

ABSTRACT

Broken Promises: How the Professional World Fails to Fulfill Women's Aspirations

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Young women are now raised to believe that they can reach for anything they can dream up. In many ways, they are no longer held to the expectation of becoming a housewife or choosing a gendered career path. However, the workplace still proves to be an inhospitable environment for women – they are faced with numerous obstacles that inhibit their ability to be successful. Among these difficulties are prejudices against certain traits in the workplace, lack of confidence in female employees, and a structure unrealistic for maintaining a healthy family and work life. To combat these issues, women need to be able to reach positions of power within their industry and workplaces need to exercise more policies that integrate family and work. Doing so will allow women to have a better chance at being both a successful professional and a happy mother.

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ASPIRATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

The Promises I Was Given

From a young age, girls now learn that they can be whoever they want to be. The little blonde girl in pigtails is told that if she wants to be an astronaut, she should chase after her dream with all of her power. I was one of those girls – I was fortunate enough to be raised by two loving parents who encouraged me to think of my wildest dreams for the future, and then double them, because that was the potential that my mother and father saw in me. The older sister to a brother who was intelligent, gentle, and handsome, I was never treated any differently. In fact, in many ways my brother, Jake, and I represent flipped personalities. From a young age I was known to boss my little brother around and eventually I grew into the much more competitive and aggressive between the two of us. On the other hand, Jake has always been naturally compassionate and kind. When his older sister, who was much smaller than he was, told him to pick up her Barbie doll, Jake happily obliged. The sibling dynamic has stayed the same for the rest of our lives – and we are very good friends because of it.

As I emerged into adolescence my parents encouraged me to embrace my competitive nature by excelling in the classroom and reaching for new opportunities as often as I could. While some girls may have learned to temper their natural ambition, I was always taught to capitalize on my unique ability to pursue my goals relentlessly. My mother and father's willingness to embrace what made me different from most females served me well. Because of this, I was able to set lofty expectations for myself. Choosing to continue my education away from home, I might not have had a clear image of what I was going to achieve in my academic or professional careers, but I was certain it would be

tremendous.

Somewhere along the way, I finally encountered my first road block. It may have been later in life than most women come across the barriers I now know as patriarchy, discrimination, and the like, but it hit hard. My whole life felt like a lie. How could I have a career and feel accomplished in life if I had to give up the family I had always wanted? But was it possible for me to be happy without building a name for myself in my chosen profession? These questions seemed practical until I realized that none of my male classmates were expected to grapple with the same issues. Instead, the boys in my class were completely unconcerned with how they were going to fit in family with their career. It simply did not seem fair to me that I had to make sacrifices for something that involved both men and women. And that is when the wheels started to turn.

True to my driven nature, I could not except the inevitable choice that it seemed I would have to make: career or family. Thanks to my upbringing, I decided that I wanted to be a part of the change. So, I got to work. I started asking the difficult questions and seeking answers. I read everything I could on maternity leave and work-life balance and happiness in the workplace and came to the conclusion that the system is broken. This is not a new conclusion – in fact, women have been saying that our current society needs a new way of functioning for centuries – but it was an influential discovery for me.

What I have come to see is that women destroyed the professional world's current structure the second the first pointed heel set foot in the corporate office. It is no secret that women entered a man's world when they started infiltrating boardrooms and emergency rooms. However, after decades of being a vital part of the professional realm, women are still being forced to operate in an arrangement that is made for men. Not only

is this unfair, but it is almost impossible to expect any female to succeed in an inhospitable environment. This means that if women want to achieve balance between family and career, they have to recreate the current structure to allow room for their own growth.

Mirroring my own discovery, I will explore the broken promises that women were given. We may have improved on our ability to set young girls up for success, but we are not following through with the opportunities they are guaranteed. By exploring the present professional system that women operate in, I will identify areas with potential for growth. These are aspects that can be improved to enhance women's capacity to accomplish her goals. My hope is to present solutions that are relatively simple but offer women a great deal more flexibility to incorporate family and work into their lives. By building a more hospitable environment for working women, the choice between family and career will at some point become irrelevant.

CHAPTER ONE

Computer Engineer Barbie

Girls today are raised to believe that they can be anything they set their minds to. They are not told that becoming an engineer is unrealistic, considering a family should be their natural priority. Instead, they are encouraged to think out of the limits of motherhood – to push the boundaries. Young girls are praised for choosing to be a part of STEM programs and provided all the same leadership opportunities as their male counterparts. However, they do not completely lose the expectations that come with being a woman.

Therefore, there is tension for the young women of today. On one hand, they are societally drawn to the pink dolls and frilly handbags because that is what is being pushed in their face. But they are also aware of all the new opportunities that feminists before them have created. In *Wonder Woman: Sex, Power, and the Quest for Perfection* by Debora L. Spar, addresses the struggle between being an ordinary girl and one who strives for a career. Spar describes it from the perspective of a generation caught between these two worlds as “[laboring] under a subtle set of dual expectations. To be smart *and* pretty. Equal to boys but not in competition with them. Drop-dead gorgeous in clothes we stitched ourselves” (Spar 38). In other words, those girls who did choose to seek out more than a diamond ring for themselves still were expected to conform to outdated concepts of what a female should be like. Instead of being greeted with open arms at the doorstep of professionalism, they were welcomed with a pair of curlers and pointy heels. Reach for the stars, they were told, but only if you can manage to do it while looking like the picturesque woman.

Beginning at a young age, girls are offered a variety of options that both align with gender norms and are gender neutral. If they want to play with princesses, they have no issue doing so – and the same rings true if girls would rather build Lincoln Logs with their brother. Parents strive to foster environments in which their daughters are pushed to dream big and push limits. Thanks to the women that came before them, multiple generations of women have the promise of the future they desire. The only catch is that in many ways the old expectations are still forced down their throats, “Work hard and do well!” we urge girls (in schools and Brownie troops and soccer leagues across the country). ‘Just remember to find your prince!’ the mermaid Ariel (who gave up her voice for a man) giggles back” (Spar, 41). An unprecedented amount of faith is put in the younger generations of women with the expectation that they find a way to remain within the confines of womanhood society has become comfortable with.

There is a lack of restriction and a plethora of choices, but that makes it even more difficult for these girls once they grow up. Eventually, they realize that being just like the dolls they were raised with is incredibly difficult to do when they are juggling a career and a family as well. Some of the influences on young girls make a positive impact, while others are the same antiquated concepts disguised as progressive figures.

An example of the paradox that young girls are raised in can be found in Computer Engineer Barbie. Released in 2010, the doll was created after a poll indicated that young girls wanted this to be Barbie’s next profession. However, it was later revealed that a group of activists had flooded the online poll – young girls voted for Barbie to become a news anchor. The concept alone of a Computer Engineer Barbie puts into reality the dualistic world that today’s girls are being raised in. On one hand, Barbie is marching into a male-

dominated industry and succeeding (supposedly). But in true Barbie fashion, she walks on her beautifully thin legs into the engineering field with a perfect ponytail and pink cat eye glasses. The career might have changed, but the doll itself hasn't changed much.



The mixed signals do not stop with the physical doll. Mattel released a book along with the new Barbie entitled, *Barbie: I Can Be a Computer Engineer*. In the beginning, the book seems innocent enough, but as Barbie finishes designing her new video game, she says that she'll "need Steven's and Brian's help to turn it into a real game". Not only was Barbie completing the most feminine part of the computer engineering process, but she also needed assistance from two men to finish it. Barbie may appear to be upwardly mobile – the fact that she asks for help from a male suggests otherwise. It also defeats the purpose of making a statement with her career because the book creates the need for men to bring her success. Barbie needs her two male colleagues to bring her designs to life and create a product.

