportunities, that is the key." Finally, the participants recommended that all young women be encouraged to never give up on their dreams and to persist all the way to their goals: "The main thing I say to them is don't give up and believe in yourselves. I think it's a matter of determination and a decision not to give up," and to dare to dream: "I'll tell her ... dream big, be bold, and take all the opportunities that come your way."

Quantitative Findings

In order to further hone in on the personality and family-related factors that help women advance to key positions, we contrasted the top-ranking women with the three subgroups of the comparison group: junior managers, therapists, and low-ranking employees. A MANOVA was used to compare the four groups on various personality traits. As can be seen in table 1, there was a significant difference between the senior-ranking women and the other three sub-groups in levels of androgyny along with a whole set of traits. Examination of the particular differentiation characteristics shows that the differences emerged from the characteristics considered "masculine" and not those considered "feminine." The women in positions of influence demonstrated higher levels of ambition, leadership, assertiveness, independence, resoluteness, and the like. At the same time, they did not differ significantly from the other groups in qualities considered to be feminine, such as sensitivity, empathy, containment, and warmth.

Table 1

Group comparison on various dimensions of personality, expressed as MANOVA coefficients

Trait	df	F	Occupation	Means (sd)
Androgyny	3	9.64***	Leaders	-.64 (.72)
			Managers	02 (.69)
			Therapists	.24 (.63)
			Employees	.52 (.77)
Leadership	3	5.93***	Leaders	6.06 (.93)
			Managers	5.85 (.87)
			Therapists	5.40 (1.09)
			Employees	4.61 (1.05)
Achievement-orientation	3	3.62**	Leaders	6.12 (1.02)
			Managers	5.38 (1.12)
			Therapists	5.35 (1.14)
			Employees	4.85 (1.32)
Independence	3	3.81**	Leaders	6.50 (.73)
			Managers	6.28 (.96)
			Therapists	6.50 (.69)
			Employees	5.61 (.78)
Ambition	3	3.42**	Leaders	6.12 (.96)
			Managers	5.52 (1.29)
			Therapists	5.45 (1.15)
			Employees	4.82 (1.49)
Resoluteness	3	3.26**	Leaders	6.12 (.63)
			Managers	5.38 (.94)
			Therapists	5.35 (1.18)
			Employees	4.85 (.92)
Assertiveness	3	2.54*	Leaders	6.00 (.82)
			Managers	5.80 (.98)
			Therapists	5.2 (1.05)
			Employees	5.19 (.02)

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .00$

We performed several additional analyses concerning the division of labor in the families of the comparison participants. About two-thirds of the women reported that they bore the bulk of the responsibility for the home and the care of the children; half of them (one-third of the overall sample) were responsible for between 60% and 75% of these tasks and the other half

undertook between 75% and 100% of the household chores, so that house maintenance fell mainly on them. The remaining one-third reported an equal division of labor. A significant correlation ($r = .587$, $p < .00$) was found between the degree of equality in role division and the women's satisfaction with this division, such that women who bore most of the burden reported the lowest acceptance of the situation and vice versa. In addition, a significant correlation was found between the degree of equality in the division of labor at home and the rank the woman held on her job ($r = .539$, $p < .00$) as well as the degree to which she defined herself as a career woman ($r = .608$, $p < .00$), such that the greater the equality in the family, the higher the level the woman attained on her job and the more she defined herself as a career woman.

Discussion

The present findings sketch a profile of the highest-ranking women in Israeli society, and identify some of the factors that promoted their rise to the top. Of the various factors expected to play a role in their ascent, the women in our sample seemed to focus primarily on the personal and familial ones and less on the organizational determinants. Accordingly, we can account more for the former as compared with the latter.

The picture that emerged is of ambitious, androgynous women who blazed their way to policymaking positions primarily through a dedication to excellence rather than aspirations for power and supremacy. They are highly educated, as a group, with many being self-identified feminists, and almost all advocates of gender equality. Most of them experienced gender-neutral socialization in childhood along with parental confidence in their abilities and encouragement. In adulthood they generally proceeded to recreate an egalitarian nuclear family, characterized by equitable division of labor with their partners, while a minority never married at all. The mothers among them tended to have fewer children than average, and, as a rule, seemed to cook up with atypical solutions for the widely noted work–family conflict and maternal guilt. At the same time, by their own admission they were not immune to these emotions but rather willing to pay the price attached to their career paths, noting that the benefits outweighed the costs.

An analysis of the organizational level reveals that the majority of these trailblazing women reached their high-ranking positions with minimal organizational help, although a few were aided by dedicated mentors or female colleagues or superiors. In keeping with previous accounts (e.g., Davidson & Burke, 2011; Eagly & Carli, 2007), many identified their mastering of the male organizational rules as a precondition for their advancement. Similarly, they all had to devise individual solutions for the typical family–career conflict, in the absence of any systemic mechanisms for its resolution.

