

# *Introduction: It's Not (Always) Your Fault*

*The test for whether or not you can hold a job should not be the arrangement of your chromosomes.* — BELLA ABZUG

Jennifer is a consultant at a large management consulting firm. Since graduating from business school, Jennifer has worked hard, played by the rules, and thrived professionally. Things are going great for her: a few years ago, she was promoted to the prestigious position of director. Having achieved a measure of job security, she and her husband—a lawyer at a big law firm in town—decided to have a baby and got pregnant. She took off the full six months allowed at her company; her baby is now 11 months old.

Recently, though, Jennifer found out that her compensation is lower than her co-worker Mike's, even though he started after her and brings in less business to the firm. Jennifer, who has never really seen herself as different from the men she works with, realizes that she might have made a mistake in not asking for an increase in compensation earlier. She goes to her boss, Rick, to discuss the matter. To her surprise, instead of being supportive, he tells her he's heard some concerns from other people in her department but reassures her he has her best interests at heart: "You're a valuable part of the team. I know there were questions among the committee about whether your performance is sustainable, but

I'll be sure to bring up your contributions when we're deciding on compensation for next year."

Surprised by Rick's easy dismissal of her concerns, Jennifer goes to her mentor, Jane, for help. Jane, who does not have children, tells Jennifer there's not much she can do about it. "Once you have children," Jane says, "it gets harder and harder to balance everything. You just need to work extra hard to prove you're willing to do what it takes to stay in the game."

Jennifer leaves Jane's office feeling more unsure of herself than ever. She's starting to think there's more going on than meets the eye—but what can she do about it that won't make things worse?

As recently as a decade or so ago, gender discrimination was so obvious it was all but impossible to ignore. In 1982, Ann Hopkins was denied a promotion to partner at the accounting firm Price Waterhouse because, as male co-workers said, she needed to "walk more femininely, talk more femininely, dress more femininely, wear make-up, have her hair styled, and wear jewelry."<sup>1</sup> In 1997, Goldman Sachs financial analyst Cristina Chen-Oster was sexually assaulted by a co-worker after a business meeting that took place at a Manhattan strip club called Scores.<sup>2</sup> Sex discrimination cases this egregious are dwindling. Some holdouts certainly exist, but the age of the Boom Boom Room—of referring to female employees as "whores" and "playboy bunnies" and of holding meetings in men's clubs—is largely past.<sup>3</sup>

"Twenty years ago, it used to be visible to any woman," said a longtime consultant. "We were forced to wear a skirt. It was so overt. We were expected to get the coffee." Another woman, who started working in finance in the 1980s, remembered being made to go in the back door and up the back elevator to attend a meeting in a club that didn't admit women. As recently as 10 years ago, she said, she would regularly be the only woman at corporate golf tournaments. When she won, the prize was a men's shirt.

These days, litigation and changing cultural standards have eliminated many of the more blatant examples of sexism in the professional world. Unfortunately, that doesn't mean it's disappeared.

For this book, we interviewed over 125 women about their experiences with gender bias: women at the top of their fields in law, in business, in politics, in science; married and unmarried women; mothers and women without children; women in their 30s and women in their 70s.

“For the younger women who look at me and think, ‘Why are you dredging up history?’” said one executive about her efforts to talk to young women about gender bias, “my response is, ‘You know what? I hope you are so lucky that you make it through this life with no unfortunate encounters like those I’ve just described. But, in case you do, you should be able to identify them and understand what is occurring.’”

Which takes us back to Jennifer, who is facing bias of several distinct types. The bias she’s facing may seem subtle, but it’s having a huge effect on her career. In short succession, she ran into each of the basic patterns of bias:

*Prove-It-Again!*—Women are forced to prove their competence over and over, whereas men are given the benefit of the doubt. *Why didn’t Rick acknowledge that Jennifer had more seniority and brought in more business than Mike?*

*The Tightrope*—Women risk being written off as “too feminine” when they’re agreeable and “too masculine” when they’re aggressive. *Did Rick think Jennifer was too assertive in asking about her compensation?*

*The Maternal Wall*—Women with children are routinely pushed to the margins of the professional world. *Is Rick worried that that Jennifer might have lost her commitment to work now that she has a child—or does he think she should?*

*The Tug of War*—All of the above pressures on women often lead them to judge each other on the right way to be a woman. *Are Jane’s judgments shaped by her own choices?*

The conventional advice is that women’s careers derail because they don’t have enough ambition, because they don’t ask, because

they choose children over career—in other words, because they're not enough like men. This advice can hurt women's careers, because while women who *don't* ask get in trouble for failing to make it clear what they want, women who *do* ask get in trouble for failing to fulfill people's expectations about how a woman should act. Take Jennifer: she followed the advice that's out there and was left wondering where she went wrong. This book is for Jennifer and women like her.