The Computer Engineer Barbie sends a message to young girls that they can have the career they desire, but they must still look like a picturesque woman while doing so. It's no stretch to say that real computer engineers do not arrive at work every day in perfect

outfits, especially if they have a family at home. In this way, a paradox is presented to young girls. They are raised believing they can be anything they would like to be – but it comes with stipulations. They are told to reach for the stars – but not without pulling the wait of their family behind them. The issue is not that young girls are pushed away from careers because they are given the opportunity to see this in simple parts of their upbringing, like Engineer Barbie, rather it is in how this plays out once they're older.

The girls grow up and start to look at careers with all the ambition of boys. They dream of being CEOs and being the brains behind medical breakthroughs, just the same as any of their male counterparts. The division comes where families are concerned. Young women in college are asked how they plan to balance their workload with having a family, without even a thought that a family might not be in her plans. This same question is never asked of young men in college because it is assumed that they will find someone to take the brunt of the load at home while they are taking care of business at work. Girls believe that they can have a career thanks to Engineer Barbie, but they are handed a burden along with it without a question – the burden of choice. Barry Schwartz identifies the high amount of choice that people are faced with as one of the main stressors in their lives because they are so concerned with making the wrong decision. In his Ted Talk, he says, “Something as dramatic as our identity has now become a matter of choice...We don't inherit an identity; we get to invent it. And we get to re-invent ourselves as often as we like” (Schwartz). In other words, young girls are so concerned with the choices they may have to make in the future that they opt to make the decision now rather than go through the pain of losing something they are passionate about in the future. Young women make the choice far before it is necessary based on the assumptions surrounding a career woman.

It is the assumption that women are going to take on the majority of the work at home that derails the dreams these young girls have built up. They gain the understanding that they must incorporate childcare and housework into their life and make the only practical decision: choosing less strenuous careers. In this way, an invisible barrier is created between women and success because of the multitude of choices they are offered surrounding future family life. It is not that they are raised believing their only path is to motherhood or a traditionally female career, but rather they choose the path of least resistance when it becomes apparent that a more strenuous occupation is not realistic. The women who find themselves in positions of power in large corporations or as a successful surgeon are the ones who have looked at the odds and become determined to beat them.

More recent examples show how the toy industry has progressed when it comes to representing women in the STEM fields. In November 2017, LEGO released a new set entitled “Women of NASA” featuring four prominent women from NASA’s history. The differences between this LEGO set and Engineer Barbie begin with the rhetoric attached to the toys – children are encouraged to “follow in the footsteps of four pioneering women of NASA with this fun and inspiring LEGO set” (LEGO, 2017). The key part of this description is the emphasis on pushing children to see these women as role models and pursue a career similar to theirs. Rather than creating some zany story like Engineer Barbie’s, LEGO presents an explicit mission with their job: to grow future leaders in the STEM field.



Another stark difference between the Women of NASA LEGO set and Engineer Barbie is the type of women represented by the toys. Engineer Barbie portrays a cookie-cutter blonde woman wearing professional clothes, almost as if she were dressed for a Halloween party. The LEGO set chose instead to create toys out of real women, and stay true to their appearances. Of the four women, one of them is black and one is an elderly woman. These toys are accurate depictions of what the women they are inspired by looked like when they achieved great accomplishments as part of NASA. Not only does this speak to LEGO's commitment to diversity, but it also gives children a different idea of what a woman in the STEM field looks like. It provides young girls with a more accurate, and therefore reachable, role model to have and contributes in a positive way to their expectations for their own lives. By representing real women, LEGO works against the idea that women should be perfect while they maintain these grueling careers.

The set also provides a rare example of an older female in a career, showing young girls that they can have lifelong careers – not just careers that exist to keep them busy until

they are married or decide to have children. This concept furthers the focus on the accomplishments of these women, not their appearance or any fashionable career. For these LEGOs, it is this emphasis that gives it such a strong capacity to influence young girls – they see women as NASA legends, not as blonde and bouncy. Thus, their first thought could be “I want to be an astronaut someday”, not “I want to be that pretty when I grow up”.

Finally, women being the sole focus in a LEGO set speaks volumes to how far the toy industry has come. Historically, LEGOs have been a toy for young boys – after all, the boys do the building. However, this set is directly targeting young girls and encouraging them to see LEGOs as an option for toys. Opening these types of toys up to girls in such an inviting way makes it easier for them to see themselves playing with other masculine toys. Beyond that, it sets the tone early on that girls can do anything boys can with the integration of girls into the world of LEGOs.

One other company that ran with the push for more progressive views on women is Nike Inc. with its “If You Let Me Play” campaign. The series of TV commercials showcased adolescent girls of varying ethnic backgrounds reciting facts about the benefits of including girls in sports. Entering the media at a time during which there was a battle to expand the amount of opportunities that girls had to play sports, Nike attempted to showcase its support for the new generation. Andi Ziesler in *We Were Feminists Once* describes the TV commercials as packing “decades of rebuttal to sports as a ‘boy thing’ into thirty seconds of airtime” (14). The commercial clearly champions the idea of girls participating in something that was reserved for men until only recently – but the biggest accomplishment of the ad was the ripple effect of it being “one of Nike’s most successful

campaigns ever” (Ziesler, 14). Just imagine all the little girls who saw girls their own age participating in sports on TV and thought they might want to do the same. The impact of TV on a population cannot be ignored, especially when it could motivate young girls to step out of their comfort zone.

Striped to the bone, however, this advertisement is just that – an attempt to sell more tennis shoes or moisture-wicking shirts or whatever it was that Nike was focusing on at the time. For every girl that was inspired by that commercial, there a loyal customer of Nike was built and the company’s bottom line was improved. As if to prove the company was leveraging current attitudes in favor of increased female participation in sports, Nike followed their successful campaign with another entitled “There’s a Girl Being Born in America”. This time the commercial focused on the different ways that the youngest generation is being raised. Like the advertisement before it, this campaign “invokes sports as a means for girls to thrive in the world: ‘There’s a girl being born in America/ And someone will give her a doll/ And someone will give her a ball/ And then someone will give her a chance’” (Ziesler, 15). Once again, the sports apparel company pulled on the heartstrings of America to empathize with young girls, all the while opening up their pockets to accept the steady stream of cash that came with a successful advertisement.

The way that these issues are presented in Nike’s campaigns also relates to how girls still operate in a dualistic world. Girls have to ask to play sports, they are not shown going out and giving themselves permission to do so. While this distinction may seem small, it has a direct effect on the way that females’ participation in sports is viewed. Rather than being an activity they get to enjoy simply because a girl has a passion for soccer, she is instead an outsider in the world of athletics. Thanks to the supposed

generosity of men, women have the privilege to be exposed to pastimes men have enjoyed for years. They are a guest in their own leagues simply because men were there first. In this way, the Nike campaign fails to empower women in a way that encourages them to think of sports as an equal part of their reality.

The idea that women are guests in the world of men is something that extends into the world of business and STEM and almost every other aspect that women have been allowed to invade. Not all men may have actively fought against including their female coworkers in the C-suites, but they might not be so accommodating to them once they do. They are also encouraged to remember the Engineer Barbies of their past – to maintain their girlish charm to not be too similar to the men that are with them.

One way that the paradoxes in which young girls are raised comes back to haunt them during their adult life is in how they handle promotions. Sheryl Sanderberg focuses on the concept of withdrawing from a career before actually leaving in *Lean In*. She discusses how women she has worked with have been apprehensive to take on new projects or even accept promotions because they are worried that a family will eventually make these advances in their careers too difficult to handle. Using the metaphor of a marathon, Sandberg describes how women are not apt to succeed: “both men and women arrive at the starting line equally fit and trained. The gun goes off. The men and women run side by side. The male marathoners are routinely cheered on: ‘Lookin’ strong! On your way!’ But the female runners hear a different message. ‘You know you don’t have to do this!’” (100). Women are not encouraged to make good on the promises they were given at a young age, instead reality hits when they set foot in the workforce. No longer are they told to reach as high as they can, instead they are warned that the career ladder they are climbing

may fall out underneath them. Society's attitudes towards women completely change as they begin to accomplish the very things they were set up to do with all those progressive toys and other influences.