Lacking any substantial organizational backing, most of the interviewees identified familial and personal factors as being more central to their ability to progress to the highest ranks in their organizations. In the family realm, the majority of those

in a steady relationship singled out spousal equality and support as possibly the most important contributor to the materialization of their leadership aspirations, allowing them to reach the highest echelons by making the combination of a demanding career with family feasible. The patterns that emerged in the comparison group revealed that the greater the woman's share of responsibility for the home, the less she was able to advance in the workplace. This resonates with similar findings in the literature demonstrating that the greater the balance between women and men in the private sphere, the vaster the opportunities for women to reach leadership positions in the public sphere (Chang & Halpern, 2010; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Kark & Eagly, 2010). The standpoint of the unmarried interviewees, both divorced and never married, appears to further support this conclusion. Pointing to the potentially hindering impact of an unequal relationship on career prospects, these women tied their choice of being single to a determination to avoid a non-egalitarian relationship that could potentially jeopardize their chances of advancement in the world of work. Taken together, these findings make it clear that women's rise to the top is aided tremendously by an equal division of labor within the family.

An additional significant factor that seems to have played a major role in enabling these women to devote themselves to their upward-bound careers is the successful solutions they found to the frequently noted maternal guilt. Although not all of them experienced such guilt, it still came up in practically every interview, attesting to its significant centrality. In fact, most of the interviewees reported contending with considerable guilt. Yet rather than letting it control their career paths, they managed to find ways to neutralize it by means of rationalization or conscious willingness to pay this price. Others divulged a total lack of guilt, in a rather atypical manner. Either way, the moderation of their guilt was linked in large measure to the equitable sharing of parental responsibilities with their partners, which assured them that there would always be a parental figure present for their children. Additionally, their relatively small number of children may have also contributed to their ability to move ahead in the public sphere, in keeping with previous findings of an inverse relationship between number of children and women's seniority (Wallen, 2002).

Beyond the interviewees' current family constellation, the characteristics of their families of origin were also associated with their achievement of top ranks. Empowering family characteristics, such as a model of an egalitarian marital relationship between parents and even grandparents; a strong, inspiring mother; socialization to gender equality; parental confidence in their capabilities; as well as being the eldest sibling, were shared by most of them and related, not surprisingly, to their rise to the top. These findings attest to the decisive impact of socialization to gender equality on the path the daughter will take. In keeping with similar findings (e.g., Hallett & Gilbert, 1997), the more a young girl is allowed to believe that no path is closed to her, the greater her chances of

gaining prominence in the public sphere as an adult. That so many of these women had a strong and determined mother for a model, whether accomplished or not, speaks to the importance of mothers' own empowerment as a source of inspiration for their daughters, in keeping with similar accounts in the literature (e.g., O'Reilly, 1998). Also consistent with the literature (e.g., Allgood, Beckert, & Peterson, 2012), is the finding that fathers seem to play a pivotal role in building the daughter's self-confidence and the realization of her potential, highlighting the importance of fathers' encouraging involvement in their daughters' upbringing. At the same time, for some of the women it was actually the necessity to contend with hardship in their family of origin that apparently helped them to develop inner resources to confront adversity.

On the personal level, the androgynous nature of their personality apparently placed these high-ranking women at a different starting point compared to many other women, as reflected by their distinction from the comparison group. In contrast to the latter, they appear to be considerably more achievement-oriented, ambitious, assertive, self-confident, and resolute. Alongside these agentic personality traits, culturally considered as masculine, most of these women also displayed communal qualities, usually considered as feminine, such as empathy, warmth, and care for the needs of others, to no less a degree than the women in the comparison group. As it is the agentic cluster of traits that distinguished the senior women from the rest, it stands to reason that these particular qualities played a pivotal role in their ascent to the top of the pyramid, which is hardly surprising considering that the criteria for advancement in the male organizational culture are tailored to masculine norms and characteristics (e.g., Davidson & Burke, 2011; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; Schein, 2001). At the same time, it is important to note that their equally extant communal traits did not stand in their way to the top, in keeping with reports of growing appreciation for androgynous management styles (e.g., Kark et al., 2012). However, in a departure from Kark et al.'s results, we did not find the communal traits to provide any particular benefit on their own. Rather, it appears that the combination of both clusters of traits into an androgynous whole was the source of our interviewees' advantage.

An egalitarian value system appears to be an additional promoting personal feature. For many, this belief in gender equality also translated into self-identification as feminists, while others preferred to avoid the label, though almost invariably endorsing its cause. Either way, these convictions may have provided them with the resolve not to surrender to the various obstacles encountered or to give in to feelings of guilt and blame that might have otherwise created a difficult choice between career and family (e.g. Mor & Guy, 2006). Their selection of an egalitarian partner may have also resulted from this stance, as previously suggested (e.g., Backus & Mahlik, 2011), further easing the family-career conflict. In addition, there might have been a synergic interaction between their high levels of ambition and their belief in gender equality.

