

“...a well-organized, well-thought-out call to action.” —*Publishers Weekly*

# BREAKING THROUGH BIAS



ANDREA S. KRAMER

ALTON B. HARRIS

Praise for  
***BREAKING THROUGH BIAS***

and **Andrea S. Kramer**

and **Alton B. Harris**

“According to spouses Kramer and Harris, ‘Women don’t need to be fixed,’ but society does, and quickly. The authors proceed to identify a serious advancement problem for women, who make up 45 percent of entry-level professionals but only 17 percent of C-suite executives. They blame this gap on the pervasiveness of gender stereotypes, which lead to a kind of ‘benevolent sexism’ that’s as damaging as it is unintentional. Kramer and Harris acknowledge that systemic change is important, but it takes time, which leaves current would-be executives in the dust. The authors discuss managing perceptions, being aware of body language, crafting communications, and using anger to its best effect... a well-organized, well-thought-out call to action...” —*Publishers Weekly*

“*Breaking Through Bias* teaches women strategies they can use to counteract the negative effect of gender biases, while showing men what actions they can take to help advance their women colleagues. This book deserves widespread attention!”

—**Hon. Jessica A. O’Brien**, President, Women’s  
Bar Association of Illinois

“Women are more qualified, educated, and prepared for leadership roles in every field—business, law, politics, and technology—than ever before. Yet, well into the twenty-first century, we still encounter the old barriers of prejudice and gender bias. *Breaking Through Bias* provides women with hugely impactful tools that can be put to use right now to confront gender issues and, yes, partner with enlightened men to promote our advancement.”

—**Jan Schakowsky**, Congresswoman, Ninth District of Illinois

“Change cannot come fast enough in the pursuit of gender equality in the workplace. In *Breaking Through Bias*, Andie and Al provide strategies that allow women—and men—to create their own change by teaching us to communicate in a way that overcomes biases and stereotypes. This information is invaluable for all professionals looking to accelerate within inclusive workplaces around the globe.”

—**Deborah Gillis**, President & CEO, Catalyst

“It is exciting to see the ideas that Andie has been using for so long to personally mentor women now being made available on a broad scale in this terrific book. A great read for any woman who wants to take control of her career and be seen as the smart, capable woman she is.”

—**Julie Howard**, Chairman & CEO at Navigant Consulting, Inc.

“Andie and Al tackle the all-important subject of gender-correlated communication styles in the workplace from a fresh perspective. Combining their own real-life experiences (as a woman and as a man) with solid research, *Breaking Through Bias* is a highly readable book. Offering both practical advice for women and essential knowledge to the men who want to support them, this is a book to read and to share with others.”

—**Carol Frohlinger**, President, Negotiating Women, Inc.

“Barriers to gender equality persist. This groundbreaking book encourages talented women to persevere on the road to achieving the success they seek. This book should be mandatory reading for women both at the onset of their careers and on the path to the top of their profession.”

—**Laurel G. Bellows**, Managing Principal, The Bellows Law Group, P.C. and past President, American Bar Association

“Andie and Al have written an exceptional book—and an important one. It reflects decades of experience in thinking about how to overcome gender bias, and is chock-full of practical and accessible strategies for surmounting the challenges that women—and men—face. It should be read and studied by anyone seeking to win in the worldwide battle for talent.”

—**Jeffrey E. Stone**, Chairman, McDermott Will & Emery LLP

“Andie has worked tirelessly on the advancement of women in workplaces for so many years, and the wisdom and insights from that work are elegantly captured in this book! *Breaking Through Bias* is a great resource for women navigating the realities of workplace gender bias and the men who want to make their workplaces work better for everyone! Andie and Al’s advice is practical without asking women to be something other than who they are, which is why it will also be effective for those who utilize it.”