The reality of Engineer Barbie also hits when women become active members of the workforce. Instantly they are expected to adhere to the principle of having it all. In other words, they are expected to have a successful career, functioning family, and still find time to maintain a perfect outward appearance while doing so. Regardless of whether a woman has children or even wants a family, their colleagues ask how they expect to manage their new promotion with their personal life or given suggestions on where to find the best fitness classes to stay in shape. Engineer Barbie may have been a failure when it came to encouraging young girls to pursue a career in STEM, but it was woefully accurate when it comes to what working women are expected to be like.

The issue with the concept of having it all is that in most cases it is physically impossible – unless some female scientist is able to come up with a way to create ten more hours in a day. One of the most successful businesswomen in the world blatantly states, “the very concept of having it all flies in the face of the basic laws of economics and common sense... ‘Having it all’ is best regarded as a myth” (Sandberg, 120). If someone like Sheryl Sandberg acknowledges the naivety of integrating two lifestyles into one, it only seems logical that the rest of the world would do the same. Unfortunately, this is far from the truth.

Dreams are powerful. They push people to accomplish amazing things and lead to someone to grow beyond their perceived potential. However, dreams can also quickly be crushed. The danger of pushing young girls to pursue any career they desire through toys

like “Women of NASA” LEGOs or play sports like their brothers is how unrealistic those dreams are. Perhaps the poor reception of Engineer Barbie speaks to how dissatisfied women of today are with the lot that they were dealt. After all, when they were only five years old they were encouraged to imagine being a doctor. Unbeknownst to them, the doctor they became was expected to be the same perfect Barbie they would have been if they had chosen to skip years of college in favor of a husband.

The workforce needs to catch up to the toy industry and all the other areas of life that have embraced women by creating a welcoming environment. If women cannot have it all, then it should not be viewed as failure. Or even better, women should be given the opportunity to maintain a career and a family through policies that make it easier for them to do so. Maybe if Engineer Barbie simply existed in a more hospitable environment she would not seem so far-fetched.

CHAPTER TWO

Growing Up and Donning a Pantsuit

Let's say that you were raised with a perfect childhood. You were loved by your parents and encouraged to do anything you set your mind to. Your dad sat in the bleachers as you played as the only girl on the boy's hockey team and your mom helped you develop a science fair project that was far above the learning level of anyone else at your school. As much as possible, you were given all of the opportunities you could have been afforded. The good news is, lots of young girls do have these sorts of childhoods. But what happens when these girls grow up? What do their lives look like when they sit down in their first college lab? Hopefully, they feel completely welcomed in their classroom and encouraged to pursue their dreams of being in the medical field. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Far too often, women are met with the opposite of what they expected.

Those women who make it far enough to see it notice that they are existing in a world of false pretenses. They were told that they could make it to the top, but the path looks a little different than what they expected. One of the more pervasive suggestions for women just beginning to begin their career is to behave as much like men as they possibly can. In other words, ditch the dresses and embrace the pantsuit. Unlike their female colleagues, men are encouraged to speak up first and aggressively assert themselves to gain social capital. So, if women want to catch up, then they need to adopt some of these same habits. However, this leads to something that Sheryl Sandberg has deemed the "imposter syndrome" (Sandberg, 29). When women feel the "imposter syndrome", they begin to recognize that they are not behaving in a way that is natural – or at least in a fashion that

believe is more acceptable for a man. Therefore, the doubt only piles higher for women who are trying to give themselves a leg up.

One male quality that young professional women are taught to emulate is the practice of appearing more confidently than they actually are. Anne-Marie Slaughter describes how her husband helped her overcome the obstacle of unconsciously undermining herself: “My husband taught me to act like a man...Andy, a powerful speaker and assertive debater, would listen to me make my arguments. Afterward, he’d point out all the ways in which I’d undercut myself: the typically feminine tropes of speech and posture that signal lack of confidence...” (Slaughter, 17). Behaviors as simple as exuding confidence are unnatural for women. This inability to believe in themselves runs so deep in women, that they underestimate their own basic talents. Rather than believing that they are more than competent to pursue whatever dream they have chosen, women are quick to be critical of themselves. Sandberg details “a study of close to one thousand Harvard law students [that] found that in almost every category of skills relevant to practicing law, women gave themselves lower scores than men” (30). Not only does this mean that women have built their own barrier to succeeding, but it also means that they have given men the head start. If men are walking into interviews bragging about their professional abilities, while women are hesitantly detailing their accomplishments, then it’s no wonder women have a difficult time getting promoted. After all, confidence is key in presenting yourself.

Confidence is also much more difficult for women when it comes to how intelligent they perceive themselves to be. Humility may be an admirable quality, but when it comes to considering yourself to be smart or unintelligent, too much humility can be detrimental. The notion that women do not have as much natural brains as men begins very young. An

article entitled “The Confidence Gap” in *The Atlantic* describes “a study from researchers at the University of Illinois, New York University, and Princeton [that] found that girls as young as six years old believe that ‘brilliance’ is reserved for men. The girls in the study also believed that, unlike boys, they don’t have the innate abilities to get good grades at school” (Krischer). Without the confidence in their own intelligence, girls sell themselves short when it comes to grades, and beyond that the sort of dreams that they could eventually aspire to.

The confidence gap is rooted in some of the most basic lessons that young girls are taught, causing them to develop their personal skills differently than boys. Following the introduction of Lynne Doughtie as CEO and United States chairwoman, KPMG elicited a study of 3,000 professional and aspiring female business students. Of these respondents, “eight-six percent...were taught to be ‘nice to others’ growing up and to do well in school, but less than fifty percent were taught leadership lessons” (Schwartz). While young women may be raised to have just as many aspirations as men do, they are not armed with some of the skills necessary to push themselves forward in a career. In this way, boys emerge from school more confident in their ability to lead, as well as with less concern for how their actions affect others. These qualities cause them to be more focused on their own success than their female colleagues, and thus more willing to elbow past the competition for leadership roles. Young boys also tend to have more role models on which to base their future success. Seeing someone who looks like you in a leadership position helps to motivate men to reach for leadership, but girls do not grow up with the same advantage (Schwartz). Instead, young girls must search for women to look up to – an issue that continues into their professional careers as they begin to search for mentors.

These young girls grow up and become like Margarita Levin, wife of Michael Levin, a couple described in *Backlash* by Susan Faludi. Although Michael is aware of his wife's exceptional aptitude in mathematics, he and his wife share the belief that women cannot be naturally talented in the sciences. As a result, she downplays her knowledge and places much more stock in the success of her husband (Faludi, 310). Margarita is an example of a woman who has reached a ceiling far too early because she lacks confidence in her ability to move forward in her career. Without the belief that she could not possibly be just as smart as a male math whiz, she could have struck out to do groundbreaking research and thus launched herself into a very promising career. Instead, Margarita follows her husband's wishes and adopts his beliefs – which actually push her towards anti-feminism. Her aspirations are cut short – and with it goes her potential.

Lacking confidence leaks into every sphere of women's inability to close the gap in the workforce. Without the same sort of confidence that men have, women find themselves willingly taking lower salaries and passing up promotions because they do not have the self-confidence to believe that they deserve the higher salary or position. Journalists Katty Kay and Claire Shipman published an article in *The Atlantic* detailing their research on what they deemed "the confidence gap." They found that women's lower confidence contributed to the dismal number of women at the top of the corporate ladder by looking into personnel records from Hewlett-Packard. These records indicated "that women working at HP applied for a promotion only when they believed they met 100 percent of the qualifications listed for the job. Men were happy to apply when they thought they could meet 60 percent of the job requirements" (Kay, Shipman). Particularly interesting about these findings is that women who may be more qualified than men are

not even attempting to interview for higher positions. These women are not more concerned with their family life, as many people claim, but rather they do not believe in their own ability to be in a position of power. Without this confidence, women pass up opportunities that they have every right to seize.