## *The Stubborn Gap at the Top*

In the past several years, there's been a renewal of interest in the gender gap: why it's still there and what to do about it. Women like Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg and former Obama administration official Anne-Marie Slaughter have jump-started an important conversation by bringing attention to an issue that many people hoped would resolve itself: while women have made extraordinary strides in the professional world, something's going wrong at the top.<sup>4</sup>

The good news is, in many ways, women are doing better than ever. Women outnumber men in college by about 57 to 43 percent, and a 2010 study found that young, single women in urban areas actually earn median salaries about 8 percent higher than comparable men.<sup>5</sup> In an influential article (and later a book) called “The End of Men,” journalist Hanna Rosin suggests the possibility that the “modern, postindustrial economy is simply more congenial to women than to men.”<sup>6</sup>

The problem? As women get older, advance up the corporate ladder, and begin to have families, their advantage not only disappears, it turns into a striking handicap. As of 2011 only 3.6 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs were women—16 white women, 2 women of color, 17 men of color, and 465 white men.<sup>7</sup> That's one table of women in a restaurant packed with 27 tables of men. Professional women in other fields are in better shape, but not by much. In 2010, women made up 47 percent of first- and second-year law firm associates but only 15 percent of full-fledged partners in the United States,

a number that has been fixed for the last 20 years.<sup>8</sup> In science and technology, the numbers are even worse: women constitute a mere 22 percent of software engineers and only 6 percent of chief executives at top technology companies.<sup>9</sup> We can talk about equality until we're blue in the face, but the numbers are pretty sobering.

So how does this happen? The answer is twofold. First, even if the disadvantages women now face in the workplace are small compared with disadvantages women faced a century (or even a decade) ago, relatively small problems have surprisingly large effects over time. Very small differences in how men and women are treated can lead to huge gaps in pay, promotions, and prestige, a phenomenon often called the *accumulation of disadvantage*. Psychologist Virginia Valian writes that “the well-meaning advice often given to women—not to make a mountain out of a molehill—is mistaken. That advice fails to recognize that mountains are molehills, piled one on top of the other.”<sup>10</sup> She describes a meeting from the perspective of an outsider: John asks Monique to get the coffee, Rahul interrupts Cara. In those apparently inconsequential interactions, the outsider is left with a distinct impression of who is respected and powerful within the group: “people who were equal in my eyes when it began are [now] unequal.”<sup>11</sup> Because small instances of bias like these are cumulative, women like Jennifer (from our original story) sometimes don't start to feel the effects of bias until they are already established in their careers.

“It's not until women have been around a long time that they start to say, ‘Oh. Now I kind of get what you 50-year-olds have been talking about,’” said a consultant.

We're also just beginning to recognize some of the most powerful patterns of gender bias that kick in as women move up the ladder in their careers. New research shows that motherhood is the strongest trigger for bias: women with children are 79 percent less likely to be hired, only half as likely to be promoted, and earn a lot less money than women with identical resumes but without children.<sup>12</sup> The same results don't hold for fathers. In a country where 82 percent of women become mothers, that puts women at a

huge disadvantage in the workplace relative to men.<sup>13</sup> Yet we talk a whole lot about women's *choices* surrounding motherhood and very little about the pressures driving them out of positions of leadership or the workplace in general. In order for things to change, we need to recognize and start to break down the Maternal Wall.

Another theme that's conspicuously missing from the way we talk about gender is that bias against women often translates into conflict among women. The resulting Tug of War has been taboo, silenced by the quest for sisterhood. Talking about conflict among women seems to confirm negative stereotypes about women as catty and petty. And we know instinctively that, as an underrepresented group in many industries, infighting isn't going to get us anywhere, so the impulse is to hush it up.

But the Tug of War exists, and denying it hasn't worked. When there's only room for a few women at the top, women will scramble to take those spots. And when women are conscious of being judged, some will be quick to jump on the other women they think are hurting their cause, whether it's because they feel those women are acting too much like men or because they're reinforcing stereotypes of femininity. When women receive the message that their hold on power is tenuous, they do what they feel is necessary to protect their futures.<sup>14</sup> Gender bias is built into office politics such that, as long as people pursue self-interest within that system, men will find it easier to get ahead than women. The problem is not a few rotten apples. It's the barrel.