—**Dr. Arin Reeves**, author of *One Size Never Fits All: Business Development Strategies for Women (And Most Men)* and *The Next IQ: The Next Generation of Intelligence for 21st Century Leaders*

“*Breaking Through Bias* serves as a wake-up call for senior business leaders. The book explores common gender stereotypes and discusses the discriminatory bias that result. Based on my own work on culture change over the past five years, I am convinced that bias in the workplace is real. Things aren’t equal. I can’t allow myself to be satisfied with an environment where female employees have to expend energy combatting bias, so culture change is necessary—but it is slow work. This book offers insights and practical approaches to help women manage the environment as it exists. It is essential reading for modern businesspeople of either gender.”

—**Lee Richard Tschanz**, Vice President North America, Sales, Services, and Solutions, Rockwell Automation

“The medical profession is no more free of gender bias than all other professions that make up our economy. From the early stages of training to achieving the attending physician status, bias exists at every level. Thus, I am enthusiastically recommending that women medical students, residents, and fellow colleagues read and reread *Breaking Through Bias*.”

—**Neelum T. Aggarwal, MD**, Chief Diversity Officer of American Medical Women’s Association; Chair of Mentors, Advisors and Peers Committee, Women in Bio (Chicago); Associate Professor, Departments of Neurological Sciences and Rush Alzheimer’s Disease Center

“Andie and Al have created the perfect primer to navigate through the treacherous waters of gender bias. This is not a book you read and donate to your neighborhood library! You’ll want to keep it handy for its many insights and apply them to the countless scenarios that emerge throughout your personal and professional life. This is the book I wish I had more than thirty-five years ago when I launched my career in public relations.”

—**Cheryl Procter-Rogers**, PR strategist and executive coach,  
A Step Ahead PR Consulting and Coaching

# BREAKING THROUGH BIAS

COMMUNICATION

TECHNIQUES

*for* **WOMEN** *to*

**SUCCEED** *at* **WORK**

**ANDREA S. KRAMER**

**ALTON B. HARRIS**



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*For Cynthia and the brilliant, fulfilling,  
and productive life she has ahead of her.*

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# PART I

## Understanding Gender Stereotypes

# 1

## The Elephant in the Room

A great deal of attention is now being paid to workplace practices and the burdens they impose on women, particularly women with small children. The assumption seems to be that if only American workplaces did not demand so much “face time,” encouraged more flextime, allowed telecommuting, provided generous maternity leaves, and created welcoming reentry programs, women would be able to advance in their careers in a manner comparable to men.

Unfortunately, as sensible as these (and other) workplace changes would be, we seriously doubt they would do much to end the disparity in women’s and men’s career achievements. The reason is that none of these changes gets at the real cause of women’s and men’s disparate career experiences. The elephant in the room of gender career achievement, so to speak, is the stereotypes people controlling women’s career advancement opportunities tend to hold about women, men, families, careers, and leadership. Without acknowledging and addressing the persistence of these stereotypes and the biases that result from them, women’s career advancement will continue to be disrupted and blocked without regard to the changes made in workplace practices.

## GENDER STEREOTYPES ARE SCRIPTS FOR DISCRIMINATORY BEHAVIOR

The stereotypes with which we are concerned are preconceived views about the characteristics of various types of people. These stereotypes act as both sorting mechanisms and behavioral guides. We use stereotypes to assign people to particular categories—friend, foe, desirable, undesirable, worthwhile, worthless, and so forth—and we then rely on these stereotypes to tell us how we “should” relate to the people in those categories. Some stereotypes are benign and can lead to harmless or even socially beneficial behavior. An example might be a belief that “Drivers who take their turn at stop signs are courteous people.” Stereotypes of this sort are useful and underpin much of our productive social interactions. But other stereotypes are far from benign and are likely to lead to discriminatory behavior. An example might be “Women are poor at mathematics.”

