

‘...a well-organised, well-thought-out call to action’ *Publishers Weekly*

# BREAKING THROUGH BIAS

SECOND EDITION



**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*

“Of the structural barriers to women’s advancement in the workplace, none seem more intractable than gender stereotypes held by career gatekeepers, often unconsciously. *Breaking Through Bias* is an indispensable guide to overcoming these barriers—a practical system of ‘attuned gender communication’ enabling women to achieve their career goals while simultaneously transforming American organizations. This is an important book for women, and for all those who seek to create a better workplace.”

—**Frederick M. Lawrence, Secretary and CEO,  
The Phi Beta Kappa Society, Distinguished Lecturer in  
Law, Georgetown University Law Center**

“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, Former 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, Former Chairman & CEO,  
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 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, Global Vice President Enterprise Accounts CPG & LS, 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**



# Breaking Through Bias

Communication Techniques for Women to  
Succeed at Work

Second Edition

ANDREA S. KRAMER  
ALTON B. HARRIS



N I C H O L A S   B R E A L E Y  
P U B L I S H I N G

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BOSTON • LONDON

First edition published by Bibliomotion, Inc., in 2016  
This edition published in 2020 by Nicholas Brealey Publishing  
An imprint of John Murray Press

A Hachette company

25 24 23 22 21 20 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020931277

ISBN 978-1-5293-1729-9

US eBook ISBN 978-1-5293-1732-9

UK eBook ISBN 978-1-529-31731-2

Printed and bound in the United States of America

John Murray Press policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable, and recyclable products and made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

John Murray Press Ltd  
Carmelite House  
50 Victoria Embankment  
London EC4Y 0DZ  
Tel: 020 3122 6000

Nicholas Brealey Publishing  
Hachette Book Group  
53 State Street  
Boston, MA 02109, USA  
Tel: (617) 523 3801

[www.nbuspublishing.com](http://www.nbuspublishing.com)

*For Cynthia, whose persistence, brilliance, and astonishing accomplishments remain a continuing inspiration to us.*





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## ANDIE'S PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

Since the first edition of this book was published, my husband, Al, and I have watched dramatic changes—some positive, some negative—in the discussions about and treatment of women in gender-biased workplaces. One area where there has been little improvement is in the critical mass of women moving into the leadership ranks of workplaces in America and around the world. This second edition reflects our efforts to include changes since the first edition was published, to update the information and advice we provide throughout the book, and to refine and modify some of the communication techniques to deal with today's workplaces.

My journey to helping women succeed in gendered workplaces began many years ago. When I graduated from law school I was fortunate to have a number of job offers, but two in particular interested me. One was from a large and highly prestigious law firm; the other was from a small, three-year-old firm with only seven lawyers, hardly any reputation, and no national prestige. The large firm promised me a place in a prominent, highly respected, and nationally recognized tax department; the opportunity to earn a great deal of money; and immediate personal and professional status. At the small firm I would be the only tax lawyer but the partners told me they would give me whatever resources and support I needed and send me to whatever classes I thought would be useful. Although the partners had great hopes for the future, they made it clear that the firm's prospects were not certain. I was young, undoubtedly foolish, and certainly without fear of failure; I accepted the small firm's job offer.

The decision was right for me. I spent almost 15 years at that firm and two characteristics are most memorable. First, the partners kept all of their promises to me, and I learned how to be a real lawyer. I became an equity partner, brought in my own clients, and chaired the firm's tax group, which had seven lawyers in it by the time I left.

Second, and much more importantly, my being a woman had nothing to do with my professional development or advancement. I worked with a group of senior lawyers, all of whom were men, not one of whom, not once, not even for an instant, made me feel that being a woman made a whit of difference to my career opportunities, acceptance into the senior leadership ranks, or my becoming a great lawyer. Growing as a lawyer is never smooth sailing, but my being a woman was never the cause of the rough waters I encountered.

Because of the opportunities that firm gave me, the time came when I needed the resources of a much bigger law firm to meet the needs of my clients. When I left, I was apprehensive. I expected many differences, but the most disturbing one I encountered was the one I least expected: gender bias. At my new firm—and at all of the other very large law firms and businesses I interacted with—I saw obstacles in the way of women's career paths. I saw inconsistencies in the opportunities made available to women as opposed to men, and I found unfair demands placed on fabulous women trying to become good lawyers while they simultaneously raised children.

It all reminded me of the career advice I received in my teens. I was told then that there is a difference between being a "lawyer" and a "lady lawyer." Lawyers could be successful and happy; lady lawyers could never be both. Well, I was a lawyer (a successful one at that), I was a lady, and I was happy. I knew that other women could be just as successful and happy as I was. I was damned if I was going to sit back and watch law firms and other professional and business organizations discriminate against women; force them to choose between success and happiness; or hinder their likelihood of attaining successful, satisfying careers.

Coming face-to-face with the reality of gender bias after not seeing it at the start of my career taught me several things. First, I learned that

there are truly gender-neutral workplaces, but these are a precious few. By and large, we live in a society of gendered workplaces, where men run most organizations and make most of the career advancement decisions. As a result, those career decisions are often affected by gender bias (conscious and unconscious).

Second, I learned that if women are going to advance as we aspire to—and all of the research shows that young women are just as ambitious as young men, if not more so—we cannot passively accept the current gender-skewed environment. In addition, we cannot wait for our workplaces to become gender-neutral. Women need to recognize and purposefully counter the gender stereotypes and biases present in our workplaces. Women can use communication techniques to overcome or avoid gender bias.

Third, I realized that successful women deal with gender stereotypes through nuanced and carefully honed communication skills. Al and I call these skills “attuned gender communication,” and these techniques remain the subject of this book’s second edition.

Close to 30 years ago, I made a commitment to myself to do everything in my power to help other women be successful *and* happy in their careers—so they might come as close as possible to experiencing the gender-neutral path I had been lucky enough to follow when I first started my career. I have been trying to make good on that commitment ever since.

Since joining my current law firm, I founded its Gender Diversity Committee, launched its LGBT Committee, and served on both its Management Committee and Compensation Committee. I am pleased to have participated in many of its efforts to successfully increase gender diversity and inclusion. We’ve been named one of the best law firms for women, a top 10 female- and family-friendly firm, and one of the 10 best Big Law firms for female attorneys. We exceed industry averages in the advancement and promotion of women into our leadership ranks, and our market-leading policies and procedures have been adopted and followed by other professional organizations. I’m very proud of my firm, my personal contributions to its gender diversity efforts, and the ways in which my female colleagues have successfully advanced in their careers.

In the early 2000s, I began to speak publicly about how women can confront the difficulties they face in their careers because of gender bias. I have spoken on this topic before hundreds of groups; written hundreds of articles, blog posts, and guides; and led more than a hundred workshops aimed at helping women advance in their careers. In 2005, I cofounded the Women's Leadership and Mentoring Alliance (WLMA), a not-for-profit corporation that provides a national mentorship program for women across industries and professions, and I continue to serve as WLMA's board chair.

Al and I wrote the first edition of this book after I realized that my techniques for overcoming gender stereotypes and bias had struck a chord. We knew that Al's male perspective was invaluable and provided a unique addition to my views. In combining social science research, stories from women we have mentored and interviewed, as well as our own experiences and perspectives, we provide women and men with a clearer understanding of the operation of gender stereotypes and bias.