Our basic message is simple: it's not your fault that the men at your company consistently progress up the career ladder more quickly than women do. It's not your fault that last year's review said you needed to speak up for yourself, and this year's review says you need to stop being so demanding. It's not your fault that you came back from maternity leave ready to dive back in, only to find yourself frozen out of major assignments. And it's not your fault that the woman you thought was your mentor has been arguing *against* the promotion you seek. Plenty of things may happen to you that *are* your fault, but gender bias isn't one of them.

#### UNDERSTANDING SUBTLE BIAS

Some bias — notably Maternal Wall bias — is both strong and blatant. But today, much bias is subtle.

Even subtle bias can have a strong effect. Inspired by research from Alice Eagly (coauthor of the excellent book *Through the Labyrinth: The Truth about How Women Become Leaders*), a group of scientists built a computer simulation of a fictional company with 500 employees at the bottom and only 10 at the very top. Each employee was assigned an evaluation score and promoted according to who had the highest score. The scientists gave the male employees in the simulation 1 percent higher scores, on average, to represent the effects of gender bias. After a relatively short time period, only about a third of the top positions — and a full 53 percent of the positions at the bottom — were held by women. When the bias variance was upped to 5 percent, only 29 percent of the positions at the top were held by women and 58 percent of the positions at the bottom.<sup>a</sup>

### *Why (Almost) Everything Women Are Told about Work Is Wrong*

This isn't the first book to offer advice on how to change women's disadvantage in the professional world. There's a ton of business literature that offers a ton of advice: Ask for more money! Network more! Stop being such a bitch! Stop being such a doormat!

Most books focus on what women are doing wrong. But many of the obstacles women encounter stem from factors out of their control. A good example of well-meaning but misleading advice literature is *Nice Girls Don't Get the Corner Office*, published in 2004 and in many ways still the most influential book in the genre. *Nice Girls* takes the Man Up approach, telling women that we're all girls at heart and that when we're challenged, we tend to flee, "take a step back into girlhood and question our self-worth."<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the

book *Women Don't Ask*, which made a splash when it was released in 2003, proposes that women's woes stem from their failure to ask for raises and promotions. Authors Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever point to the negotiation gap they identify between men and women and argue that women need to ask more if they want to get ahead.<sup>16</sup>

This advice is popular for a reason. Rather than pointing to the institutions, it tells women there's something easy they can change in themselves. It also reflects the popular assumption that all of women's problems stem from the fact that they're too girly. But women are expected to jump into compassionate roles inconsistent with what we expect from leaders. Women are expected to be nice, to be modest, to work collaboratively, and to be understanding. These are habits that don't fit with the established image of a leader.

The problem with books like *Nice Girls Don't Get the Corner Office* and *Women Don't Ask* is that they forget that not all women are Nice Girls. Women who are direct, are self-assured, and know their own worth encounter gender bias, too. As Babcock and Laschever themselves recognize, women face tight boundaries for what is considered acceptable female behavior, and "when women stray—or stride—across those boundaries they face penalties for violating society's expectations."<sup>17</sup>

If you've ever been called a bitch for sanctioning a subordinate who was out of line or suddenly become invisible to a man you've contradicted, this probably sounds familiar. Women often face backlash for "acting like men"—doing things like asking for a raise or raising their voices. In a chapter called "Scaring the Boys," Babcock and Laschever address what happens when women *do* ask: "Women may be perceived to be doing good work only as long as they are toiling away at less important jobs. Once they qualify for and start asking for more important, and therefore more 'masculine' jobs, their work may begin to be devalued and their 'personal style' may suddenly become a problem."<sup>18</sup>

So advice literature that assumes that all women are "too femi-



nine” and just need to man up is misleading. (Note that here, and throughout the book, we use “masculine” and “feminine” to describe stereotypes about how men and women should behave—not to imply that men and women should or do conform to these categories.) So is another strain of women’s leadership literature, the Taming the Shrew subgenre, which encourages women to soften their masculine traits. In *Taming Your Alpha Bitch*, published in 2012, authors Christy Whitman and Rebecca Grado teach women to become “femininely empowered”: “By making the choice to abandon the fruitless quest for dominance and superiority, you gain the power to tune out the comparing, competing, fear-based mental chatter that keeps you from enjoying life experiences as they unfold.”<sup>19</sup> Jean Hollands, author of *Same Game, Different Rules*, teaches women to cry in meetings, punctuate their speech with “ums” and stutters, and “wear softer-looking clothes.”<sup>20</sup>

Again, this advice is useful to a relatively narrow band of women—those who tend to be so aggressive that it’s unlikely that any level of softening would undermine their authority and effectiveness. For everyone else, it can be positively perilous.

