

The Canary in the Mine

By Mañanita Ochoa

Mother's Day came and went. I felt bad for not having written anything to celebrate it and I apologized to all my mothers. They told me not to worry; I still had time to do it. Now, I am sending this message out to all mothers and their progeny. No one in the world should be excluded.

Miners, when entering the bowels of Earth to excavate its riches, take canaries with them, not just because they like their company, but because when the canary stops whistling it's time to come up and get some fresh air. The lack of oxygen in the mine affects the canary before it does the miners, because canaries have smaller lungs and large whistles. When societies and associations inhibit equality and silence their women, the oxygen in those mines is also running out. I have no doubt that the ability to solve problems is equally distributed among the sexes. Not so the ability to create them. Impatient and testosterone charged beings create more problems than those who are understanding and maternal. Brilliant, hardworking, and creative women can tolerate some abuse, as long as it is for no more than a few hours a day. That is why they tolerate stifling husbands, as long as they provide support for the family. But those same women cannot tolerate abuse at work that goes on for ten to twelve hours. A lot less of their identity depends on climbing the corporate ladder or getting a raise; it relies more on doing a good job for loved ones, whose happiness and reciprocity is closely related to the love they give. That is why women are so often referred to as having a healing, civilizing influence over societies. They do

Societies, like some arrogant states, where an active participation by women is lacking in all facets of public life, end up self-destructing. Mothers want their sons to get married, so that other women can carry on with their domestication once mothers have done all that they can. Similarly, companies and governments in which women are not present tend to show a lack of creativity, an inability to cope with new demands and other inefficiencies. Even though fathers have always been better fishermen and hunters, mothers have managed the crops of all developed societies. A good share, if not all, of the increase in general productivity and the service sector in the United States over the last thirty years has been due to the influx of a large number of university graduate women and mothers to the work force. Between 1970 and 1990, 10% more women joined the job force than did their male counterparts. This led to a reduction in financial risk among middle-class families, an increase in productivity and consumption, and a reduction in the need to save, since the family unit was less vulnerable to financial distress.

I worry when our societies take two steps forward and one step back and experience a reduction in the increase of women's high level participation in public and corporate life. I am afraid these societies and companies may end up like mines without oxygen. It is worrisome that after significant progress made in the 80's and 90's, women's gains in the US economy stopped 15 years ago and are declining. At many high level conferences I attend, women's attendance leveled at about 15% and to the naked eye it is less than 10% in the last couple of years.

We can observe an increase in women entrepreneurs where they have the power to efficiently decide what direction they want to take. I know that women are great

entrepreneurs. It might be their natural destiny. But it would be better to create work environments that inspire more rather than fewer women to rise to corporate and public life challenges.

Long live selfless mothers, hard working and entrepreneurial women. They make our countries noble and resistant to the abuse of testosterone. Sons, take care of those beautiful and musical canaries that let us know when we must abandon the mine before we asphyxiate from lack of oxygen.

Next Sunday I will write something for Father's Day, so fathers will feel happy, take a deep breath and enjoy the whistling of the canaries that attest to the oxygen in their lives.