In collaborating again on this second edition, Al and I hope to continue to offer helpful and immediately actionable advice about ways in which women can communicate to avoid or overcome the career-disrupting effects of stereotypes and bias. We both believe that women can take control of their own careers in gender-biased workplaces and achieve the success and satisfaction they desire and to which they are entitled. Women do not need to wait until their organizations become more gender neutral. With this second edition, we update and expand communication tools women can use to ensure that gender bias does not prevent them from going as far and as fast in their careers as their talents will allow.

Andie Kramer  
Chicago, IL

## AL'S PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

I was a founding partner of that small law firm where Andie started her career. I am proud that we were able to give her the bias-free opportunities and support she needed to develop into the superb and successful lawyer she is today. Andie's experience at our firm, however, is not the whole story. In early 2015, after growing to well over 100 lawyers, that law firm merged with a much larger national law firm. Sometime before that merger, I began to reflect on our history and consider what we had done right and what we had done wrong. We had consciously tried to create a workplace that would allow women and men to thrive equally. Nevertheless, although many women, including Andie, did thrive and succeed marvelously, there had been serious disparities in the career achievements of our women and our men. We had hired women and men in almost equal numbers, but we had lost far more women than men. By the time we merged, a mere 15 percent of our top partnership rank were women. What had gone wrong? Why weren't the women in our firm staying with their careers as long as the men or being elevated to equity partner as frequently as the men?

Most certainly it was not because our female attorneys lacked the talent or ambition of our male attorneys; these women were without exception not only bright and well trained, but enthusiastic about practicing law and committed to having long and successful careers. After several years, too many of these fabulously talented women would leave. Sometimes, they left for more prestigious positions, but as I later learned, many left because they felt a lack of tangible career satisfaction and success.



They believed they had little support or career-enhancing opportunities, they interacted with few female role models, and they experienced a sense of being excluded from the ingroup. In other words, women left because they did not have the same positive career experience as their male counterparts.

Our failure to retain and advance women on a basis comparable to men was hardly unique. Rather, it reflected a broader national pattern in the legal profession and the business world generally. *I always thought* we were different; *I always thought* women were not disadvantaged; and *I always thought* we were a place where each of our attorneys could find happiness and career success. I was wrong on all counts.

As I reflected on our firm's failure to become a place of true gender equality, I became convinced that our problem lay in the fact that our workplace—just like the workplaces in most other businesses throughout the United States—was gendered. Gendered workplaces are led and dominated by men and structured to expect conformity with masculine norms, values, and expectations. In gendered workplaces, two powerful yet generally (but not always) implicit or unconscious biases create serious obstacles to women's advancement into senior leadership: affinity bias and gender bias. Affinity bias is the instinctive preference to associate with and advocate for people who are similar to oneself, so a man may decide to support and promote a man because they "think" the same way. Gender bias—the stereotype-driven expectation that men will be superior to women when facing career challenges—may prevent a man in leadership from considering offering a career-enhancing project to a woman. As a result of these biases, often (but not always) without consciously discriminatory intent, women face hurdles, potholes, and dangerous curves on their career paths not on men's paths.

I now realize that there were a great many things our firm should have done—and that modern organizations can do now—to clear these discriminatory obstacles from women's career paths. I also realize, as a result of working with Andie and many other talented women who have successfully moved into senior leadership positions, that there are

a great many things women can do for themselves to avoid or overcome the discriminatory consequences of affinity and gender biases. With the right information, tools, and techniques, ambitious, talented, hardworking women can do much to end the shameful disparity in women's and men's career achievements. Women do not need to wait for gendered workplaces to become gender neutral, nor do they need to start acting more like men. Women, just as they are, with the right information and tools can claim their rightful seats at the leadership table and speak with voices that will be acknowledged, listened to, and respected.

This brings me to the reasons I originally wrote this book with Andie and why we have updated it together for this second edition.

First, the bias-driven dynamics of gendered workplaces cause high-potential, once-eager women to drop out of their careers or choose to move to less intense, less interesting, and less financially rewarding positions. They often do this because they find their professional lives unfulfilling, frustrating, or oppressive. Many women are not prepared for these dynamics, much less how to navigate them successfully. I believe, however, that with an understanding of affinity and gender bias, women can transform these frustrating, negative dynamics into positive work experiences. With concrete, effective, practical advice about how to cope with these discriminatory obstacles, women can achieve full and satisfying careers. I have written and revised this book with Andie to provide women with that information and advice.

My second reason is that women can benefit from a male perspective on what women can and should do to achieve career success. While Andie and I share similar views about how women can deal with affinity and gender biases, our views are not identical. By bringing our perspectives together, we hope women will gain a clearer picture of how workplaces look from both a female and a male point of view. Moreover, I hope that our dual perspectives will provide women with original, practical, and effective advice to aid them in advancing in their careers.

My third reason is that most senior men don't realize how much harder it is for a woman to advance in a career than it is for men. Too

many men are, *just as I was*, convinced they are totally without bias and that their organizations are perfect meritocracies. They are wrong on both counts. This book is obviously for women: it is addressed to women, talks about problems that are unique to women, and offers communication strategies and techniques tailored specifically for women. But I believe that men—particularly men in senior leadership positions—also need to read this book. They need to read it to understand how and why affinity and gender biases discriminate against women as they compete with men for career advancement. They need to read this book to recognize that their own unconscious biases are often directly contrary to their conscious beliefs and values. They need to read this book to realize how important it is to become active participants in the effort to diversify their organizations' senior leadership. Men need to offer a helping hand to the women with whom they work; to mentor and sponsor the women around them; and to make sure the women who work for them are challenged, coached, trained, encouraged, compensated, and promoted in the same way and to the same extent as men. Thus, my hope is that men will read this book and recognize the need to increase the number of women leaders in their own organizations.

The final reason is for our daughter, Cynthia. She is an incredibly talented, ambitious, and personable young woman. At the time this book was first published, she was in medical school and firmly believed the world was a meritocracy, that women and men were equal not only in their abilities but also in their opportunities, and that nothing would hold her back in her medical career except her own shortcomings and mistakes. This book was originally intended in part as a gift to Cynthia of the advice I believed she would need when she found that the world is not a meritocracy, that women's and men's career opportunities are not equal, and that her career could be impeded for reasons that had nothing to do with her talent but everything to do with her being a woman. She is now an MD, has seen the working world in all its unfairness and absurdity, and has used much of the advice we offer in this book to advance successfully despite such biases and unfairness. This second edition is for

Cynthia as well. In many ways, her continuing career success has been her gift to us; to see so much of what Andie and I have tried to convey put to work and to make a real, concrete difference. There cannot be a better reason to have written and revised this book than that.

Al Harris  
Chicago, IL



# INTRODUCTION TO SECOND EDITION

There is a wide disparity in women's and men's career achievements. This book is about how you as a woman with—or about to begin—a career can avoid falling victim to this disparity. It is about how you—right now, just the way you are—can advance as far and as fast as your talent, hard work, and commitment will take you. Achieving such success depends on your understanding of the nature, causes, and operation of gender stereotypes; how they foster biases; and how these biases operate to hold women back. It also depends on your willingness to use the communication techniques that will allow you to avoid or overcome these biases. Before jumping directly into these matters, let's look closely at the extent of the persistent and vexing disparities between women's and men's representation in senior leadership.