When you look deeper at why women are unwilling to vocalize their talents and be more aggressive about their own success, another reason for their actions appears. Unlike men, women are wired to be much more concerned with how their colleagues view them – and the very traits that they are encouraged to possess are what earns them a negative social label. In other words, when women adopt the behaviors associated with successful men: professional drive, ambition, confidence, they lose the rapport of their colleagues. Women who are successful defy gender stereotypes by exhibiting the leadership behavior necessary for growth. There is not a place to them to exist naturally in the current social system – so they are rejected. As written in a *Harvard Business Review* article entitled “For Women Leaders, Likability and Success Hardly Go Hand-in-Hand”: “As descriptions like ‘Ice Queen,’ and ‘Ballbuster’ can attest, we are deeply uncomfortable with powerful women. In fact, we often don’t really like them” (Cooper). People react much differently to females that are ambitious, which means women are faced with existing on an island in their pursuit of career success.

The reason for this difference in opinion relates to our stereotypes for men and women: “Our stereotype of men holds that they are providers, decisive, and drive. Our stereotype of women holds that they are caregivers, sensitive, and communal. Because we characterize men and women in opposition to each other, professional achievement and all the traits associated with it get placed in the male column” (Sandberg, 40). Battling

assumptions is difficult for any rule breaker, but to do so with such a developed prejudice presents a challenge much greater. For the men who are at the top of the overwhelming majority of the business world, it is much easier to swallow a man who elbows out the competition to earn a big sale or a promotion. When the person placing their own ambition at the forefront of their mind becomes a woman, it is far less palatable. Not only that, but in a more conservative organization a senior manager could be hesitant to make any sort of a statement by highlighting the female employee as top of their class. Making waves on your own is one thing but creating them on behalf of another person calls for a lot more guts.

Outside of the workplace, many women who are successful have the issue of damaging their significant other's sense of manhood with their higher rank. Men feel a contrasting pressure to be as ambitious as possible – but sometimes their significant other is the competition. Arlie Hochschild's *The Second Shift* is a groundbreaking study on family dynamics in varying types of homes. One of the families she studied consisted of an extremely talented woman who often happened to overshadow her husband: Nina and Peter. When it came to how much Nina earned, her husband “treated her salary as a miserable secret” and refused to tell his friends how successful his wife was because, “Peter said, ‘I’d never hear the end of it’” (Hochschild, 85). This example is particularly painful because a spouse is supposed to be the most supportive person someone has. In a perfect world, your spouse would be your number one cheerleader as you reach for your goal. But Nina has been trained to undermine her own success to save face for her husband.

Now imagine how difficult it would be for Nina to be confident in herself at work when Peter teaches her to behave like she is not as talented as she is. A healthy salary is

something that she has earned – but rather than celebrating her husband is asking her to be as quiet as possible about it. Therefore, women who are successful have to battle with the notion that their success makes them unattractive to men. While women may be career-focused, being liked by their significant other is a substantial obstacle for them. Further complicating the notion that women need to adopt qualities attributed to men if they want to be successful in their careers.

This fear that focusing on your professional life will harm your attractiveness runs even deeper when women are hounded with images of unhappy career women. In a time when women were making a vast number of strides, a study originally released by the *Stamford Advocate* famously found that “never married college-educated women at thirty had a 20 percent chance of being wed; by thirty-five their odds were down to 5 percent; by forty to 1.3 percent” (Faludi, 23). While this study was eventually proven to be defunct, it echoes a much larger cultural issue. Many young women are afraid of actively pursuing their career because of what it could do to their personal life. If they have to capitalize on the ability to find a husband while they are still young, few women would choose a head start in the workplace.

Likewise, women who do exhibit a high level of confidence and take actions to promote their own interests often deal with an entirely new set of negative reactions. Many women who are ambitious and unapologetic in their career are seen as crotchety or unapproachable. In short, “if a woman walks into her boss’s office with unsolicited opinions, speaks up first at meetings, or gives business advice above her pay grade, she risks being disliked or even – let’s be blunt – being labeled a bitch. The more a woman succeeds, the worse the vitriol seems to get” (Kay and Shipman). Men may be praised for

putting their neck out there and speaking up when their opinion has not been asked for, they will probably even be labeled as a leader and identified as a potential candidate for the next opening in management. However, the opposite is true of women who behave the same way. And so, women are told to be more confident and assertive in the workplace – but not so much so that people do not feel like they can be friends with you. Because apparently no one likes a woman who knows her worth in the workplace.

The argument against women taking their place in the professional world and rising amongst the ranks because of their likeability is particularly complex because of the validity to women's negative reactions. Not many people would tell a young woman entering the workforce to be as ambitious as possible, despite what her colleagues may whisper about her over the water cooler. Even smaller still is the number of women who would actually heed that advice. It thus presents a dilemma: be successful or be liked – which is even more unfair when you consider that men would not have to choose between the two options. Maybe if women made a habit of encouraging each other, rather than competing for the few seats reserved for the token females, they would be more capable of making strides in the workforce.

Women also have to put much more thought into something as simple as what they wear to work and their general appearance while they are in the office. When it comes to mimicking men in your behavior, professional clothing is no exception. An article in *Fortune* attempts to tackle the complexity of dressing for success by saying, “you have to find a perfect balance between acknowledging your femininity but not overemphasizing it...the short message to women is: your femininity is an asset and a liability” (Noyes). In other words, women who want to be successful need to make their male counterparts as

comfortable as possible. Be careful not to come to the office in a flouncy skirt – because that might remind your male colleagues that you are, surprisingly, a female with an affinity for “girly” outfits. But maybe keep the navy loose-fitting pantsuit at home – because if you wear that the men in the office might forget you are a woman.

This balancing act between dressing appropriately for business and maintaining an air of femininity is an issue addressed in *The Beauty Myth* by Naomi Wolf. When Wolf interviewed Deborah L. Sheppard for her book, Wolf quotes Sheppard’s viewpoint on women’s appearances in the workplace, “‘Women,’ Sheppard continues, ‘perceive themselves and other women to be confronting constantly the dualistic experience of being ‘feminine’ and ‘businesslike’ at the same time, while they do not perceive men experiencing the same contradiction’” (Wolf, 42). The very concept that being feminine and businesslike is at odds with one another creates an inhospitable environment for women. It asks women in the business industry to forsake their gender in favor of their career – and at an even deeper level it robs them of a portion of their identity. Your chosen professional career should be an extension of who you are – you choose to be a doctor because you want to heal people, or you choose to work as a sales professional because you enjoy building connections with people. Instead, by making something as trivial as how you dress about conforming to other people’s ideals, the business industry is robbing women of the right to feel comfortable in their own skin. Further, not many people are going to perform well in their career if they feel unwelcome being in the office. It’s no wonder women find it easier to be at home with their children when the opportunity presents itself, at least at home they can feel confident wearing a skirt.