Simple formulas are highly misleading, not only because different women face different problems but because different women can face different problems at different points in their careers. The truth is that women have to be politically savvy to survive and thrive in historically male careers.

## *Denial Doesn't Help: The Superstar Parry*

Even as some women publicly address the issue of persistent gender inequality, other women insist that talking about discrimination is a dead end. When Carly Fiorina was appointed CEO at Hewlett-Packard, she famously said, “I hope that we are at the point that everyone has figured out that there is not a glass ceiling.”<sup>21</sup> When asked to clarify, she backtracked—sort of: “The reason I wouldn’t deal with gender when I became CEO of H.P. is that I believed in a

<b>SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES</b>		
A lot of the career advice women receive assumes that the problems they're having in their careers are their own fault. How does our perspective change when we look for ways to fix the system rather than to fix the woman?		
<b>THE PROBLEM</b>	<b>FIX THE WOMAN</b>	<b>FIX THE SYSTEM</b>
Women are still paid an average of about 80 cents to a man's dollar for comparable work.	Women don't ask for raises and promotions.	Women who ask for raises and promotions face backlash for being too assertive and self-promoting. Educate people about these biases and about fair ways of allocating "office housework."
The higher up you go on the corporate ladder, the fewer women there are. Women make up 51.4 percent of management and professional occupations but only 14 percent of Fortune 500 executive officers.	The ambition gap between men and women means women just aren't willing to make the sacrifices necessary to climb to the top.	Women burn out early because the effort of trying to prove their competence over and over ultimately proves exhausting. Adopt objective rubrics for measuring success that don't artificially disadvantage women.
When women have children, they are far more likely than men to drop out or leave the fast track.	Women "opt out" when they have children because they realize they have different priorities than men do.	Workplace ideals are designed around men married to homemakers. Create a variety of schedules and career tracks—for men as well as women.
Women are seen as a bad fit for jobs that require authority and power.	Women need to act more like men by being assertive, aggressive, and hard-charging at the expense of others.	Reflect more accurately the skills necessary to succeed, including emotional intelligence and other devalued but important skills traditionally associated with women.

meritocracy where gender isn't the issue," Fiorina said. "I wanted to play by the same rules. Look, I'm not an idiot. There are clearly things that are different for men and women in leadership. But I believe you have to be the change you seek."<sup>22</sup> Note that Fiorina said this while working in Silicon Valley, where fewer than 10 percent of company board seats are occupied by women and only 11 percent of venture-backed companies have a female CEO or founder.<sup>23</sup>

A common claim, in Silicon Valley and elsewhere, is that gender bias can't be a problem at [insert company name here] because the company is a meritocracy. But recent research shows that organizations that think of themselves as highly meritocratic tend to have *more* gender bias than organizations that do not. Emilio J. Castilla and Stephen Benard, in a study called "The Paradox of Meritocracy in Organizations," found that when an organization's core values state that raises and promotions are "based entirely on the performance of the employee," women were given smaller bonuses than men who received equivalent reviews.<sup>24</sup> Because meritocratic cultures perceive themselves as "unbiased and fair," people working within them worry less about how their actions will be perceived—and therefore succumb more easily to bias.<sup>25</sup>

There's nothing wrong with trying to be the change you want to see in the world. But when Gandhi proposed this, he didn't mean colonialism would disappear if Indians pretended British rule didn't exist—and we're pretty sure gender bias won't disappear simply because we deny its influence. Being the change you want to see in the world first requires an understanding of what needs changing. Ignoring the role bias plays in creating our reality is a good way to maintain the status quo.