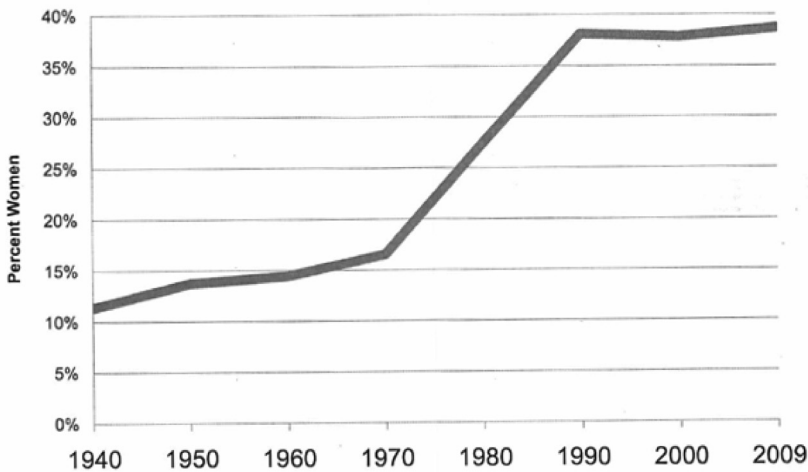
## Disparities in Women's and Men's Career Achievements

In corporate America, women make up 48 percent of entry-level career employees but only 38 percent of first-tier managers, 34 percent of senior managers, 30 percent of vice presidents, 26 percent of senior vice presidents, and 21 percent of executives in the C-suite.<sup>1</sup> In Fortune 500 companies, women make up only 9.5 percent of the top earners,<sup>2</sup> constitute only 12.5 percent of CFOs,<sup>3</sup> only 6.6 percent of CEOs,<sup>4</sup> and only 22.5 percent of board members.<sup>5</sup> Outside of corporate America, women fare no better. They make up 47 percent of law firm associates but only 20 percent

of equity partners.<sup>6</sup> Women are over 50 percent of medical students<sup>7</sup> but only 25 percent of full professors, 18 percent of department chairs, and 16 percent of deans at medical schools.<sup>8</sup> Women are just 27 percent of tenure track professors at four-year colleges and universities,<sup>9</sup> despite making up 54 percent of full-time students.<sup>10</sup> With respect to political office, women make up only 24 percent of the members of the US House of Representatives, 23 percent of US senators, 28 percent of state legislators, 18 percent of state governors, and 23 percent of the mayors of the 100 largest American cities.<sup>11</sup> Of the 250 top-grossing Hollywood films of 2017, women made up just 18 percent of the directors, executive producers, producers, writers, cinematographers, and editors.<sup>12</sup>

Many more similar statistics are available, but the point should be clear enough: women are not moving into senior leadership positions in business, the professions, academia, government, and entertainment in numbers anywhere near comparable to men. And discouragingly, women have made virtually no progress in changing this situation since the 1990s. As this graph from the US Census Bureau dramatically

**Percentage of Managers Who Are Women:  
1940-2009**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, decennial census 1940 to 2000, 2009 American Community

illustrates, between 1970 and 1990 women made steady and rapid progress, increasing their representation among corporate managers from about 16 percent to more than 35 percent. Since then, however, women's progress has been nonexistent.<sup>13</sup>

The US Census Bureau graph stops at 2009, but the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that things had not significantly improved by 2016,<sup>14</sup> and the 2019 LeanIn and McKinsey study on women in the workplace makes clear that there has been no progress since then.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, as LeanIn and McKinsey concluded in their 2018 report, "Progress isn't just slow. It's stalled."<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps equally troubling as women's lack of increased representation in senior leadership ranks is the fact that when women do gain access to those ranks, they are largely concentrated in "feminized" positions such as human resources. And regardless of the type of management position they hold, women are paid less than men in similar positions.<sup>17</sup>

### *Why the Achievement Disparity?*

The difference in women's and men's career achievements is often explained by claiming that women prefer to spend time with their children rather than pursuing career success; they don't ask (or don't want) to move up to senior leadership positions; and they lack the ambition, confidence, and core competencies needed to successfully compete against men. These claims, however, are all patently false.

A growing body of research makes clear that women are just as talented, ambitious, and committed to career advancement as men. For example, a 2017 study by the Boston Consulting Group found "on average, women entered the workforce with the same—or higher—levels of ambition as men, in terms of their desire to hold leadership positions or be promoted. . . . [I]t is also unequivocal: having children does not affect women's desire to lead. The ambition levels of women with children and women without children track each other almost exactly over time."<sup>18</sup> Moreover, recent psychological research finds that "one's sex has little



or no bearing on personality, cognition and leadership.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, as a review of hundreds of studies on cognitive performance (such as math ability), personality and social behaviors (such as leadership), and psychological well-being (such as self-esteem) found, there are more similarities than differences between men and women.<sup>20</sup>

Writing in the *Harvard Business Review*, Catherine Tinsley and Robin Ely conclude that “on average, the sexes are far more similar in their inclinations, attitudes, and skills than popular opinion would have us believe. [There are] sex differences in various settings, including the workplace—but those differences are not rooted in fixed gender traits. Rather, they stem from organizational structures, company practices, and patterns of interaction that position men and women differently, creating systematically different experiences for them.”<sup>21</sup> This is confirmed by a 2011 report by Catalyst which found that even when women do everything they are told to do to get ahead, they still fail to advance as far and as fast as men.<sup>22</sup> In other words, women with high ambition, terrific abilities, can-do attitudes, and appropriate behavioral characteristics are systematically disadvantaged in relation to men in their pursuit of career advancement.

So what is the problem? Why are women at such a disadvantage in comparison to men when it comes to career achievement? A recent American Bar Association (ABA) report on why experienced women lawyers leave the legal profession provides a key insight. This ABA report concludes, “It is clear that women lawyers on average do not advance along the same trajectory as men,” for they “have far less access to the building blocks for success than men.”<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the ABA found that “women report being four to eight times more likely to be overlooked for advancement, denied a salary increase or bonus, treated as a token representative for diversity, lack access to business development opportunities, perceived as less committed to their career, and lack access to sponsors.” Thus, women’s *experience* in the pursuit of career success in large law firms is very different from that of their male counterparts. Our research makes clear that this sharply differentiated workplace experience of

women and men is also found in virtually all other professions, business settings, academia, and politics.<sup>24</sup>

## Gender Bias

The question is: what accounts for women's and men's very different workplace experiences and their divergent representation in senior leadership? The answer to that question is the focus of this book: pervasive, persistent gender stereotypes and the biases that flow from them. We first discuss what these stereotypes and biases are, why they are most pronounced in workplaces led and dominated by men with decidedly masculine cultures, and how these stereotypes and biases operate to create obstacles to women's career advancement. Most importantly, we then go on to spell out in detail the concrete, practical, effective steps women can take to avoid or overcome these discriminatory obstacles. In other words, this book is about the myriad ways in which gender stereotypes and their ensuing biases hold women back and how women can break through these biases to achieve career success *and* satisfaction.