From another angle, beauty in the workplace can be leveraged for power. If a woman is perceived as beautiful, she is often more positively received in the workplace and has the ability to use her gender to gain ground. While this seems like an asset for women at first glance, it also presents an interesting issue of ethics. Would it be right for a woman to go out of her way to make herself beautiful, even if it meant changing her appearance to fit traditional beauty standards, in order to gain a promotion? Economists have dubbed the assumption that more attractive people perform better in their occupation as the “beauty premium”, a term backed by a study in which employers are given the opportunity to evaluate job candidates with and without knowledge of their appearance. Writing for the *New York Times*, Hal R. Varian details how employers were given just resumes or resumes and photographs or a face-to-face interview. Concerning potential employees, “when employers evaluated employees only on the basis of resumes, physical appearance had no impact on their estimates, as one would expect. But all of the other treatments showed higher productivity estimates for beautiful people, with the face-to-face interviews yielding the largest numbers” (Varian). This research suggests that it can be beneficial to be attractive in the workplace because it managers have a higher perception of attractive employees’ ability to succeed. And thus, the double-edged sword of being beautiful by society’s standards but not flaunting your femininity is established.

Naomi Wolf gives the notion that women in the professional industry must be physically attractive a name: the “professional beauty qualification” (27). She further describes this unspoken requirement, also known as the PBQ, as “a legitimate and necessary qualification for a woman’s rise to power” and capable of being “earned by any woman through hard work and enterprise” (Wolf, 28). Therefore, beauty becomes a

currency used for a woman's benefit in the business industry. It also gives women the idea that if they simply work hard enough, they can be beautiful enough to be successful. Of course, there are plenty of parts of this concept that is unsustainable. To begin, not every woman can fit into the ideal female body type. Many women are not able to attain the perfectly thin body of a Victoria's Secret model. Likewise, it is unreasonable to assume that just because a woman is not what most people would deem traditionally beautiful, she is not talented enough to make it in her career.

But let's assume that a professional woman does adopt this concept. She decides that in order to be taken seriously in her career she needs to spend as much time as possible being beautiful. This woman relentlessly exercises to maintain her perfect body, she spends four hours every six weeks getting her hair cut and colored, thirty extra minutes every morning putting on makeup – the list goes on. All of this effort is exuded in the hope that she will be accepted in her office and seen for the talented employee she is. These hours all add up. *Women's Health* reports that “women spend an average of fifty-five minutes every day primping”, which totals to “335 hours...14 full days spent primping! – per person per year, on average” (Thapoung). The most pressing part of those numbers is that time could be used coming to work earlier or staying late – billable hours for an employee and hours that could be spent earning another promotion. Instead, these hours are used to ensure that women conform to traditional beauty standards in the workplace.

Some women might choose to put that much effort into their daily beauty routine even if they did not have to appear perfectly primed in the office. But the issue comes in when a female worker does not see it as a choice. She is instantly more exhausted than her male counterparts if she gets up an hour earlier five days a week to do the same job, so it

is not shocking if her performance is lower. Similarly, for women who are balancing an occupation and a family, those fourteen days a year equate to time they are not spending with their children or committing to valuable self-care. Overall, the hours lost to developing a personal image could cause women to be unhappier. There is also no promise that a woman who exudes the most effort possible in her beauty routine is seen as a more valuable employee – so those fourteen hours could ultimately be for nothing.

The hypocrisy when it comes to women's appearance at work is rampant in how detailed expectations are. If a woman wants to evoke Hillary Clinton and wear a bright pink pantsuit to work, she should not have to worry about rubbing her femininity in the faces of her male coworkers. After all, she is – believe it or not – a female. In contrast, think about how much thought men need to put into their outfit daily. No one is asking men to tone down their masculinity. In fact, they are actually asking women to adopt more masculine outfits.

And so, the stage is set for the bright-eyed young professional women graduating with all of their lofty dreams. They are encouraged to reach for the stars in their commencement speech and then thrust into a world where they must constantly walk in a balancing act. Be confident – but make sure you are still likable enough that your coworkers do not see you as a threat. Bring your femininity into the professional world where the organization could use some diversity, but only a toned-down version of your gender. Do not forget to be beautiful while you are trying to juggle a career and a personal life, those are valuable hours spent making sure you look the part of a promotion. It is a difficult line to walk – the line between being a woman and businesslike – and it is a line women strut on in pointed pumps. Perhaps if women were able to spend less time worrying

about whether or not they could fit into the business world and more hours on perfecting their profession, they would make more gains in the workplace.

CHAPTER THREE

First Comes Love, Then Comes Marriage...

At some point in their life, most women decide that they want to start a family. The succession created by society is to begin thinking of having children sometime after a woman has built a solid foundation in her career. She starts to worry about her biological clock running out and thinks that it might be time for her to give in to her spouse's plea for children. So, the career woman makes the happy decision to have a baby – and for a little while she is able to handle both her career and her new family. Except at some point, the balancing act begins to be too much. What's worse is that she will look at her male cohorts and wonder why they are not faced with the same duplicity that she is. As if the business world were not difficult enough to exist in as a woman, a family complicates it even more. Having a family brings to the surface the question that every female professional faces: how is it possible to handle a career and a family?

While this question becomes more relevant once a woman decides to have children, it is something that even unmarried women perceive as a roadblock they will eventually have to tackle. Although it may be years away, “by the time they are in college, women are already starting to think about the tradeoffs they will make between professional and personal goals. When asked to choose between marriage and career, female college students are twice as likely to choose marriage as their male classmates.” (Sandberg, 92). The most powerful effect of taking into account a family far before one exists is that women will begin to make decisions to account for their future children. Women will choose a different major in college or be less aggressive in their search for jobs. Making these decisions early on drastically alters the course of a woman's life – for instance, she might

decide not to chase after the international sales position she desperately wants at age twenty-three because she is worried about work interfering with her family life ten years down the road. Women are making the conscious decision to settle for less – a choice that only fosters resentment and feelings of inadequacy.

One of the points that Sheryl Sandberg makes in her book *Lean In* is that women tend to “leave before they leave”. Rather than continuing to charge forward in their pursuit of their career during the time they have before having the responsibility of children, they start making little decisions to scale back their career in preparation for what is to come. Sandberg describes the how some women make small adjustments that limit their career growth: “often without even realizing it, the woman stops reaching for new opportunities. If they are presented to her, she is likely to decline or offer the kind of hesitant ‘yes’ that gets the project assigned to someone else” (93). In this way, women begin to limit their opportunities – among which could be promotions and recognition that could pave the way for more satisfaction with their career. People who are higher up in their industry may have more responsibility but being in a more senior position also comes with more flexibility. With fewer people managing your time, you might have the ability to alter your schedule to accommodate picking up the kids from school a couple times a week or a weekend away with family. All of the little choices a woman makes along the way prior to having children in their life could compile into the lack of experience that limits her from the promotion she needs to be able to have more control over her workday.

One of the reasons that this paradox is originally brought into question is because of the dueling requirements presented by a child and a manager. Traditionally, men are devoted to their manager’s wishes while women are responsible for attending to her

children's needs. However, as more women enter the workforce these expectations have not been altered to accommodate for the fact that some employees are being pulled in two directions. Sharon Hays describes the underlying cultural identities that modern working women are pulled between in terms of a career mother named Rachel whose boss does not seem to understand how Rachel's child could possibly be more important than her job. In cultural terms, "Rachel's understanding of the logic of child rearing is connected to the cultural conception of women's private sphere in the home, and her boss's understanding of the logic of paid work is connected to the cultural conception of men's public sphere in the larger world. As an individual, Rachel is pulled between these two spheres" (Hays). The opposing public and private spheres have not been integrated culturally, therefore women feel pressure from both sides to be wholly dedicated to one or the other. With these two gender norms in place, women feel that they must make the decision between work and family life.

Women who make these decisions may think they are saving themselves from heartache in the years to come, but research suggests otherwise. In their series of articles for *The Atlantic* studying a sample of educated women with and without careers, Hana Schank and Elizabeth Wallace refer to these women as "the Scale Backers – 13 women who dialed down high-powered careers to simultaneously be full-time mothers and workers." What is surprising is that these women feel just as stressed with their lives as the group of women who chose to stay the course in their career, even at the expense of childcare and less face-time with their children. The only difference between them and the women still putting most of their effort towards their career is that these women feel stretched. By attempting to have one foot in both worlds, "they became, ironically, the

most stressed-out of our subjects, attempting to do everything well, but feeling like they excelled at none of it” (Schank and Wallace). Although these women were living relatively successful lives without having to fully dedicate themselves to either realm entirely, they felt dissatisfied. In essence, having it all was not really all they thought it would be.