Perhaps the endorsement of egalitarian notions is one of the decisive factors allowing them to act upon their high ambitions instead of foregoing them like so many women feel forced to do (e.g. Hallett & Gilbert, 1997). Conversely, it might be the case that it was their extraordinary ambitiousness that turned them onto feminism in the first place, possibly as a means for its expression. Be the direction of the interrelation between these qualities as it may, they appear to function conjointly in influencing women's rise to prominence.

Finally, the motivational system of these high-ranking women raises some interesting questions. The fact that they were not motivated to reach senior policy-making positions by a desire for power and control, but rather by a commitment to excellence, warrants special attention. Does it imply that women as a group are not attracted to power, dominance, and control over others, or might it be that women feel uneasy expressing such aspirations due to their incompatibility with the female gender role? A similar finding was the reluctance of many of the interviewees to take credit for their accomplishments, attributing them instead to circumstances or luck, in accordance with consistent external attribution of success on the part of women. However, given that these women did not fear to reveal their androgynous nature in any way, it seems that their accounts should probably be taken at face value. Hence, their rise in the organizational hierarchy should be viewed, in accordance with their point of view, as a result of the vast esteem they enjoyed there due to their excellence and accomplishments, rather than resulting from a quest for power in the sense of supremacy or dominance.

In reading the results, one should bear in mind the limitations of this study, most of which concern the sampling methods used in both its qualitative and quantitative parts. The major limitation of the qualitative section is the selection of the participants from a pool of prominent leading women known to the researchers, thereby excluding unknown potential candidates, as well as leaders from additional domains. Secondly, the rather low rate of participation is another concern. The fact that only one half of the approached women agreed to participate may have created systematic and meaningful differences between the current interviewees and other leading women who opted not to participate. Clearly, these factors may influence the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the convenience sampling of the comparison group makes it difficult to ascertain the exact source of the group differences documented in this study, as these may be related to factors that were not presently controlled. However, while these limitations may have made it impossible to account for all factors instrumental to paving women's paths to the top universally, they, nevertheless, did not hinder the fundamental goal of identifying some very central ones. This notwithstanding, future research should repeat this investigation with prominent female leaders in additional domains and cultures, as well as conduct better controlled comparisons with other women.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Action

The picture that emerges from the current findings makes it possible to formulate recommendations for action on all three levels—the organizational, familial, and personal alike. On the social-organizational level, a normative change is called for, away from exclusive male-centered definitions and towards a more egalitarian system whose rules and standards are transparent and accessible to women. Organizations can actively assist women's ascent by intentionally seeking out those with leadership potential and appointing them mentors dedicated to their promotion to the highest ranks. There is a need for a change in attitudes and perceptions that associate leadership with maleness, coupled with a growing appreciation for communal traits alongside the instrumental. In addition, it is important to recognize the different paths followed by women and men on their way up and reward women, accordingly, for achievement orientation and persistence, even if they are focused primarily on performance excellence rather than acquiring power and position. Our results show that this is the main route women take to the top.

Action is needed on all fronts to reduce the conflict between work and family. First, a far-reaching change is needed in the social norms that charge women alone with the primary responsibility for children and the home, while undoing the association between caregiving and womanhood. Organizational mechanisms that enable women to combine career and family more reasonably should be devised. Establishments must think creatively about solutions in this respect. For instance, flexibility and adaptation of work conditions for parents of both genders may encourage men to take an equal part in household chores, thereby enabling more women to reach senior positions.

On the familial level, there is an obvious indication for a completely equal division of labor between partners, as indicated by nearly all the married interviewees, who singled this out as one of the most crucial prerequisites for reaching the highest echelons. Accordingly, women should be encouraged to refuse to settle for any less than true equality in the home, while insisting on a supportive, egalitarian partner, who is willing to make mutual concessions for their advancement. The recommendations for family of origin include a call for gender-neutral socialization of girls that will instill in them the full gamut of qualities, "feminine" and "masculine" alike, while presenting them with a broad spectrum of opportunities devoid of all gender bias. Concomitantly, parents should endow them with encouragement to fulfill their potential to its utmost and aspire to the highest goals. Both parents have an important role in this process, with the father's being confidence-building and the mother's being role modeling. Our results show that mothers' own empowerment is one of the strongest inspirations for their daughters'.

On the personal level, the development of a feminist identity, or at the very least a belief in gender equality, is indicated. Such a value system will likely contribute to confidence that all doors

are open to them and self-fulfillment is their right. Furthermore, the results of our study point to the advantage obtained by these senior women from focusing on the benefits that their achievements afford their children. Working mothers should be encouraged to adopt such a perspective. This way, not only can they free themselves of any and all guilt but actually relish the value of their accomplishments, thereby removing a central obstacle to their advancement. They will then become free to seize promotion opportunities that come their way, as did our interviewees, without any fear or apprehension, even if they did not plan initially to go that far. And above all, it is essential to encourage women to believe in themselves and take credit for their accomplishments; to dream big and high and never forego their aspirations and visions.

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