### *Implicit Gender Bias*

A person holds an implicit gender bias when she or he unconsciously—that is, without any conscious awareness—assumes, expects, or anticipates that men will be better than women at critical workplace tasks, that women are better at and have a greater responsibility for childcare than men, that women and men are best suited for different societal roles, and that men should play leadership roles and women should play supporting roles. Implicit gender bias has numerous variants: motherhood bias (mothers pursuing careers are hurting their small children), self-limiting bias (women's assumption that certain careers, positions, and tasks are not appropriate for women), agentic bias (discomfort with women who do not conform to traditional feminine behavior norms), negative

bias (communal women are not cut out for leadership roles), and affinity bias (a preference for associating with and supporting people who are like you).

Implicit gender bias and its variants affect people's actions, decisions, and judgments. They influence how people relate to women and men, decide what assignments and projects to give them, evaluate their performance, and provide them with feedback. Although implicit gender bias and its variants adversely affect women's career advancement, these concepts do not involve bad intentions or malevolent motivations. Implicit biases result not from consciously held beliefs, but from deep-seated, long-established stereotypes we have acquired simply by growing up in this society and being exposed to contemporary media, entertainment, politics, and education.

### *Explicit Gender Bias*

In writing the first edition of this book, we focused almost exclusively on implicit gender bias. We assumed that explicit gender bias—the open, intentional, aggressive, and hostile expression of sexist and misogynistic views<sup>25</sup>—was so socially unacceptable that it did not pose a serious threat to women's careers. While that assumption may have been justified in late 2015 when we submitted our manuscript, Donald Trump's presidential campaign and election have made it apparent that that assumption is no longer justified. Beginning with Trump's campaign, the media has been flooded with crude, angry, and mean-spirited criticisms of women. Indeed, explicit gender bias has now become so prevalent that we are convinced it poses a real and very severe threat to women's career advancement. Our change of heart is nicely captured by Cheryl Strayed when she writes:

I've never been under the illusion that sexism had vanished, [but] before Trump was elected there was a history-lesson element to the stories I told of my first consciousness about what it meant to be female in America, a quality that had made the sexism I

experienced as a girl seem antiquated and nearly extinct. The message was: *This is the way it used to be! Isn't that amazing?* In witnessing the presidential campaign and Trump's eventual election, I've concluded that I had it wrong. This isn't how it used to be. It is the way it is . . . . This election wasn't simply a political contest. It was a referendum on how much America still hates [strong, ambitious] women.<sup>26</sup>

Explicit gender bias exists on a continuum of discriminatory gender-specific behaviors that includes implicit gender bias, incivility to and microaggressions against women, inappropriate sexual comments, unwelcomed touching, actionable sexual harassment, and criminal sexual assault. As we wrote in the *Harvard Business Review*, because these discriminatory behaviors are all related and interconnected, they need to be “addressed collectively, because sexual harassment [and other forms of explicit gender bias are] far more likely in organizations that experience offenses on the ‘less severe’ end of the spectrum than in those that don’t.”<sup>27</sup> As a consequence, this book's continuing focus on implicit gender bias remains highly relevant. Misogynistic criticism of women striving to achieve true gender equality is tolerated only when there is a pervasive, unconscious assumption that women are somehow less capable, less qualified, and less entitled to play leadership roles than men. Therefore, to effectively attack such explicit gender bias, implicit gender bias must also be attacked. And that, of course, is precisely the objective of this book.

## Approach

Given the overwhelming evidence of the adverse career consequences for women of gender bias, it might be thought appropriate for us to focus all our attention on the legal and institutional reforms needed to rid American workplaces of the discriminatory consequences of such bias. Unquestionably, this reform is necessary, and there are many sensible

and persuasive advocates working toward that goal.<sup>28</sup> In fact, in our book *It's Not You, It's the Workplace*, we present a comprehensive program for achieving true gender diversity in organizations' senior leadership ranks. Our focus in this book, however, remains on what women can do on their own *right now, today*, to improve their career prospects *despite* the presence of gender bias. Ambitious, talented women should not have to wait for large-scale structural or organizational changes to achieve career success. Therefore, our focus is on the great many things women can do *now* to avoid or overcome the discriminatory consequences of gender bias. Accordingly, we lay out tools and techniques women can use *despite gender bias* to make their own careers more successful, satisfying, and sustainable. Effective use of these tools and techniques depends on women's ability to identify the stereotypes and biases held by the people who maintain the checkpoints and gatehouses on their career paths. By managing the ways in which women interact with their career gatekeepers—managing the impressions they have through what we call attuned gender communication—women can avoid, disarm, or overcome—break through—gender bias.

It's important to note that the communication techniques we present in this book have nothing to do with women learning to act more like men. We believe women are just fine the way they are. Women's attitudes, abilities, and behaviors are as suitable for the boardroom as they are for the nursery. Consequently, we make no attempt to teach women to be different from the way they are now. Our goal is to help women become better at identifying the presence of gender stereotypes, more sensitive to how these stereotypes foster gender biases, and more skillful at managing the impressions they make in order to avoid or overcome these biases. With these abilities, women can take control of their own careers and advance on terms comparable to those of the men with whom they work and compete.

Many self-help books for women argue that women are responsible for their failure to advance in the workplace because of the way they speak. These books argue that women are holding themselves back because their speech patterns are either too assertive or not assertive

enough. Either way, these books argue that women need in some way to be fixed in order to succeed in their careers.

Again, we want to be very clear that we don't think women need to be fixed. We agree with linguist Cecilia Ford that a negative response to a woman when she speaks is "based first and foremost on the fact that she is speaking from a woman's body: speaking not 'like' a woman but 'as' a woman . . . [She is] penalized because she is *speaking while being a woman*."<sup>29</sup> In other words, the problem is not *the way women speak* but that women are speaking while being women. The reason this is a problem is because of the stereotypes their audience ascribes to them simply because they are women. The objective, therefore, is not for women to be fixed so they communicate more "like" someone else; rather, the objective is for women to communicate in such a way that they can avoid or overcome the discriminatory consequences of these stereotypes. This means providing women with tools and techniques to allow them to communicate—using their voice, posture, movement, words, and attitudes—in such a way that they are listened to; seen as competent, confident, socially sensitive leaders; and not penalized for being women. In other words, to master attuned gender communication.

## Attuned Gender Communication and Impression Management

Attuned gender communication involves four elements:

1. The cultivation and active use of the key attitudes needed for career success: grit, a positive perspective on your abilities, a coping sense of humor, and a confident self-image.
2. A high degree of self-awareness or self-monitoring.
3. A keen awareness of the impressions you are making on the people with whom you deal in your career.
4. An ability to use a variety of communication techniques to manage and change those impressions in order to avoid or overcome

the biases arising from the gender stereotypes that are so pervasive in gendered workplaces.