But is half a career really having it all? And is that truly the life she desired – feeling stretched between her home and her family life? Odds are the career and family she imagined as a college student did not involve this feeling of being caught between two worlds. Because of this, some women eventually make the decision to drop their career all-together. Often, this is not something they planned for, but rather a choice they make in lieu of the difficulties they face in attempting to balance their children and their career. In their study of educated women, Schank and Wallace found that “one commonality among our interviewees who chose to stay home is that they held jobs that, once their child was born, no longer ‘worked’ for the family: the job wasn’t sufficiently flexible for a new parent; it didn’t pay enough to cover the cost of childcare; or it simply wasn’t so fulfilling as to warrant the disruption it would cause the family” (“When Women Choose Children Over a Career”). They decided the tradeoff was not worth the loss of family time, proving the point that no matter how much you love a job, children are more valuable.

The number of women who eventually leave the workforce shows how prevalent the pressure to leave is: “Of Yale alumni who had reached their forties by 2000, only 56 percent of the women remained in the workforce, compared with 90 percent of men” (Sandberg, 99). Although these women have some of the best education offered in the world, they still feel that they cannot make a career work once they have families. The amount of time and effort they are expending on their occupation eventually succumbs to

the demands children place on their life. Not to mention the hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars they spent on education, women who are highly educated and leaving the workforce are lost potential. Assuming these Yale graduates are spread out amongst a myriad of disciplines and a solid representation of college graduates as a whole, that leaves a dismal number of women in the workforce. Therefore, only perpetuating the disproportionate representation rather than making strides to remedy the same issues that pushed them out of the workplace.

The saddest part about both scaling back your career and leaving it all-together in favor of spending more time with your children, is that this is not often met with praise from other women. Instead, women such as Anne-Marie Slaughter who sacrifice their high-power career are met with disappointment from their cohorts. After stepping down from her prestigious job in Washington D.C., Anne-Marie Slaughter says, “I routinely got reactions from other women my age or older that ranged from disappointment (‘It’s such a pity that you had to leave Washington’) to condescending (‘I wouldn’t generalize from your experience. *I’ve* never had to compromise, and *my* kids turned out great’)” (“Why Women Still Can’t Have It All”). Women who discount the value of family time by making their colleagues feel inadequate when they place their children in a place of higher importance are unknowingly perpetuating the current state of conflict. They are encouraging the concept that careers and families are incompatible, all the while only making it more difficult for the young women poised to enter the professional world. Rather than looking down upon women who leave their career because they have children, people should be asking themselves how they could have changed her mind.

The way that women who leave their career in favor of their children are treated eventually affects their self-esteem. Initially, these women may be content with the time they have with their children, but as the reality of their decision sinks in they begin to feel like a failure. One of the women studied by Arlie Hochschild describes life after she became a stay-at-home mom as such: “Being out of work, I felt really inferior. When I went out to the supermarket in the morning, I felt fat...and dumb. I wanted to go up to the people in the aisles and say, ‘I have an MBA!’...I didn’t want to be classified as a dumb housewife” (Hochschild, 152). This feeling of inadequacy is entirely unfair – what is to say that women who stay at home with their children are any less intelligent and valuable as women who spend their weekdays at a job? Not only is this another example of how women are all too quick to break apart each other’s confidence, but it also eats away at the possibility that women will be happy with their decision. Without feeling like they are valuable members of society as stay-at-home mothers, women cannot be expected to view that as a valid possibility for their life. Instead, they see themselves as a failure if they refuse to spend their lives attempting to straddle two opposing interests.

The stigma associated with putting family life above – or even at the same level – as your career has not changed in the corporate world to compliment the new level of flexibility that is now available at many organizations. In companies that do offer more progressive policies, “employees who make use of flexible work policies are often penalized and seen as less committed than their peers. And those penalties can be greater for mothers in professional jobs” (Sandberg, 130). This means that even mothers who are lucky enough to have the option of working from home or taking advantage of unlimited vacation time are unwilling to do so because they are worried about the consequences. So,

women are again stuck in the middle with no good options – working more means less time with your children but taking initiative and leaving the office right at five o'clock also could result in a boss who sees you as not dedicated enough to your job.

One of the women that Arlie Hochschild studied while she was writing *The Second Shift* perfectly displays how the corporate world expects people to treat their family. Rather than encouraging people to share details about their life outside of the office, they expect their employees to remain private about what goes on at home. Ann Myerson is a woman who has managed to rise in her career early on, becoming a vice president of a large firm at before thirty-five. When it comes to her twelve-month-old daughter, Ann says, “the worst thing I could possibly do is acknowledge that my children have an impact on my life. Isn't it ironic; I'm on the verge of quitting the company but I can't even tell my boss I don't want to go on this trip because my child's sick” (Hochschild, 96). What Ann is suggesting first, is that she is unable to communicate the effort that goes into having a toddler at home to her boss. Second, she is saying that there is no way to remedy the situation because she fears she will not be taken seriously as a professional. And finally, that something as simple as a business trip could put her career in jeopardy. The situation is set up to be impossible for Ann to feel like she cannot be successful no matter what she chooses. On one hand, she is surrendering her ability to care for her sick child. On the other, she risks losing everything she's worked for over the last ten years and having to start from scratch. Therefore, a simple decision turns into a major dilemma because the corporate world refuses to recognize that there could be more to life than a computer screen and a fancy corner office.

While women make the decision to cut out time for their family, this leads to a sort of damned if you do, damned if you don't situation. By making sacrifices throughout their career, women begin to feel inadequate when it comes to their ability to succeed. The very language that people use to describe women who leave their careers creates a narrow definition of success: "euphemisms like 'opting out,' or certainly 'dropping out,' send a deep cultural message about how we define success and failure, while also obfuscating that message in ways that make it very hard to challenge" (Slaughter, 178). The message that these sorts of phrases sends is that if you see your family as more important than your career, not only are you wrong but you are also destined to be a failure. The very core of the environment within the professional world, therefore, is incompatible with women. Once women have children, they begin to view their family in a negative light. They see their families as stumbling blocks to their success – and then turn to a career that they no longer love, if they ever did, for relief. However, this occupation is telling her that she should be more concerned with the numbers on her screen than the letters on her daughter's report card. It is natural for a mother to see through this corporate screen, so she still makes the effort to be involved in her child's life. In this way, women are setting themselves up for disappointment when they attempt to balance their career and their family life – because she sees value in her children where her boss only sees a distraction.

Another reason that women are unsuccessful in maintaining a happy family life and a fruitful career is the impossible standards that they are held to in both realms. On one hand, women are expected to be perfectly put together at the office, but they are also supposed to be a perfect mother. In part, this is an issue that feminism has generated on its own. When it comes to motherhood, the standards are so high that they are unattainable

for many women without a job. Debora L. Spar identifies the ridiculously high bar set for mothers as a huge stumbling block for career women. Rather than focusing on the important parts of parenting, like spending quality time with your child, women are getting caught up in the details of decorating a perfect nursery. In other words, “we need to stop being so damn perfect...As a generation – maybe even as a nation now – we are keeping our houses too clean, our kids too hypoallergenic, our families too well costumed and organized. We are not helping our children or our marriages. And we’re certainly not helping ourselves” (Spar, 170). The competition to be a perfect mother is fiercer than the fight to be at the top of the sales board sometimes, which is wrong on so many levels. The fact is that there are no perfect parents – male or female – so why does society expect every mother to be Martha Stewart?