No one would disagree that some of the most powerful people in the world are women: Angela Merkel; Sonia Gandhi, president of the Indian National Congress; Dilma Roussef, the president of Brazil; and Hillary Clinton, to name a notable few. These are, incidentally, the top four of the only *six* women in *Forbes's* list of the 70 Most Powerful People of 2011.<sup>26</sup> But these are exceptional women with exceptional circumstances. Sonia Gandhi married into

a political dynasty, and her husband was prime minister of India before his 1991 assassination.<sup>27</sup> Hillary Clinton's husband, of course, was president of the United States. Pointing to their pedigrees is not to denigrate or diminish their accomplishments. It's to say that holding such women up as proof that the glass ceiling has been shattered involves an astounding level of deliberate blindness.

For several decades now, superstar women have been held up as proof that women who don't make it to the top must not be trying hard enough. From Margaret Thatcher to Marissa Mayer, these women have more than held their own against men and achieved incredible professional success while simultaneously raising families and developing a highly visible public profile. If they can do it, why can't everyone?

Superstars are different from most women. Not everyone's father is Zbigniew Brzezinski. (That said, Mika Brzezinski's book *Knowing Your Value* is a good, eye-opening read: it's pretty shocking when even someone as successful and well-connected as Brzezinski, who is a cohost of MSNBC's *Morning Joe*, encountered open gender bias.)<sup>28</sup>

Superstars may actually get higher evaluations than equivalent men because women tend to get polarized evaluations: either very good or very bad. This occurs because in-groups (including men) tend to give polarized evaluations to out-groups (including women), whereas evaluations of one's own group tend to be more nuanced (some strengths, some weaknesses).<sup>29</sup> So superstars may well get great evaluations in environments in which women who are merely excellent get evaluations much, much lower than evaluations of comparable men.<sup>30</sup>

Superstars are different in more subtle ways as well. Two of the most successful women I interviewed, both of whom reached the top of large organizations, illustrate how superstars differ from the rest of us. Both had personal styles and aspirations that were a near-perfect fit for the organizations in which they had thrived. Perhaps because of this, both were more willing than many others Joan interviewed to put gender bias to one side and just go for the

gold. One, when asked for her strategies to overcome the Prove-It-Again! problem, responded almost pityingly. “Well,” she said, “I guess you have to prove it again.”

Another New Girl had crusaded against male-only clubs early in her career. Then she stopped because she realized that it made her male colleagues uncomfortable. That didn't serve her purpose. In her view, the best way she could help women was to get to the top rung. So she did. She was the first woman to run a major international law firm, which, when she ran it, was probably one of the best places in the legal profession for women to work. Today she sits on corporate boards—and helps other women attain that role.

Many people aren't superstars for reasons that have nothing to do with raw talent. They just don't want the same things the superstars want. They are not as driven to succeed in conventional organizations because they want more work-life balance or are less willing to let go of outrage or are just plain quirkier: their goals and talents *don't* map perfectly onto those of conventional organizations. To quote Congresswoman Bella Abzug, “Our struggle today is not to have a female Einstein get appointed as an assistant professor. It is for a woman schlemiel to get as quickly promoted as a male schlemiel.”<sup>31</sup>

### *Everyone's a Little Bit Sexist Sometimes*

Attributing women's stalled advancement to gender bias can be a little hard to swallow these days. Years of hard work by several generations of feminists have ensured that it's no longer okay, legally or socially, to deny women opportunities because of their gender. We may like to think that the days of *Mad Men*-era boys' clubs are long gone. And after all, you may be thinking, “My husband or boyfriend or son isn't gender biased. My roommate isn't gender biased. George who works in the next cubicle isn't gender biased. *I'm* not gender biased.”

Statistically, that's not true.

In 1998, a group of social scientists developed the Implicit Association Test (IAT) and with it a theory that has quietly changed the way we think about bias and discrimination.<sup>32</sup> The IAT measures the ease with which people associate certain photographs and words. In the classic test, white and black faces are paired with either positive or negative words. Subjects who respond more quickly when positive words are associated with white faces are described as showing an automatic preference for European Americans, while those who respond more quickly when positive words are associated with black faces are described as showing an automatic preference for African Americans.<sup>33</sup>

Results collected between 2000 and 2006 show that the vast majority of test takers display some level of automatic bias against African Americans—70 percent showed some automatic preference for white faces over black faces, while only 12 percent showed some preference for black faces over white faces.<sup>34</sup> A similar pattern holds true for bias associating men with science and women with the humanities: 72 percent of test takers showed some level of automatic association of male with science and female with liberal arts, while only 10 percent showed any level of association of male with liberal arts and female with science.<sup>35</sup>