You communicate through spoken and written words, but you also communicate through your attitudes, facial expressions, gestures, postures, touches, use of personal space, dress, punctuality, responsiveness, and so on. You communicate with every aspect of your behavior, and the whole of your behavior shapes everything other people think of you, from their first impression of you to your ability to lead, influence, inspire, and motivate them. Therefore, the heart of attuned gender communication is managing the impressions you make by controlling the totality of your behavior. By managing how and what you communicate, you can shape the impressions other people have of you. This is hardly a new concept. Philosopher and historian David Hume made the point in the 1770s:

An orator addresses himself to a particular audience, and must have a regard to their particular genius, interests, opinions, passions, and prejudices; otherwise he hopes in vain to govern their resolutions, and inflame their affections. Should they ever have entertained some prepossessions against him, however unreasonable, he must not overlook this disadvantage; but, before he enters upon the subject, must endeavor to conciliate their affection, and acquire their good graces.<sup>30</sup>

If we replaced “orator” with “woman in a business situation” and modernized Hume’s language, we have the essence of attuned gender communication in two sentences.

## Our Audience

This book is addressed to talented, ambitious women who are prepared to compete vigorously for career advancement and don’t want to be held

back simply because they are women. In virtually every segment of our economy, and certainly in every traditionally male segment, the playing field for career advancement is decidedly tilted against women. Women's success depends on their being able to find ways to level this playing field. Attuned gender communication involves a series of practical, real-world communication techniques that women can use to do this. Moreover, it is important to recognize that by working for their individual advancement, women can do a great deal to positively affect the organizational changes that will make it increasingly easier for other women to achieve *their* career success.

### *Men*

Throughout this book, we address our comments and advice to women. It would be a great mistake, however, for men to think this book is not relevant for them. Men, particularly men who play senior leadership roles in business and the professions, most definitely should read this book. Unfortunately, most men believe that they are free of biases against women and that the organizations in which they work treat women and men equally. By reading this book, men will quickly realize that both of these beliefs are false and that it is far harder for women to advance in their careers than it is for men. The importance of such a realization lies in the fact that when men become aware of the extent and consequences of gender bias, they also become aware of the importance of their full participation in diversity and inclusion.<sup>31</sup> We also believe that if senior-level men read this book, they are likely to become active mentors and sponsors of women, call out their colleagues who behave in biased and exclusionary ways, and support initiatives to ensure that women receive a fair shot at getting to the top. The more men become aware of how much work needs to be done to achieve gender equality, why achieving such equality is so important, and how hard it is to do, the easier it will become for women to advance in their careers.



## What Is to Follow

This book is divided into four parts. In part I, “Understanding Gender Stereotypes,” we discuss the common gender stereotypes that both sexes have about women, men, families, career, and leadership. We explain why these stereotypes are at the root of the disparity in career achievement between women and men, and we discuss how they operate as scripts for discriminatory behavior. We explore why women so often think stereotypically about themselves, their careers, and their families and why women who buy into these stereotypes accept career-limiting roles. We also specifically address explicit gender bias through an examination of the consequences of Trump’s public misogynistic behavior and the revelations resulting from the #MeToo movement.

In part II, “Conversations with Yourself,” we address the conversations you, as a woman, need to have with yourself about yourself and your career. These conversations are about key career attitudes: grit, mind-set, humor, and self-image, and the importance of managing the impressions you make as you interact with others. These are conversations about how you, like Hume’s orator, can win the “affection” of the people with whom you are dealing and “acquire their good graces.”

Part III, “Conversations with Others,” is about how you can effectively communicate with the people with whom you deal in your work life. Your communication must be designed to make an impression of competence, confidence, and social sensitivity. It should avoid impressions that trigger or reinforce hurtful gender stereotypes. We address what is commonly called women’s double bind: the adverse career consequences women often suffer whether they behave communally—being seen as likable but not a leader—or agentically—being seen as competent but not likable. We refer to this double bind as the Goldilocks Dilemma: women’s risk of appearing to be too soft or too hard but rarely as just right.

In part IV, “Communicating in Difficult Situations,” we examine in several chapters how you can effectively advocate for yourself without running afoul of the common expectation that women should be

modest and not self-promoting. We end with a chapter focused on the key choices in your life away from work that play a critical role in your ability to maintain the career commitment that is essential to success. We discuss why “work-life balance” and “having it all” are gender stereotypes that will not help you achieve satisfaction either in your career or in the other aspects of your life. We also explain the importance of sensibly choosing what you actually want to have in your life.



PART I

Understanding  
Gender Stereotypes



## Chapter 1

# The Elephant in the Room

**I**N THE INTRODUCTION, WE DISCUSSED the wide and persistent gap between women’s and men’s overall career achievements. We also made clear that this gap is not due to women being less ambitious, competent, or committed to their careers than men. Indeed, the important takeaway is that gender has little or no bearing on leadership ability, career ambition, or commitment.<sup>1</sup> Another misconception about the reason for the achievement gap is because of rigid workplace practices. It is often argued that if American workplaces demanded less “face time,” allowed more flextime, permitted more telecommuting, provided more generous paid maternity leave, and created more welcoming reentry programs, women would advance in their careers in a manner comparable to men.

Although these (and other) structural workplace changes are sensible, desirable, and much needed, we seriously doubt that—by themselves—they would do much to end the disparity in women’s and men’s career achievements. The reason is that the fundamental phenomenon holding women back is not structural but psychological: the elephant in the room of the disparity in women’s and men’s career achievement is gender bias. This bias flows from the multitude of stereotypes that the people controlling women’s careers hold about women, men, families, competitiveness, ambition, commitment, and leadership. Unless we recognize the pervasiveness of these stereotypes and find ways to avoid or overcome the

biases that flow from them, women will continue to encounter serious obstacles to their career advancement regardless of much-needed structural changes that should be made to workplace practices.

## Gender Bias

Gender bias is manifested in the systematic depreciation of women's competence in relation to men's. Gender bias can be explicit—consciously motivated, open, and hostile disparagement of women—or implicit—unconsciously motivated, even at odds with a person's strongly held conscious beliefs. We address explicit gender bias in [chapter 3](#). In this chapter, we focus exclusively on implicit gender bias. Implicit bias is the direct result of the stereotypes people exhibiting such bias hold; therefore, we need to carefully examine those stereotypes.

## Gender Stereotypes

Stereotypes are reflexive, automatic, unconscious beliefs, expectations, and preconceptions about the capacities, behavior, and characteristics of various sorts of people. The stereotypes about women and men are based on inescapable biological and physiological characteristics. Sex characteristics are unique among a person's other characteristics, however, for at least four reasons:

1. Identifying a person as either female or male is not optional; everyone does it automatically with respect to everyone—including themselves. There is no escaping that categorization.
2. Once we identify a person as of one sex or the other, we tend to categorize them as a woman or a man, and it is extremely difficult to alter that characterization. That person is a she or he, period. (Sexual identity and transgender issues blur this point, but its basic thrust remains valid.)

3. We sort people by sex as soon as we hear or see them, and we usually know immediately whether the person is a woman or a man (if we don't, we are likely to be thrown off balance).
4. A person's sex cuts across all other categories. No matter what other social identities about another person we use to sort them—occupation, status, personality, race, age, or something else—we always sort that person by her or his sex.