The unrealistic standards of motherhood eat away at any sanity that is left in the working mother after she has spent her day attempting to fit into the impossibly masculine mold of the professional world. At some point, she becomes so stretched that she reaches what Anne-Marie Slaughter has identified as the “tipping point”. This stage in a woman’s career comes when “what was once a manageable and enjoyable work-family balance can no longer be sustained – regardless of ambition, confidence, or even an equal partner” (Slaughter, 19). The most important piece of Slaughter’s definition is that she acknowledges that a tipping point can be reached by even the most ambitious woman in the office. It is also something that some women cannot plan for, because they never saw themselves making that decision. These sorts of ambitious and confident women would also most likely be bothered by the idea of being a subpar mother. People who are highly competitive and have a strong sense of self-motivation are often the most successful in

their careers because of these attributes. However, these are characteristics that cannot be turned on and off. Therefore, women with the drive it takes to rise quickly through the ranks of a corporation or a law firm are also most likely the women who feel the need to be as incredible of a mother as possible. Inevitably, these women reach a tipping point and have to make the choice between fully devoting themselves to their career or to motherhood – the latter of which is a much more natural and simple option.

Some women who strive to be as successful as possible in their career begin to feel badly for leaving their children in the hands of a nanny or even their father. Because of the standards of motherhood set forth, they feel like a failure as a mother if they are not available for their children as much as other mothers are. Nina, a woman studied in *The Second Shift*, has had a highly prolific career while being a mother. Eventually, she felt forced into asking to move into a part time position to make time for her daughter, which her boss granted. Despite the approval from her boss, “Nina was punished for being an uncommitted worker...one older man – whose own marriage to a career woman had come to a stormy end and who had quietly resented Nina’s success for years – finally confessed to her, ‘When you went part time, I realized you weren’t serious’” (Hochschild, 92). The moment that Nina made any sort of compromise for the benefit of her children, she was seen as a lesser employee. The quality of her work and the hours she put in at the office suddenly seemed to be useless, and the years she had spent building up her reputation were erased. None of this was because her performance at work went down, it was all because Nina acknowledged that her daughter was an important part of her life.

All of this said, there are some women who continue to value their career years beyond the birth of their children. People like Sheryl Sandberg have even found a way to

be successful as a single mother. These women face a whole different host of obstacles and negative perceptions due to their life choices. Despite the notion that women are successful if they have a solid career, “America looks askance at any woman who doesn’t appear to put her children’s care above her professional life” (Slaughter, 55). An example of this can be found in how Wendy Davis, a successful politician, has experienced backlash for making sacrifices in favor of her career. Her decision to leave her children “with her then-husband in Texas while she went to Harvard Law School has been held up as an example of her selfishness” (Slaughter, 55). Again, women face two options that both leave her with some sort of negative perception by society. If she chooses a career-focused life, like many men have for decades, then she is seen as a bad mother and selfish. But by placing more focus on her children, she is a failure. Therefore, even women who do seek to have a rich professional life face a backlash from society.

Career women are therefore faced with the impossible choice between two lives that they love: their profession and their children. The construction of the American professional culture is such that a family is viewed as an imaginary entity that should only exist in the comfort of your home. However, children and marriages are the core of most people’s lives – the first question many people ask is whether you have a family at home. Not only would work be more enjoyable if these two aspects of life could be joined, but it also has the potential to make the workforce much more hospitable to women. If women feel as if their family is a welcome part of their life in the office, they will see themselves as more valuable employees. In turn, they become more motivated and dedicated employees – the women in the office may even stick around long enough to become some of its best leaders. Once females feel comfortable enough to talk to their boss about their

children from her cubicle, she will no longer see work as something that keeps her from them. The key to building a professional world with more women is to bust open the doors of family and let it bleed as much as it can into the office.

CHAPTER FOUR

Building a Better Tomorrow

The professional world is clearly made for men – and why would it not be? When the American economy exploded a hundred years ago, only people who wore pants were allowed to be a part of it. While women have made all kinds of improvements to their lives, there is one place that is clearly still difficult beyond belief for women to be involved in: the workplace. So, how do women who want to have a career make it happen without becoming miserable in the process? Current research makes careers appear daunting for women who hope to have a family down the road. With the story presented, many women simply choose the path of least resistance.

Despite the vast literature on what makes it so difficult for women to succeed, it is entirely possible for a woman to dedicate herself to a career and a family, however there are a few areas of improvement for both working women and the American workplace. Women who are currently in careers or getting ready to begin their professional lives could make more effort to put themselves in positions of power. They could reach for the promotion that appear to be out of their skillset, in hopes that their current body of work will be enough. Through being in leadership positions, women could alter the workplace to make it more flexible for employees and eliminate the negativity surrounding motherhood. However, to accomplish many of the changes necessary, men need to be involved in the conversation. Men are the people currently in the position to make the changes necessary for women to succeed – and many of the alterations could produce a more suitable working environment for them as well. Until the discussion regarding work-life balance includes both men and women, it will face more resistance than it can

overcome. The ultimate goal is to bring family into the workplace – by doing this, women will be more comfortable and successful.

Improving the structure of the workplace to make it more hospitable to women is one of the most concrete ways that the professional world can bridge the gender gap. Currently, women are faced with the option of leaving their children from eight to five o'clock five days out of the week – sometimes even longer – or dropping their career altogether. As Anne-Marie Slaughter puts it, “the majority of Americans are mired in a 1950s mindset when it comes to assumptions about when and how we work, what an ideal worker looks like, and when to expect that ideal worker to peak in his or her career” (208). In other words, corporate America still expects their employees to report to the office as early as possible, stay as late as possible, and complete the entirety of their work at the same desk. This might have been practical twenty years ago when portable computers were rare, however now that almost every American owns a portable computer it is antiquated to believe that they need to be in a cubicle to perform the same task.

The good news is that the amount of companies who allow employees to work from home are on the rise. Last year, Gallup released a survey finding that, “forty-three percent of employed Americans said they spent at least some time working remotely...that represents a four-percentage point increase since 2012” (Chokshi). One of the most common reasons that companies are resistant to incorporate more flexibility when it comes to working remotely is the notion that employees are not as productive when they are not in the office. However, this same study discovered that, “workers who spend none or all of their time out of the office reported feeling equally engaged last year. Those who spend sixty percent to eighty percent of their time away from the office had the highest rates of

engagement” (Chokshi). This means that employees are engaged in their work, regardless of their physical location.

For women, having more flexibility on when they are in the office could greatly improve their ability to mix family life and a career. With the ability to pick up their kids from school, but continue working, women might not feel as if they are missing out on crucial parts of their children’s lives. Providing women – and men – with the flexibility to be with their family when they chose to be and even to work while they spend time with their family, does not have to be where the inclusiveness stops. The workplace desperately needs to become more understanding of family life. For both their male and female employees, it is crucial that they make efforts to bring more personal life into the office. As CEO of Palo Alto Software, Sabrina Parsons has developed the sort of environment that encourages employees to bring their children with them to work. Employees “are allowed to bring their infants with them” because, as Parsons believes, “as long as employees can get their work done, why is an infant snoozing away a problem?” (Slaughter, 227). Providing people with the option to bring their children to work breaks down the barrier between corporate America and family-life. Instead, it promotes the notion that these two can coexist – and that employees are just as productive with more flexibility.

The other area of the workplace that needs to be addressed before women are fully capable of entering the professional world is parental leave. Unfortunately, the United States “is the only country among forty-one nations that does not mandate any paid leave for new parents...the smallest amount of paid leave required in any of the other forty nations is about two months” (Livingston). Without the option of paid leave, plenty of women have to make the decision to quit a job in order to care for a child. They do not

necessarily have the ability to keep the job they are in without being forced to leave their newborn child in a daycare – which some parents might not even be able to afford.