What's really interesting about the IAT is that implicit bias shows very little correlation with explicit bias.<sup>36</sup> When people are asked directly about their biases, their responses tend not to reflect the patterns that show up on the implicit association test. A study coauthored by Anthony Greenwald, who invented the IAT, found that while the majority of white test takers claim to either be indifferent to race or to show a preference for black people over white people, their scores indicated a strong automatic preference for white people.<sup>37</sup>

The IAT reveals attitudes we didn't know we had. Confronting those attitudes may well make us uncomfortable, which is probably part of why people tend to convince themselves they are unbiased. A Stanford study, for example, showed that we tend to rate other people's actions as *more* influenced by bias than they actually are

and our own actions as *less* influenced by bias.<sup>38</sup> When confronted by the suggestion that we may be biased, we generally turn to introspection and in good faith determine that we're being rational.<sup>39</sup> Alas, the IAT shows a more uncomfortable truth.

All this is to say that you're probably biased, as are the people around you. When we talk about biases, we're not necessarily talking about something ill intentioned or malicious. This is both good news and bad news. The good news is that it's not the case that everyone is out to get you. The majority of people you work with probably mean well, including the ones who treat you in ways you feel are unfair. The bad news is that it can be easy to dismiss this bias as innocent or impossible to reverse: if *everyone* has biases—and they don't even know it—then what the heck can we do about it?

This book proposes two different paths to overcoming bias, both of which are necessary if we're going to move past the challenges working women face. They're both premised on the basic fact that understanding gender bias can be powerful.

Path one is to educate yourself. If you understand the biases working against you, you can learn how to “hack” them—manipulate them to lessen their impact or even work them to your advantage. Path two is to educate others. As long as we ignore unconscious biases, they'll remain invisible. Only people who know their biases can rise above them.

## *Know the Rules, Then Break Them*

The worst part of writing an advice book is having to give advice. We think there are certain things you need to know to understand what's going on in your career. We think it's not useful to ignore gender bias, and we think too much of the advice out there puts the blame squarely on women's shoulders without acknowledging that what works for a man may not work for a woman.

At the same time, we want to make it clear that there is no single answer to how to succeed as a woman in the professional

world. In case this was somehow still ambiguous, both Rachel and Joan are women. But no woman is only a woman. We're both white. And middle class. And American. And straight. And able-bodied. All those things affect our outlook. This concept is known as intersectionality.<sup>40</sup>

#### BADASS WOMEN WHO BROKE THE RULES

Some women completely ignore some or all of the advice in this book and still get where they need to go. If you're more of a rule breaker yourself, here are some role models to get you started.

**SOJOURNER TRUTH** (1797–1883): An abolitionist and civil rights activist, Truth was a noted speaker who once, according to legend, flashed her breasts at a heckler who accused her of being a man. During the Civil War, she helped recruit black soldiers for the Union Army and afterward spent years lobbying the government for land grants for former slaves.<sup>b</sup>

**GEORGE SAND** (1804–1876): No Tightrope-walking for this French author: in addition to her novels, poems, and literary criticism, Sand was known for her gender bending and high-profile affairs. She smoked tobacco in public, which was taboo for women at the time, and wore pants because they were more comfortable and durable than dresses. Divorced young, she had a series of lovers including composer Frederic Chopin.<sup>c</sup>

**HELEN GURLEY BROWN** (1922–2012): Her bold book *Sex and the Single Girl* finally said out loud what everyone already knew: women have sex before marriage, *and they like it*. As the editor of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, Gurley Brown used the magazine as a platform to advocate for women's sexual revolution and shaped the modern-day media in the process.<sup>d</sup>

*Remember:* there's no right way to be a woman. This book is meant to serve as a guide to some of the biases that may affect how people react to you. The advice is geared toward counteracting that if you feel that's getting in your way. If something else works for you—get it, girl.



We spoke not only with women of color and white women. We also spoke with straight women and lesbians; women born in the United States and women from abroad; older women, younger women; women in business and law and politics and science and journalism. Bringing all of these experiences together is an ambitious undertaking, and we've done our best to include a diversity of voices without losing sight of the common themes that run through women's experiences.

We deal with race in two different ways. In all but one of the following 14 chapters, we include quotes from both women of color and white women without identifying the race of the women. We felt this was necessary to protect confidentiality, given the sensitive nature of the topics discussed. In chapter 11, we take a different approach and discuss the distinctive experiences of women of color.