Sorting people by sex is, in itself, largely benign, and some researchers suggest this probably has an 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 roles, behaviors, norms, attitudes, activities, and characteristics we believe are appropriate for women and men. In this way, we turn a person's sex into their gender. And despite the enormous changes in women's activities and opportunities over the past 50 years, these socially constructed gender characteristics—the gender stereotypes highlighted 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 both identified virtually identical sets of characteristics associated with women and with 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>2</sup> The 2004 study found that people still expected women to be affectionate, sensitive, warm, and friendly, while people still expected men to be aggressive, competent, independent, tough, and achievement oriented.<sup>3</sup> All of these stereotypes remain operative today. Men are still assumed to be characterized by traits of action, competence, and independence, which are often called “agentic” qualities.<sup>4</sup> Women, in contrast, are still assumed to be characterized by traits of sensitivity, warmth, and caregiving, which are often called “communal” qualities.<sup>5</sup>



### *Perniciousness of Gender Stereotypes*

Why are we making such a big deal about gender stereotypes? If most people think that women are warm rather than assertive and that men are aggressive rather than sensitive, what is the harm? The harm in the workplace 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 “feminine” jobs (such as a nurse, teacher, or administrative assistant) and not for “masculine” jobs (such as an 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 tracked into leadership roles seen to require forceful, competent, and competitive behavior.<sup>6</sup>

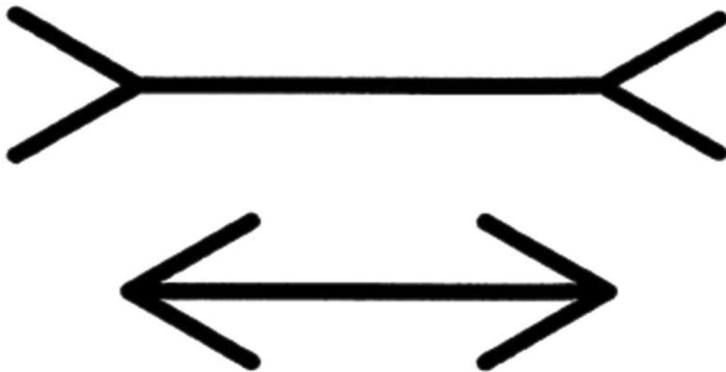
Because of gender stereotypes, most people—women *and* men—tend to think “men” when they see words such as boss, CEO, and director, and to think “women” when they see words such as assistant, attendant, and secretary. People often have these associations because “it is easier for people to capture and understand information about unknown others that is consistent with the gender stereotype (she is a nurse) than counter-stereotypical information (she is a mechanic).”<sup>7</sup>

Gender stereotypes create a fundamental incongruity between general expectations of roles and behaviors of women and those of leaders. Thus, people think (perhaps unconsciously) that women should be caring, while leaders should be decisive; women should be modest, while leaders should be assertive; women should be helpful, while leaders should be independent. In other words, gender stereotypes contribute to the idea that women are less appropriate leaders than men—and when women behave in ways thought to be appropriate for leaders, they are often subject to backlash in the form of criticism—not praise or recognition.<sup>8</sup>

### *Ridding Ourselves of Gender Stereotypes*

Of course, gender stereotypes do not reflect reality. As we have made clear, women and men are *not* inherently different in significant nonbiological ways. Why then can't we simply end gender bias by telling ourselves to stop thinking in terms of these misleading stereotypes? After all, the only reason anyone unconsciously discriminates against women in making career-affecting decisions such as assigning challenging projects to men rather than women is because the stereotypes he (or she) unconsciously holds led him (or her) to expect that men would perform the projects better than the women. Therefore, if we—all of us—would just stop allowing stereotypes to influence our career-affecting decisions, we would be free of implicit gender bias and workplace discrimination against women would end. Wouldn't that be nice! Unfortunately, eliminating gender bias is not so simple.

To understand why, it is useful to draw on an analogy with the Muller-Lyer optical illusion with which many readers may be familiar:



In looking at the two lines, we—all of us—see the top line as longer than the bottom one. It does not matter that we are told the two lines are exactly equal in length or that we measure the lines to confirm they are equal. Regardless of *consciously knowing* the lines are equal, *we don't see them* as equal. The same thing is true of gender stereotypes. It doesn't

matter that we consciously know women and men are fundamentally equal with respect to ambition, talent, commitment, and competitiveness. Because of gender stereotypes we don't see them as equal in these respects.

That is not to say that women cannot do a great deal to avoid or overcome the discriminatory consequences of gender stereotypes—precisely the focus of this book—or that organizations cannot do a great deal to prevent gender stereotypes from having a discriminatory impact on the decisions affecting women's careers—precisely the focus of the last chapter of our book *It's Not You, It's the Workplace*.<sup>9</sup> But it is to say that we cannot break through bias by simply telling ourselves to stop thinking in terms of gender stereotypes.

## Gender Stereotypes Are Scripts for Discriminatory Behavior

Stereotypes operate both as sorting mechanisms and behavioral guides. Thus stereotypes “help us” assign people to particular categories (friend, foe; desirable, undesirable; forceful, deferential; competent, incompetent). And thus once we have sorted them, stereotypes also “tell” us how we should relate to the people we have assigned to those categories.

To put this a different way, stereotypes are generalizations: all people who are X are like Y and, therefore, they should be treated like Z. Because not all people who are X are like Y, we are prone to misjudge particular individuals' actual characteristics, abilities, and potentials. And as a result, because we have mischaracterized certain people who are X as being Y, when we act like Z toward them, we are likely to behave toward them in inappropriate and discriminatory ways. For example, managers may well pick an all-male negotiating team because they (unconsciously) believe that “men are more competitive than women,” even though if they had examined each individual's actual characteristics, it would have been quite apparent to the managers that several of the women were better negotiators than the men they actually selected.

People generally believe they don't make such discriminatory

decisions, that they do not rely on stereotypes in judging other people, and that they are free of the biases these stereotypes foster. Psychological and sociological studies, however, make it clear that virtually all of us have implicit biases. As Mahzanin Banaji and her colleagues point out, “Most of us believe that we are ethical and unbiased. We imagine we’re good decision-makers, able to objectively size up a job candidate or a business deal and reach a fair and rational conclusion that is in our, and our organization’s, best interests. [More than two decades of research, however,] confirms that, in reality, most of us fall woefully short of our inflated self-perception. We’re deluded by...the illusion of objectivity, the notion that we are free of the very biases we are so quick to recognize in others.... The prevalence of these biases suggests that even the most well-meaning person unwittingly allows unconscious thoughts and feelings to influence seemingly objective decisions.”<sup>10</sup>

*Al:* On a recent flight from Chicago to Washington, DC, an airline employee sat next to me on her way home. The weather had been terrible, flights had been canceled 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 1:00 a.m. for an early flight to Chicago. She was now flying back to her base in DC 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 DC 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 almost always flight attendants; men in uniforms are pilots. Now, while it may have been statistically unlikely for her to be a pilot, I had clearly categorized her incorrectly, albeit relatively harmlessly in this case. But would it have been harmless if I had been in charge of hiring airline pilots and

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a woman had 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, age, or another social identity.