People generally believe they don’t judge other people based on stereotypes and that they are free of the biases that stereotypes foster. But psychological and sociological studies make clear that virtually all of us have implicit biases against groups that are different from us (out-groups), whether those groups are defined by economic or social status, race, religion, or ethnicity, or by education, sexual orientation, or gender. Members of out-groups are often criticized, excluded, and unfairly treated. School access, housing patterns, social acceptance, political opportunity, and workplace advancement are all affected by such implicit biases.<sup>1</sup>

Women pursuing careers in traditionally male industries, professions, job types, and areas of economic activity are subject to particularly severe implicit biases. One recent study revealed that approximately 75 percent of people think “men” when they see career-related words such as business, profession, and work, but think “women” when they hear family-related words such as domestic, home, and household. An overwhelming majority of people associate men with leadership positions such as boss, CEO, and director, while they associate women with aide positions such as assistant, attendant, and secretary.<sup>2</sup> And, most

people think men when they hear the words math, science, or surgeon and think woman when they hear the words nurse, caregiver, and grammar school teacher.

Such associations are certainly understandable, given that women and men do often serve in gender-differentiated roles. But as Al's following story makes clear, such stereotypes are by no means always correct, and they can have highly discriminatory consequences.

*Al:* On a recent flight from Chicago to Washington, D.C., an airline employee sat next to me on her way home. The weather had been terrible, flights had been cancelled over the past two days, and I was pleased my flight had boarded. The airline employee said she was flying home after having been called up at 1 a.m. for an early flight to Chicago. She was now "dead heading" back to D.C. and then to her home in Roanoke, Virginia. I thought to myself, "Why would the airline call up a flight attendant as far away from D.C. as Roanoke?" I then turned to really look at my seatmate for the first time and saw she had stripes on the sleeves of her jacket and a hat in her lap. She was a pilot.

My unconscious stereotypes had been at work: women in uniforms on airplanes are flight attendants, men in uniforms are pilots. Now, while this is undoubtedly statistically true, I had clearly incorrectly categorized this woman, in this case harmlessly. But would it have been harmless if I had been in charge of hiring airline pilots and a woman applied for the job? Would that woman have had a harder time getting my endorsement than a man would have had? I hope not, but I think about that female pilot every time I find myself about to make a categorization of a person based on gender, race, or age.

We all hold and operate with a wide variety of stereotypes. Think about your own ideas about a nurse, college president, professional athlete, investment banker, marine, or beauty pageant contestant. But as filled as our minds are with stereotypes, the stereotypes we hold about people of both sexes are unique for at least four reasons. First, when we assign a person to one sex category or the other, that's the end of the

matter. (Transgender issues blur this point, but its basic thrust is still valid.) Second, we cannot choose not to assign a person to one sex or the other. Thinking about a person as either a woman or a man is not optional; we do it automatically, and there is nothing we can do about it. Third, we sort people by sex as soon as we hear or see them. We know immediately if the person is a woman or a man (and if we don't, it is likely to throw us off balance). And fourth, a person's sex cuts across all other categories. No matter what other ways we may sort people—occupation, status, personality, race, age, or something else—we also sort them by sex.

Sorting people by sex is, in itself, largely benign and probably had evolutionary value. But this sorting does not stop with the biological division of the population. Once we have sorted people by sex, we then ascribe to them certain socially constructed characteristics. And despite the enormous changes in women's activities and opportunities over the past forty years, these socially constructed gender characteristics—the gender stereotypes with which we are concerned throughout this book—have hardly changed at all. The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), developed in 1974, and an extensive 2004 study of gender stereotypes identified virtually identical characteristics associated with women and men. According to the BSRI, people expect women to be affectionate, sensitive, warm, and concerned with making others feel more at ease. Men are expected to be aggressive, competent, forceful, and independent leaders.<sup>3</sup> The 2004 study found that people still expect women to be affectionate, sensitive, warm, and friendly, while they still expect men to be aggressive, competent, independent, tough, and achievement oriented.<sup>4</sup> The stereotypes about women and men identified in 1974 and 2004 are still operative today. Men are still assumed to have traits of action, competence, and independence, often called “agentic” qualities.<sup>5</sup> Women, in contrast, are still assumed to have traits of sensitivity, warmth, and caregiving, often called “communal” qualities.<sup>6</sup>

