

women & philanthropy

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discovering our power

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Yesterday & Today

Quick—what pops into your mind when you hear the word “philanthropist”? For many people, the word conjures images of great wealth...the opulent lifestyles of the Carnegies and the Rockefellers...and visions of older men sitting in leather club chairs, sipping brandy — and perhaps wincing from the pain of gout. But those images certainly don’t do justice to many of today’s philanthropists — and in fact aren’t so accurate in describing yesterday’s.

Yesterday: Giving More Time Than Money

Until recently, most women were unable to contribute financial support to causes they valued: only a few wealthy women controlled their own resources — most of which were inherited — and felt able to make independent fiscal decisions. Those women gave wisely and well. A few examples: in 1871 Sophia Smith created Smith College. In 1889, Catherine Wolfe Bruce purchased a telescope for Harvard. And Madam C.J. Walker supported multiple social causes with profits from the cosmetics company she founded in 1905.

But, while most women couldn’t contribute money, they could — and did —

contribute time and expertise: many educational, religious, medical, and community institutions couldn’t have existed without the volunteer “womanpower” that ran their Boards, staffed their desks, and raised their funds.

Were those women philanthropists? “I certainly think so,” says Helen Roesing Monroe, ’63, a principal in the Endowment Development Institute based in Bonsall, California. “If you define philanthropy as public service for the common good — and I believe that’s how we should define it — women have always been philanthropists. The difference is that historically women contributed more services than money.”

changing the image—and the reality

Today: Backing Convictions with Contributions

Now, though, changes in society are changing philanthropy. While volunteer work is still the lifeblood of many institutions, more women are revisiting their understanding of philanthropy—and discovering the empowerment that comes with backing their convictions with contributions.

What kinds of societal changes are at work? Basically, today's women have more money—and more control over it.

- *Today, women make up half of America's workforce: they're earning their own money. In fact, according to the Women's Philanthropic Institute, 60% of the wealth in the U.S. is owned by women. "That often means more discretionary income, and that in turn means women can support the causes they value," says Betsy M. Crone, Chatham '67, fundraising consultant and a founder of the D.C.-based EMILY's List, which raises funds for pro-choice Democratic women political candidates.*
- *In days past, women who inherited wealth often felt obliged to disburse the money as their parents or husbands would have; their own wishes were not a priority. Inherited assets will always be a large*

part of the monies available for philanthropy—in the coming few decades, more than \$10 trillion will be passed between generations—but women's decision-making patterns may be changing. "We're becoming somewhat more independent, and our own priorities are coming to the fore," says Helen Monroe.

"Women philanthropists are driven quite simply by a desire to make the world a better place. They understand that by helping raise the quality of life for others, they also enhance life for themselves and their children."

—Women's Philanthropic Institute

Basic Understandings Revisited

At the same time, basic understandings about philanthropy are being revisited—and women are paying attention. Among those understandings:

- *Philanthropy continues to be vitally important to this country's institutions. "We're seeing the failure of various bureaucratic approaches, and the devolution that has put money back into the hands of local entities doesn't seem to be working well," says Helen. "That means we have to take care of each other—we have to support what matters to us."*
- *Adds Trish Jackson, Vice President for Education at CASE (the Council for Advancement and Support of Education in Washington, D.C.), "This country's institutions—including colleges and universities—are genuinely and uniquely reliant on philanthropy. Few other nations have institutions that have succeeded principally as result of private support."*
- *Philanthropy is the business of individuals—more than of corporations and foundations. In 1998, contributions to charitable and nonprofit organizations totaled \$174.52 billion—and, of that, individuals contributed \$134.84 billion. They supported religion, education, the arts and humanities, health, human services, and more.*
- *Philanthropists don't have to be wealthy—or male. "As we women start to be more active in giving, it's easier to think of ourselves as philanthropists—*

dedicating our resources and committing our passions to organizations we care about," says Trish Jackson.

Women clearly want to make a difference. Their annual giving to charity is 94% of men's—even though women earn only about 75% of what men do.

A Way to Bring About Change

Armed with new understandings about philanthropy—and with more resources and more control over them—women are discovering that giving financial support is an effective way to bring about change in society. Says the Women's Philanthropic Institute, "Women philanthropists are driven quite simply by a desire to make the world a better place. They understand that by helping raise the quality of life for others, they also enhance life for themselves and their children."