### *How Gender Stereotypes Lead to Discrimination against Women*

Women pursuing careers in gendered workplaces are subject to particularly discriminatory stereotypes. Because of traditional gender stereotypes, both women and men are twice as likely to hire a male candidate than an equally qualified woman.<sup>11</sup> Women are 25 to 46 percent more likely to be hired if their gender is not disclosed.<sup>12</sup> In addition, almost half of women (42 percent) report having faced discrimination on the job because of their gender; and women with postgraduate degrees report gender discrimination at an even higher rate of 57 percent.<sup>13</sup>

The biases fostered by gender stereotypes typically function among men in tandem with their sense of male privilege. Such a sense of privilege involves the (usually unconscious) assumption that they are superior to women at valued workplace roles, tasks, and challenges; are entitled to preference over women with respect to career opportunities, resources, and sponsorships; and are immune from criticism for anger, aggressiveness, and self-promotion—conduct that is severely criticized when displayed by women. Because of this implicit sense of privilege, 62 percent of men believe women are well represented in leadership when only one in three managers is a woman, and 44 percent of men think women are well represented in senior leadership when only 10 percent of an organization's senior leaders are women.<sup>14</sup>

We can get a clearer picture of the biased behavior resulting from gender stereotypes by separating this behavior into negative or hostile behavior and benevolent or kindly behavior.

### *Negative or Hostile Gender Bias*

Traditional gender stereotypes lead people (women as well as men) to have a negative view of women in comparison to men when considering their fitness 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>15</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 that 50 percent of the professors 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 offered a job to the female student, they offered her a lower salary and less career mentoring than they offered male students.<sup>16</sup> The pervasive gender bias revealed by this study is not limited to academic science.

*Al:* 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 lining up another job. 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 went viral.<sup>17</sup>

Because of the gender stereotypes that career gatekeepers hold, they tend to have low expectations about women's performance capabilities and potential.<sup>18</sup> Too frequently, the mind-set of these gatekeepers is that *this* job requires *these* characteristics, and women just don't have *these* characteristics. In such cases, it doesn't matter what a woman's actual characteristics are. If the job doesn't fit the communal stereotype, then a woman might not even have the chance to demonstrate her ability to do it.

In 2005 the nonprofit organization Catalyst, whose goal is to create more inclusive workplaces, surveyed 296 senior corporate executives (168 women and 128 men).<sup>19</sup> Catalyst asked these executives to rate the effectiveness of women and men on 10 different leadership behaviors. Both the female and male executives rated women more effective at traditionally feminine tasks, such as caregiving, and rated men more effective at traditionally masculine tasks, such as leadership.<sup>20</sup>

*Andie:* I am often told that this or that organization would gladly have more women in leadership and management positions, but it can't find any women who are 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 they 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 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

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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.

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.

Another example of gender stereotyping is reflected in the controversy over Viking-era remains discovered in Birka, Sweden, in the late 1800s. The remains, named Bj 581, had been buried as an elite, wealthy warrior and strategist.<sup>21</sup> Because of Bj 581's accomplished warrior status, scientists assumed the remains were male. When 2017 DNA analysis confirmed that the remains were female, some scientists immediately argued that Bj 581 couldn't possibly have been a warrior. Others suggested there must have been an undiscovered set of male remains in that grave to have warranted such a significant burial.<sup>22</sup> Despite scientific evidence supporting the existence of the female warrior, some critics still argue that these remains were of a servant or a housewife—buried with no domestic items—in the grave of a man whose remains are absent.<sup>23</sup>

The controversy over Bj 581 demonstrated how even scientists—people we *want* to believe are highly rational empiricists—struggled to accept that a woman might have been a powerful leader or strategic warrior. With this example, we can see why gender stereotypes create such an issue: in the case of the Bj 581 warrior at Birka, gender stereotypes risk rewriting history to reinforce current stereotypes. In the case of the



modern dynamic woman—these stereotypes may cause someone to dismiss your value and skill set, thus limiting your career opportunities.

### **The Goldilocks Dilemma**

Negative gender bias is a coin with two sides. When a woman conforms to the most basic communal stereotypes—being warm, caring, and sensitive to others’ feelings—she is most often 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, doggedly pursuing a competitive objective, or frequently exhibiting a fierce commitment to performance excellence—she is likely to face a backlash and be viewed as competent but socially insensitive, “bitter, quarrelsome, selfish, deceitful, devious, and unlikable.”<sup>24</sup>

*Andie:* A personal experience might help illustrate the difficult and insidious problem that is created by the tension between a woman’s need to be agentic to move ahead and her need to be communal to be liked. When I was about 12, 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. I would be lonely.

What was going on? Why would this grown man say such things to a young girl? Looking back, I think he was clumsily trying to alert me to the dilemma the workplace still poses for women. My parents’ friend saw that the female lawyers he knew needed to choose between success and likability. I think he recognized that

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a woman who wants real career success and is willing to compete hard to achieve it runs the risk of social isolation. We discuss impression management later in this book, but whatever negative thoughts I had then of my lunch companion, I see now that he was on to something and not just being unkind.

The double bind—that women need to be communal to be liked but agentic to advance in their career<sup>25</sup>—is what we call the Goldilocks Dilemma. Whether they behave communally or agentially, women can suffer negative consequences. Indeed, women often feel they are damned if they do and damned if they don't. As a result, many women try to play it safe by appearing a little less agentic so they can be seen as a little more likable.<sup>26</sup>

Defensive behavior of this sort can take several forms.<sup>27</sup> One of the most common is illustrated by a 2011 study of students at the Harvard Business School (HBS). The women and men in the study started at HBS with essentially equal academic and career achievements. Yet despite this rough comparability, the study found that, compared to the men, the women prepared more but participated less in class; they received significantly fewer academic honors; and after graduation, they judged their HBS experiences as far less positive.<sup>28</sup>

In seeking an explanation of why women and men responded to their HBS experience in such different ways, Harvard found that two principal factors adversely affected women during their time at the business school. First, there was an obvious clannishness on the part of male professors and male students that isolated the women. HBS took immediate steps to correct this problem. But Harvard also uncovered a far subtler and more intractable problem: the women were “self-editing in the classroom to manage their out-of-classroom image[s].”<sup>29</sup> The women felt less comfortable participating in class discussions because of the penalties they believed they would face if they violated traditional communal stereotypes. They were consciously trying not to appear (too) forceful or aggressive in the classroom so they would not be viewed as unlikable

outside of class. Harvard found there were a large number of extraordinarily talented women holding themselves back academically because they were worried they would not be viewed positively or accepted socially if they were seen as competing “too hard.” These women were trying to have it both ways: to succeed (a little less), but to be liked (a little more).

The behavior of the HBS women is entirely understandable if you think about how exactly the same agentic behaviors are likely to be viewed when exhibited by a woman and by a man:

- She’s pushy; he’s determined.
- 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; he’s a go-getter.
- She’s rude; he’s direct and to the point.

*Al:* My friend 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 expressed at an earlier board meeting, which she had not attended. The board president, a white man in his late 50s, 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 tone. Dan stated that Tiffany was being businesslike and that it was refreshing

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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 consider whether the board president would have backed down if Dan hadn’t spoken up—or if another woman had defended Tiffany instead. A woman can always use male allies, but sometimes they can be especially valuable in dealing with particularly difficult senior men.