Why are we making such a big deal about these gender stereotypes? If most people think women are warm rather than assertive and that men are aggressive rather than sensitive, what is the harm? The harm is that the traits associated with women are also associated with home and caregiving while the traits associated with men are also associated

with leadership and power. When a woman is assumed to be communal simply because she is a woman, she is also assumed to be suited for stereotypically feminine jobs—nurse, teacher, or administrative assistant—and not for stereotypically masculine jobs—investment banker, line manager, or CEO. This means that women are more likely to be tracked into personnel or assistant roles seen to require warmth and a sensitivity to the needs of others, while men are more likely to be assigned to leadership roles seen to require forceful, competent, and competitive behavior.<sup>7</sup>

## DISCRIMINATORY OPERATION OF GENDER STEREOTYPES

Gender stereotypes foster discriminatory behavior in three basic ways.

- *Descriptively*, by telling us what women and men are “like”: women are communal; men are agentic.
- *Prescriptively*, by telling us what women and men “should be like”: women should be communal; men should be agentic.
- *Proscriptively*, by telling us what women and men “should not be like”: women should not be (too or very) agentic; men should not be (too or very) communal.

### Discriminatory Behavior

Gender stereotypes result in discriminatory behavior in complex and subtle ways. We can get a clearer picture of this biased behavior by separating it into negative or hostile behavior and benevolent or kindly behavior.

### Negative or Hostile Biases

When a person is operating with traditional gender stereotypes, that person almost certainly has a negative view of women’s competence and suitability for high-pressure, competitive leadership tasks. A telling and

troubling example is revealed in a 2012 Yale University study of the attitudes of science professors toward women's potential as future scientists.<sup>8</sup> The researchers surveyed a broad, nationwide sample of biology, chemistry, and physics professors, asking them to evaluate an undergraduate science student who had applied for a position as a laboratory manager. All of the professors received exactly the same materials about the applicant, except 50 percent received an application purportedly from a woman and 50 percent purportedly from a man. The professors were asked to rate the student's competence and hireability, suggest an appropriate starting salary, and indicate the amount of mentoring they would be willing to offer the student. Both the female and male professors consistently judged the female student as less competent and less suitable to be hired than an identically credentialed male student. When the professors did offer a job to the female student, they offered her a lower salary and less career mentoring than they offered the men.<sup>9</sup> The pervasive gender bias revealed by this study is certainly not limited to academic science.

*AI:* Consider the story of Kim O'Grady. O'Grady was an accomplished consultant with considerable experience and a proven track record of successful engagements. He was so confident of the strength of his résumé that when he grew dissatisfied with the firm he was working for, he quit without first having another job lined up. When he started his job search, he was baffled that he was not getting any interviews, that is, until he added "Mr." before his name. After making this simple change he quickly landed a new job. He wrote about his experience in a Tumblr blog post, "How I Discovered Gender Discrimination," that has now gone viral.

Because of the gender stereotypes they hold, career gatekeepers tend to have low expectations about women's performance capabilities and potential. As a consequence, these stereotypes operate to negatively affect women's opportunities and advancement.<sup>10</sup> Too frequently, the mindset of these gatekeepers is that *this* job requires *these* characteristics, and women just don't have *these* characteristics.

Never mind what a woman's actual characteristics are. If the job doesn't fit the communal stereotype, a woman might not even have the chance to demonstrate her ability to do it. In 2005, the nonprofit organization Catalyst, which has as its goal creating more inclusive workplaces, surveyed 296 senior corporate executives (168 women and 128 men).<sup>11</sup> Catalyst asked these executives to rate the effectiveness of women and men on ten different leadership behaviors. Both the female and male executives rated women more effective at traditionally feminine tasks, such as caretaking, while rating men more effective at traditionally masculine tasks, such as leadership.<sup>12</sup>

*Andie:* I am often told that this or that organization would gladly have more women in leadership and management positions, but it doesn't have any women qualified for these jobs. I seriously doubt this ever to be true. More likely, the leaders of these organizations don't think that "women" are qualified, and therefore have not seriously evaluated the abilities of particular women in their organizations. I know qualified women in a variety of organizations all across the country who are consistently overlooked for advancement to positions for which they are clearly qualified. What is most heartbreaking for me is to watch these women grow cynical and resigned to their current positions after management has consistently failed to recognize their ambition, talent, and capability.