The result of these 127 interviews isn't so much a road map as a "Choose Your Own Adventure." Chances are good that some parts of the book are going to speak to you more than others. Chances are also good that some parts will drive you nuts. That's okay. The debates that we had as a group during our New Girls' Network meetings have been impassioned and eye-opening, and we hope that debate continues moving forward.

As a result of our diversity, every New Girl breaks some rules and follows others, and it's up to you to decide on your own approach. What we're doing is teaching you the rules so you won't be caught off guard. If you decide to break them after that, you'll be doing it consciously. All we have to say about that is—go for it!

All New Girls internalize this approach in their own way. One woman who worked in marketing said she was careful to follow her office's conventions "to a tee" because she realized, "I'm a little bit of a minority here, and I need to make sure that the powers that be understand that I am a team player and I'm going to play it the way they say it has to be played." She got to work early and left late, adhered to memo-writing conventions and the published dress code, and generally tried not to break any "meaningless

rules.” At the same time, when she thought a particular policy was unfair, she didn’t hesitate to challenge it—and her challenge actually carried extra weight, because she had already established that she wasn’t the type to break a rule just for the sake of breaking it. Another woman, a vice president at a Fortune 500 company, said that when she was younger she used to try to blend in with the boys by reading the sports page and keeping quiet when controversial political issues came up. Over time, she learned that there were certain adaptations she just couldn’t make if she wanted to stay true to herself. “I needed to be the same person at work and outside of work,” she said. “It was too stressful to try to be two different people.”

Every woman makes different sacrifices. The women we spoke with who had reached the top often said they let instances of gender bias pass. Their theory was that success is women’s sweetest revenge, and making your point can interfere with your ability to achieve that success.

We know it’s not fair that women should have to take on this extra burden. But as one New Girl’s father told her at a young age, a lot of things in life just aren’t fair. “I didn’t want to hear it at the time, and it took me a number of years to figure out what he was trying to tell me,” she says now. “You have to make a choice. And are you going to choose the principle over being effective? Sometimes that’s the right choice, but not most of the time.”

*What Works for Women at Work* arises from the tension between the principle of gender equality and the need for women to be effective leaders now. Our goal with this book is to help you balance matters of principle with effectiveness. You can make the adaptations necessary to be an effective leader without sacrificing your principles, no matter your style and personality. Whether you’re a tomboy who always wins the office Super Bowl pool or a mother who wants to spend more time with her kids (or both), this book is designed to help you decide what rules you want to follow before you decide what rules you want to break, so that you can find the path to success that’s best for you.

### **WHAT'S BEEN YOUR EXPERIENCE?**

Rachel asked some of her law school classmates — all of whom have worked for one to five years between college and law school — whether they had experienced any of the four patterns yet. Here are some of their responses:

“My boss would call me into his office for an emotional debrief after meeting with the executive director, but never my colleagues. I also felt myself change a bit. I had spent college judging girls who ‘played dumb,’ . . . but I found myself doing it at work. I preferred to pipe up with a joke or a giggle than a substantive comment.”

“I think particularly working in the context of criminal defense, I’ve attempted to balance between showing empathy and supporting my clients emotionally, while also not just appearing like a ‘weak girl’ or, worse, an object of desire instead of a resource/authority.”

“Men can ‘achieve’ simply by befriending their male boss, forming a sort of ‘buddy-buddy’ type relationship, whereas women can’t connect with their bosses in that way — either because gender dynamics don’t allow it or because she would be seen as ‘using her sexuality’ to maintain that relationship (even if not actually doing the same things that a male associate were doing). The male bosses don’t feel comfortable judging the females on any lines other than merit because they are afraid to be seen as this creepy older guy who is into his associate.”

“I worry that the current discussion of work/family is perpetuating the idea that it’s a ‘women’s issue’ — something that women need to take into account when planning their lives but that men don’t need to think about. That would seem to imply that the correct role for women is caretaker and anything else is a ‘bonus,’ whereas men can solely think about working and being the provider. I actually had an interesting talk with one of our classmates about this, where he was like, ‘Why is that a women’s issue? I want to have family-work balance as well! Why doesn’t anyone care about that for dads?’”

“We’re all snowflakes. We’re so unique,” an executive said. “You’ve got to pick and choose from everybody to make your own mosaic of who you are and what you want to be.”

And yet for all our differences, there’s one thing we all have in common: “The advantage of being a woman,” said one New Girl, “is when they try to kick you in the balls, they always miss.”