### Motherhood Bias

Let’s shift gears slightly and look at the Goldilocks Dilemma in another context: motherhood. Women with children face particularly severe career penalties. On the “too soft” side of the dilemma, gender stereotypes suggest—and gender bias assumes—that these women need to be available to their children at all times, perpetuating the misconception that they will be less available for career demands than women without children or than men (with or without children). On the “too hard” side, however, if women with children demonstrate that they *are* fully committed to their careers, gender stereotypes suggest—and gender bias assumes—they are bad mothers and not appropriately committed to their children. Indeed, women with children and a strong commitment to their careers are frequently seen as less warm, less likable, and more hostile than similarly committed women without children.

*Al:* Andie and I have 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 that we were not traveling. In order to be able to spend evenings and weekends with Cynthia, we frequently worked at home after she had gone to bed. And one of us was always present at her school and sporting events.

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When Cynthia was about eight years old a friend's mother asked her, "What does your dad do for a living?" She replied, "He's a lawyer." The woman said, "That's great." Cynthia then expected to be asked about her mom's occupation. When that didn't happen, she proudly volunteered, "My mom's a lawyer too." But she did not get the same positive response she had received 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?"

Because of stereotypes about mothers, women with careers and children 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>30</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>31</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 male partner I was working with. After that, he started leaving voicemail messages asking me in a condescending tone whether I could talk about our project at 5:00 p.m. if I'd "still be around." I never made myself available at 5:00 p.m., but I always offered to talk to him that same night any time after 6:00 p.m., or to meet with him the next day any time after 6:00 a.m.. He never took me up on any of my suggested meeting times. He really 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 5:00 p.m. Many years later, I mentioned this experience to

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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. In his eyes, 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 11](#), “Your Career 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” because they have successful working partners—not only must perform a high-wire juggling act to raise their children *and* advance in their careers, but they also must find ways to cope with the discriminatory biases that result from the stereotypes about mothers with careers. A recent small-scale study found that because of these stereotypes, mothers experienced normative discrimination at work; 57 percent of non-self-employed mothers suffered wage inequality; 59.1 percent of mothers have felt a desire to opt out of the workforce; and 67 percent had changed their jobs due to their status as mothers.<sup>32</sup> Academic research confirms the results of this survey. Participants in another study were shown a video of a woman interacting with others in a work scenario. The participants rated a woman lower with respect to performance and work commitment when she appeared to be pregnant as compared to an otherwise identical video in which the same woman did not appear to be pregnant.<sup>33</sup>

Another study found in a sample of female and male workers that only mothers were viewed as less capable than all other workers.<sup>34</sup> A third study found that mothers were held to stricter standards than fathers and disadvantaged in hiring and promotion.<sup>35</sup> As a classic paper on the motherhood penalty concludes, “Female participants in our study... held highly successful mothers to stricter standards and penalized them on recommendations for promotion, hire, and salary. Importantly, the

penalties for highly successful mothers were not explained by the competence and commitment ratings. Instead, a substantial proportion of the penalty was mediated by the perception that successful mothers were interpersonally deficient.”<sup>36</sup>

### **Aging Out of Negative Gender Bias**

It is tempting to think that gender stereotypes will lose much of their discriminatory force when the current crop of business, professional, government, and scientific leaders retire and a younger, more open-minded group replaces them. Millennials, those Americans now roughly between 20 and 40 years old, are often assumed to be ushering in a new era of enlightened interpersonal relations. For example, in 2013 *Time* predicted Millennials would “save us all” because they are “more accepting of differences . . . in everyone.”<sup>37</sup> That same year, the *Atlantic* stated that Millennials hold the “historically unprecedented belief that there are no inherently male or female roles in society.”<sup>38</sup> And in 2015 the *Huffington Post* wrote that Millennial men are “likely to see women as equals.”<sup>39</sup>

If these characterizations are even close to accurate, then we should expect the pervasive, damaging negative biases against women leaders to diminish substantially, if not end entirely, once Millennials assume positions of economic, academic, and political power.

Before we start celebrating a coming age of gender parity, however, we need to ask whether there is any truth to these rosy predictions. Do Millennials really believe there are no inherently female or male roles in society? Do Millennial men really “see women as equals”? Unfortunately, the best information we have indicates the answer to both questions is no. In a 2014 survey of more than 2,000 US adults, Harris Poll found that young men were less open to accepting women leaders than were older men.<sup>40</sup> Only 41 percent of Millennial men were comfortable with women engineers, compared to 65 percent of men 65 or older. Likewise, only 43 percent of Millennial men were comfortable with women being US senators, compared to 64 percent of Americans overall. (The numbers were 39 percent versus 61 percent for women being CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, and 35 percent versus 57 percent for president of the United States.)

Given these findings, it would be a serious mistake to assume that with the Millennial generation we will “age” into gender-neutral workplaces.

### *Benevolent Gender Bias*

Many women work for (typically but not always) male supervisors who treat them in ways that appear to be kind and considerate. Such benevolent behavior often takes the form of frequent expressions of concern for a woman’s welfare, solicitousness as to her domestic responsibilities, and “extra” assistance with her job responsibilities. Too often, however, this behavior results from a form of traditional sexism, an assumption that women need to be protected, directed, and assisted by men.<sup>41</sup> We discuss a woman’s temptation to buy into benevolent bias in [chapter 2](#), “The Apple in the Room.”

*Al:* Kelly, a senior manager at a large corporation based in New York City, told me that when she was first out of college she had applied to be a flight attendant working out of New York City. The male interviewer said, “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 benevolent sexist attitudes often praise women highly for their performance but assign them to devalued projects. If supervisors (unconsciously) think 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 women 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>42</sup>

*Al:* 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 that the system was not ready to go live. She delayed the start-up date and explained the reasons to her boss. She was shocked to discover he believed the delay was really because she lacked the confidence to go forward on schedule. He told her he understood that she needed more time to “get comfortable” with the rollout and that he would support the delay until she “felt ready.” Although her boss might have pushed a man to go forward with the launch anyway (if he truly believed the problem was simply a lack of confidence), he dealt with her “sympathetically,” asking frequently if she needed more help. Dara later learned that after she had delayed the launch, he made a series of personnel changes that weakened her status and authority.

The dangers a woman faces in a benevolent biased 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 predict the pace and extent of your career advancement.<sup>43</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>44</sup>

If instead of giving you challenging projects (or forcing you to take them on) 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. You will lack the experience needed when the time comes for the next round of promotions. You will not be seriously considered if you are excluded from high-profile projects and projects that involve 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, or if you are encouraged to leave when others stay late or to not take on extra work.

*Andie:* More than 15 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 process by which assignments were made. Each practice group was required to identify skills that lawyers were expected to have developed by the end of each year of practice. The objective was to ensure 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.

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It worked! In recent years, women at our firm have been promoted to partner at rates substantially higher than the legal profession average. This is a substantial change from where we were before we started this program. 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 the change and enforce it.

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 are thought to have a mild and sensitive nature, then you will not be exposed to the rough-and-tumble competitive struggles that are 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 encouraged, not protected; you need to be thrown into the game, not kept safely 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.

## 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/>.
- *Identify your feminine and masculine traits.* Review the Bem Stereotypes. You should consider the relative strengths of your communal and agentic traits—and which ones you will need to

strengthen—because both sets of traits are important to advance 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, make sure you are traveling and working late too. Review our discussion in [chapter 2](#).
- *Likability is important but overrated,* 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.