One of the most ironic situations I have personally encountered involved a female general counsel who had frequently expressed a concern that too few women in her medical services company were being promoted to important, executive-level positions. A friend of mine recommended that she talk with me. I visited the company, spent several hours with her, and presented a proposal for a workshop on gender bias for her senior management team—a workshop that had proven highly successful at several other companies. After our meeting, I never heard anything further from her. I asked my friend what had happened, and he told me she decided she needed a man to head the training program because a man would be more effective than a woman in presenting the case for greater participation by women in company leadership.

*(Continued)*

So here was a woman who was concerned that the men in the C-suite were not promoting enough women, but who believed that only a man could make the case that more women should be advanced in her company. When I first heard this, I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. I did realize, however, that if I had ever thought that the discriminatory operation of gender stereotypes was limited to men, I had been seriously wrong.

It is tempting to think that gender stereotypes will lose much of their discriminatory force when the current crop of business, professional, and scientific leaders retires and a younger, more open-minded group replaces them. Unfortunately, a recent survey makes clear that the ascendance of the millennial generation is not likely to do much to expand women's career opportunities.<sup>13</sup> The survey found a significant but unexpected relationship between age and attitude toward women in the workplace.<sup>14</sup> Younger male participants were more biased against women than were the older participants. The older the survey participant, the more comfortable he was in seeing women in traditionally male roles.<sup>15</sup> Men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four were the most hesitant about women in certain roles.<sup>16</sup> Fewer than half of these men were comfortable with women as U.S. senators, Fortune 500 executives, president of the United States, or engineers.<sup>17</sup> Given these findings, it would be a serious mistake to assume that millennials will move us closer to gender-neutral workplaces.

### “Benevolent” Biases

Many women work for male supervisors who treat them in what appear to be kind and considerate ways. This benevolent behavior is often shown through frequent expressions of concern for a woman's welfare, solicitousness as to her domestic responsibilities, and “extra” assistance with her job. Undoubtedly, people of goodwill are to be valued not avoided, but too often apparently kindly attitudes mask an underlying sexism. Such attitudes often come from a sense of paternalism, an assumption women need to be protected, directed, and assisted by a man when they are in the workplace.<sup>18</sup>

*AI:* Kelly, a senior manager at a large corporation based in New York City, told me that when she was first out of college she applied to be a flight attendant working out of New York City. The male interviewer said to her, “I would worry about a nice girl like you living alone in a dangerous city like New York.” She told him she was a native New Yorker, walked out of the interview, and enrolled in business school.

Supervisors with benevolently sexist attitudes often praise women highly for their performance but assign them to devalued projects. If supervisors think (consciously or unconsciously) that women are emotional, weak, and sensitive, they are likely to give them easy assignments, “protecting” them from the difficulties and struggles inherent in challenging, competitive work. This is *not* the kind of help you need.

A 2012 study of a New York law firm’s performance evaluations of its associates provides a classic illustration of benevolent sexism. The researchers found that the women received more positive comments (Excellent! Stellar! Terrific!) than the men did, but only 6 percent of the women, compared with 15 percent of the men, were mentioned as potential partner material.<sup>19</sup>

*AI:* Dara, a senior IT manager at a major manufacturing company, was about to roll out a new computer system for several departments and outside vendors. As the launch date approached, she ran a series of tests and concluded the system was not ready to go live. She delayed the start-up date and explained the reasons for doing so to her boss. She was shocked when he replied that he understood she needed more time to “get comfortable” with the rollout and that he would support the delay “until she felt ready.” She realized he believed she had delayed the launch because she lacked the confidence to go forward on schedule. Rather than pushing her to move forward as he might have done with a man, her boss dealt with her “sympathetically,” asking frequently if she needed more help. Dara later learned that after she had delayed the launch, her supervisor started making a series of personnel changes that weakened her status and authority.