That's a lofty theory—but it translates beautifully into

women & philanthropy

practice. One example: EMILY's List, the fundraising organization that Betsy Crone helped found 14 years ago. Today, EMILY's List is the largest political action committee (PAC) in the country, raising millions of dollars—most of it from women—to support women political candidates, many of whom have been elected.

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—Helen Roesing Monroe '63,
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Endowment Development
Institute

Says Betsy, “It wasn’t long ago that women candidates weren’t seen as credible; nobody thought they’d be able to raise the money to run viable races. But women working together and pooling their contributions changed that.”

She continues, “I think we’re realizing that, through supporting causes we believe in, we’re investing in the future—maybe not ours personally, but in the longer term. We’re saying something about the opportunities and choices women should have.”

What Women Support...

Women clearly want to invest in the future. Their annual giving to charity is 94% of men’s—even though women earn only about 75% of what men do.

But women don’t always reap the benefits of their contributions: according to the Women’s Philanthropic Institute, only 5% of the money distributed by foundations in 1990 went to programs for women and girls.

Some women feel that one way to right the balance is through supporting women-driven organizations like EMILY’s List—or women’s colleges, whose positive impact on women’s lives is undisputed.

Those colleges produce a disproportionately high number of leaders in nearly every field. Congress is one example: even though women’s colleges make up only 2% of the country’s higher education institutions, 20% of women Senators and Representatives are graduates of women-only schools.

And study after study finds that women who attend women’s colleges participate more fully in and out of class...score higher on standardized achievement tests...are more likely to graduate...have higher levels of self-confidence...and are more successful in careers.

So do women’s colleges elicit passionate support from their alumnae? Some do: 5 of the 11 higher education institutions that in 1990 raised the most money per enrolled student from their graduates were women’s schools.

That’s a startling, and encouraging, statistic—but it obscures another, less positive fact: in the main, women’s college graduates don’t support their alma maters to the same degree that men support theirs.

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children to go there—but most women haven’t yet seen the role they need to play in the continuation of women’s education. Graduates of women’s colleges need to understand the stake they have in the future of their colleges,” says Betsy Crone. “I think that day is coming. I hope it is.”

...And How Much They Give

According to *The American Benefactor*, the 1995 average contribution of women to charities, including religious

changing the image—and the reality

institutions, was \$498. At Chatham three years later, the average gift of \$486 still lagged behind that figure. And the Chatham gift amount was far lower than the average 1997 gifts to peer colleges—with Hollins, for example, at \$1273 and Wells at \$1308.

What's the reason? Says CASE's Trish Jackson, "Sometimes people just don't think about the rate of inflation; they write the same check today that they wrote 10 or 20 or more years ago." But the reality is that \$1 contributed in 1983 is now worth only 62 cents—and it takes a \$4 contribution today to equal a \$1 gift in 1959.

And, adds Trish, "It's also believed that women are less apt than men are to make larger, multi-year pledges. Somehow men believe they can always earn back what they contribute—but women historically haven't felt that."

There are still more barriers keeping women from being completely comfortable philanthropists. Says Betsy Crone, "Women are often reluctant to talk about money; it's just not part of conversation at the networking luncheon or the bridge table. That's not the case with men. They'll talk freely about

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—Trish Jackson,
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 Advancement and
 Support of Education*

money, and that makes both asking for it and contributing it far more comfortable."

Helen Monroe believes that many women "don't have the kind of latitude in their marriages that will allow them to make independent decisions around money, especially if discretionary income is limited. It makes sense that women have a say over half of whatever is available to be donated, whether it's \$10 or \$10 million—but that still doesn't happen in many cases."

Nevertheless, says Trish Jackson, times are changing: "Women are, I think, more apt to break the glass ceiling in philanthropy than in most other places, including the corporate world."

One Woman at a Time

How will that happen? Just as it's happening today—one woman at a time, until a critical mass of women comes to realize that philanthropy is a real and immediate form of empowerment. "(Former Mount Holyoke College President) Elizabeth Kennan says philanthropy is the ultimate form of democracy—and that's true," says Trish. "It's a way to participate in the process, to make a difference. And when you're talking about a small institution—like Chatham—every contribution becomes proportionately more important."

Adds Betsy Crone, "We need to understand that how we give reflects our values. Gloria Steinem once wondered whether, if she were hit by a car tomorrow, her check register would reflect her support for Bloomingdales, or show what she really cared about.

"Our checkbooks—our giving patterns—should reflect what we care about. That's philanthropy."

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 of EMILY's List*