The dangers a woman faces in a benevolently sexist environment can best be understood by looking at a normal career advancement path. Moving up depends upon your professional development: acquiring the knowledge, skills, and organizational savvy to be recognized as a person of competence, confidence, and potential. The only way you can acquire these traits is to be exposed to challenging work experiences that allow—and force—you to learn, develop, and prove yourself.

A challenging work experience is difficult, stimulating, and unfamiliar. It stretches your abilities and tests your determination. Undertaking such an experience helps you gain substantive knowledge and deeper insights into the complexities of your job. Experiences of this sort also help you gain self-confidence, which in turn encourages you to seek out and volunteer for even more challenging projects in the future. Not surprisingly, the frequency, quantity, variety, and difficulty of your work experiences are highly predictive of the pace and extent of your career advancement.<sup>20</sup> When you are engaged in a challenging project you are in the spotlight and your supervisors are watching closely. Therefore, these sorts of projects provide you the chance to demonstrate that you are ready to move up to the next rung of the career ladder.<sup>21</sup>

If, instead of giving you—or forcing you to take—challenging projects, your supervisors help you with your work or protect you from this sort of experience, you will never develop the skills, resilience, and confidence you need to realize your career aspirations. If you are excluded from high-profile projects that entail extensive travel or long hours, if you are given special breaks and a bit of extra help because you are a mother, if you are criticized less than comparably situated men for the same sort of job performance, and if you are encouraged not to stay late or take on extra work, guess who will lack the experience to be seriously considered when the time comes for the next round of promotions?

*Andie:* More than ten years ago at my current law firm, we found that at promotion time many women did not have the same depth and breadth of experience as did the men with the same years of legal experience. As a result, the men were getting promoted and the women were not. This was an unacceptable result so we changed the

*(Continued)*

process by which assignments were made. Each practice group was required to identify core competencies that lawyers are expected to have by the end of each year of practice. The objective was to be sure that all lawyers received the same types of assignments and development opportunities. Senior lawyers, most of whom were men, could no longer give the plum assignments to their favored male associates while giving the grunt projects and “easy stuff” to women.

It worked! In 2014, of those lawyers promoted to income partner, more than 50 percent were women and of those promoted to capital partner, close to 30 percent were women. This is a substantial change from where we were before we started this program, and it represents a better record of promoting women than most other large law firms have. But as I keep reminding myself, the change did not come about voluntarily; it required someone to build the business case for change and a commitment on the part of senior management to actually make those changes and enforce them.

All of this should be obvious enough: to advance in your career you need to develop broad and deep career-relevant skills, and to do this you need to push yourself and be pushed by your supervisors. You need more—not fewer—challenges at work. But if you are put on a pedestal, so to speak, because you have a mild and sensitive nature, you will not be exposed to the rough and tumble competitive struggles characteristic of high-pressure executive and professional lives. Therefore, you need to be wary of supervisors and career gatekeepers who exhibit respectful, caring, concerned, and protective attitudes, or who express a solicitous concern for your personal welfare. You need to be pushed, not protected; you need to be thrown into the game, not kept safe on the sidelines. Kindness shown toward you that is not also shown toward comparably situated men is sexism, plain and simple, and its consequences are anything but benevolent.

## The Goldilocks Dilemma

When a woman conforms to the most basic communal stereotypes—being warm, caring, and sensitive to others’ feelings—she will probably

be viewed as pleasant and likable but not particularly competent or a leader. On the other hand, if she acts contrary to these stereotypes by displaying agentic characteristics—forcefully advocating a point of view, single-mindedly pursuing a competitive objective, or exhibiting a fierce commitment to performance excellence—she is likely to face backlash and be viewed as competent but socially insensitive, “bitter, quarrelsome, selfish, deceitful, devious, and unlikable.”<sup>22</sup>

*Andie:* A personal experience might help illustrate just how difficult and insidious a problem is created by this tension between a woman’s need to be both agentic and communal. When I was thirteen or fourteen, I already knew I wanted to be a lawyer. My parents had one friend who was a lawyer, so they arranged for me to have lunch with him. He spent our entire meal telling me why I didn’t want to be a lawyer. He told me that there was a difference between “lawyers” and “lady lawyers.” Lawyers can be happy and successful, but lady lawyers can never be both. If I became a lawyer, no one would ever love me. I would never get married. I would never have a family. I would not have any friends.

What was going on? Why would this grown man say such things to a young girl? As I look back, I think he was, in a very clumsy way, trying to alert me to the dilemma we pose for women by expecting that they will need to balance their social and professional relationships. My parents’ friend saw the women lawyers he knew as having to choose between success and likability. I think he recognized that a woman who wants real career success and is willing to compete hard to achieve it runs the risk of social isolation. There are ways to avoid this result, which we discuss later in this book, but the point is that, whatever I thought of my lunch companion at the time, he was on to something and not just being a jerk.

The Goldilocks Dilemma is often referred to as a double bind, a condition that business and professional women know only too well: appearing too tough or too soft but rarely just right. We also refer to this as Too Hot/Too Cold/Rarely Just Right. Women obviously want to succeed in their careers, which generally requires them to behave agentially, but

as human beings they also want, perhaps even need, to be liked, which generally depends on behaving communally.<sup>23</sup> But either way there can be negative consequences. Women, thus, can feel they are damned if they do and damned if they don't. As a result, women will often try to appear less agentic so that they can be seen as more communal.<sup>24</sup> Defensive behavior of this sort can take several forms.<sup>25</sup> One of the most common is illustrated by a 2011 study of women at the Harvard Business School (HBS). Women and men start their studies at HBS with essentially equal academic and career achievements. Yet despite this rough comparability, the study found that women prepared more but participated less in class than men; at graduation they received significantly fewer academic honors than did the men; and after graduation, the women reported their HBS experiences to have been far less positive than did the men.<sup>26</sup>

In seeking an explanation of why women and men responded to the HBS experience in such different ways, Harvard found that two principal factors were adversely affecting women during their time at the business school. First, there was an obvious clannishness on the part of male professors and students that isolated the women. HBS took immediate steps to correct this problem. But Harvard also uncovered a far subtler and more intractable problem. It found that the women were “self-editing in the classroom to manage their out-of-classroom image[s].”<sup>27</sup> The women felt less comfortable participating in class discussions because of the penalties they believed they would face if they violated the traditional communal stereotypes. They were consciously trying not to appear forceful or aggressive in the classroom so they would not be disliked outside of class. Here were large numbers of extraordinarily talented women holding themselves back academically because they were worried they would not be viewed positively or socially accepted if they were seen as competing “too hard.” These women were trying to have it both ways: to succeed (a little less), but remain likable (a little more).

And, indeed, the behavior of the HBS women is entirely understandable if you think about how the exact same agentic behaviors are likely to be described when exhibited by a woman and a man:

- She's pushy; he's persuasive.
- She's bossy; he's a leader.

- She's a self-promoter, show off, and a braggart; he knows his own worth.
- She's abrasive; he's incisive.
- She's a harpy; he's tenacious.
- She's selfish; he's too busy to pitch in.
- She's aggressive and hostile; he's a go-getter.
- She's rude; he's direct and to the point.

*Al:* Dan told me about a recent board meeting at his condominium association. Tiffany, who had just been elected to the board, raised some of the same concerns Dan had raised at an earlier board meeting, although she did not know he had done so. The board president interrupted Tiffany and in a loud voice asked, "Why are you being so aggressive?" Tiffany tried to continue but the president interrupted her again, asking, "Is it your intention to come to every meeting and be so critical?"

At that point, Dan stood up and pointed out that Tiffany was only saying what he had said several meetings earlier and that her tone of voice was far less "aggressive" than the president's was. Dan stated that Tiffany was being businesslike and that it was refreshing to have a board member prepared to raise important issues in such a straightforward way. The board president asked Tiffany to continue and never again attempted to criticize her for being "aggressive."

When I think about Dan's story, I keep coming back to the fact that without Dan speaking up, it is unlikely that the board president would have backed down. A woman can always use male allies, but sometimes they are especially valuable in dealing with particularly difficult senior men.

Let's shift gears slightly and look at the Goldilocks Dilemma in another context: motherhood. Women with children face particularly severe career penalties. They are assumed to need to be available to their children at all times, and, therefore, are assumed to be less available for career demands than women without children or men (whether the men have children or not). But if women with children demonstrate that

they clearly *are* fully committed to their careers, they are assumed to be bad mothers.

*Al:* Andie and I have always both worked full time. When our daughter was growing up, we juggled our schedules so we could be home to have dinner as a family every night we were not traveling. In order to be able to spend evenings and weekends with her, we worked at home most evenings after she had gone to bed. And one of us was always present at our daughter's school and sporting events.

When our daughter was about eight years old, she came home from a friend's house and told us that her friend's mother had asked her, "What does your dad do for a living?" Our daughter answered, "He's a lawyer." Her friend's mother responded, "That's great." Our daughter expected to then be asked, "What does your mom do for a living?" But, when she wasn't, she proudly volunteered, "My mom's a lawyer too." But she did not get the same response she had about her father. Instead, her friend's mother asked her in a very sympathetic tone, "How does it feel to be raised by a nanny?"

Women with children and a strong commitment to their careers are presumed to be less warm, less likable, and more hostile than similarly committed women without children. Because of this stereotype, working mothers often face an organizational backlash: they are less likely to be hired and more likely to be offered lower salaries than their childless female coworkers, despite being acknowledged to be equally competent.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, one well-known 2005 study found that mothers were 79 percent less likely to be hired, 100 percent less likely to be promoted, offered an average of \$11,000 less in salary, and held to higher performance and punctuality standards than women without children.<sup>29</sup>

*Andie:* When I joined my current law firm, our daughter was two years old. Shortly after I got there, I mentioned something in passing about her to a partner I was working with. After that, he started

(Continued)

leaving voicemail messages asking in a condescending tone whether I could talk about our project at 5 p.m.—if I’d “still be around.” I never made myself available at 5:00, but I always offered to talk to him that same night any time after 6 p.m., or to meet with him any time after 6 a.m. the next morning. He never took me up on any of my suggested meeting times. He wasn’t interested in meeting, only in showing his commitment and what he assumed was my lack of it. When it became apparent to him that I was committed to both my child and my career, he stopped asking to talk at 5 p.m. Many years later, I mentioned this experience to him in the context of a gender diversity discussion. He told me that this never would have happened if he had known at the time how hard I worked. Because I was a mother, he had assumed I was not committed to my career. He was just doing his job of “identifying uncommitted members of the project team.”

Having a career and raising children at the same time requires resources, assistance, and careful planning under the best of circumstances. We discuss dealing with these challenges in chapter 10, “Work and the Rest of Your Life.” The point we want to make here is that working mothers, and particularly mothers who are stereotypically seen as working by “choice”—women who have successful working husbands—not only must perform a high-wire juggling act to raise their children *and* advance in their careers, but they must find ways to cope with the biases that result from the stereotypes about mothers with careers.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Figure out your own biases. Before you can effectively cope with other people’s gender stereotypes, you need to know your own. Take the Implicit Association Test (IAT) at Harvard University’s Project Implicit webpage: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>.

- You should also learn the extent of your feminine and masculine traits by taking the Bem Sex Role Inventory test at

<http://garote.bdmonkeys.net/bsri.html>. The results will show the relative strengths of your communal and agentic traits—and which ones you will need to strengthen—because both sets of traits are important in advancing in your career.

- Be on the lookout for benevolent sexism. Solicitous and patronizing behavior can be just as hurtful to your career as overt negative bias. Demand challenging assignments; refuse special help or privileges; and if your male colleagues are traveling or working late, you should be traveling and working late too.

- Likability is important, and as we stress throughout this book; you need to develop attuned gender communication skills that encourage it. But likability can be highly overrated. There are great advantages if the people you work with like you, but if they don't, that's not the end of the world, much less your career.