The argument could be made that corporations are offering paid parental leave despite the lack of policy mandating it, but research by the U.S. Department of Labor found differently. They reported that, “in March 2016, thirteen percent of all private workers had access to paid family leave. Twenty-four percent of workers in management, professional, and related occupations had access to paid family leave, more than any other major occupation” (Bureau of Labor Statistics). However, these findings show that the majority of the private sector is not embracing the idea of paid parental leave. Women with children about to be born are thus forced to choose between their occupation and their newborn child – a choice that they should never have to make. This should also be a concern for corporations when it comes to retaining talent. With a sizable portion of their employees leaving their job to have children, they are losing employees that they would have otherwise kept. These employees also have the potential to work for their competitors if they decide to return to work eventually. Therefore, creating policies for paid parental leave would give women another reason to remain in their career beyond having a family.

On a more basic level, offering paid parental leave is a tangible way to work towards eradicating some of the social stigmas surrounding the role of the caretaker. Because maternity leave can only be applied to a woman, fathers do not have the same opportunity to devote themselves to their newborn child for a period of time. In her address to the United Nations on National Women’s Day, Anne Hathaway introduced the issue of paid parental leave as essential to the success of both men and women. Regarding the cultural impact parental leave can have, Hathaway said, “paid parental leave is not about

taking days off work; it is about creating freedom to define roles, to choose how to invest time, and to establish new, positive cycles of behavior” (Hathaway). In other words, providing men with the choice to dedicate more time towards their children will help combat the restrictions that women face because they are expected to be the primary caregiver. In fact, the same speech cites a Swedish study that “showed that every month fathers took paternity leave, the mothers’ income increased by 6.7 percent” (Hathaway). Including men in the conversation about improving work-life balance proves to impact women’s success in a huge way. Helping remove cultural stigmas around caregiving with opportunities like parental leave lifts some of the same issues that women face in the workplace.

If more female employees were making the decision to stay in their career after the birth of their children, that would also mean there were more women at the top of their respective industries. They would be staying in the industry long enough to earn the promotions necessary to place them in positions of power, rather than leaving before they have realized their full potential. Without women in decision-making positions, there is not as much pressure for corporations to put policies into place that make careers more feasible for females. The dismal data on women at the top of their fields is familiar: “women hold just five-percent of the CEO jobs in the S&P 500” and behind the women in those same companies only “16.5 percent of top executives are female” (Egan and Ordonez). When you consider all of the barriers women face to reach the peak of their career, it is not surprising that this percentage is so low. This low amount of high-level female executives provides young women who are seeking to climb the corporate ladder with few women to look up to. Women who are entering the workforce, therefore, express

less motivation to reach the top of their industry: “a 2012 McKinsey survey of more than four thousand employees of leading companies found that thirty-six percent of the men wanted to reach the C-suite, compared to only eighteen-percent of the women” (Sandberg, 16). Less than half the number of women versus men in the office are aspiring to reach a C-suite – so it is no wonder that much fewer women accomplish that goal.

Part of becoming a successful professional is identifying a mentor in the workplace, someone a lesser employee identifies as similar to themselves that can help them work through difficult situations and navigate the path to success. However, without many women in management positions, the search for a mentor becomes difficult. Sheryl Sandberg discusses the importance of mentorship at great length. According to her, “mentorship and sponsorship are crucial for career progression. Both men and women with sponsors are more likely to ask for stretch assignments and pay raises than their peers of the same gender without sponsors” (Sandberg, 66). The evidence is clear that developing a relationship with a successful member of your chosen industry is an important part of success, but this is much more complicated for women. Improving the number of women who hold positions of power in corporations would provide a bridge for younger employees to attain management roles in the future.

Without a wide selection of females to choose from for sponsors, women then move to the men in their industry. However, people are much more questioning of male sponsors with female employees. When it comes to men mentoring women, “a study published by the Center for Work-Life Policy and the *Harvard Business Review* reported that sixty-four percent of men at the level of vice-president and above are hesitant to have a one-on-one meeting with a more junior woman” (Sandberg, 72). These findings indicate that more

than half the men who hold leadership roles will not even meet with a woman who is below him without another person present. Although these men are justified in their sensitivity towards how their actions could be perceived, they are also creating limitations for women. Most employees who are seeking some sort of mentor would be focused on finding one that they could have a personal relationship – and this cannot be done when men refuse to meet with women one-on-one. Therefore, both men and women need to become more accepting of the idea that they can work together without being perceived in a negative light.

Making space for women at the top may not have the statistical data to back the advantages it provides corporations, however there are many logistical reasons why it could eventually benefit not just women – but also the men who are currently running the organizations. For instance, the influx of females’ difference in opinions and perspectives may open up a whole host of doors for companies. In regard to the numerous women who are not contributing to the workforce, “it is simply absurd to leave these talents on the sidelines, particularly when those proverbial few good men are getting harder and harder to find” (Spar, 198). With all of that untapped potential, there could be a great number of accomplishments that are just waiting for women. An industry in which diversification at the top is especially important is in PR agencies where they face offending masses of consumers with culturally insensitive advertisements. Angela Chitkara of *Harvard Business Review* writes, “one of the biggest risks to a company’s reputation is a tone-deaf advertising campaign. PR practitioners need to be keenly attuned to what their brands’ strategies are and how their campaigns can be perceived, but they’ll be hard-pressed to do so if they don’t become more diverse and inclusive themselves” (2018). By refusing to

include the opinions of minority groups like women in their decision-making team, PR firms risk running a campaign that could lose them a great deal of customers. Therefore, bringing female opinions into the boardroom could be the difference between a healthy bottom line and a dismal quarter.

Another piece to the puzzle of combining a family life and a career for women is finding the right partner to do that with. It may seem like a simple way to set yourself up for success but ensuring that the partner a career woman chooses for herself is supportive and ready to take on the complexities that come with a dual-income household makes a substantial difference. Unfortunately, the progress that women have made into the workforce have not been followed by more even splits when it comes to childcare: “when a husband and wife both are employed full-time, the mother does forty percent more child care and about thirty percent more housework than the father” (Sandberg, 106). When you consider the fact that the extra hours women are putting into childcare or housework could be precious time they had to themselves to catch up on work or sleep a little bit later, the divide becomes even larger. It is no wonder that women are so willing to leave the workplace when they observe that their husbands are not providing the necessary help in the home. The disconnect between the stagnant division of labor in the home and the increasing number of women with careers makes it all the more important that women are choosing the right mate.

Towards young women who are still searching for the right person to settle down with, Sheryl Sandberg offers plenty of advice. Although recently widowed, Sandberg enjoyed a very happy marriage with her husband and credited him with greatly contributing to her success. To career women who are dating, Sandberg tells them: “find someone who

wants to be an equal partner. Someone who thinks women should be smart, opinionated, and ambitious. Someone who values fairness and expects or, even better, *wants* to do his share in the home” (115). Although those sorts of topics are not exactly the most romantic things to bring up in a relationship, actively looking for a partner who believes in the same ideologies is crucial when it comes to managing a career and a family. Without establishing expectations, it becomes easy for women to get frustrated by the opposing pulls of family and career.

Men who are more willing to be a part of caring for the household also contribute to relationships that are holistically happier. When couples agree to be equally responsible for homemaking and breadwinning duties, “wives are less depressed, marital conflicts decrease, and satisfaction rises. When women work outside the home...couples are more likely to stay together. In fact, the risk of divorce reduces by about half when a wife earns half the income and a husband does half the housework” (Sandberg, 118). This information is particularly groundbreaking when you consider that it examines not just equality in the home, but also sharing the duty of providing for a family. Couples should, therefore, seek to be equal in all areas of their lives. Perhaps the division produces more understanding between two partners when they can both share complaints about their boss being difficult to work with today and their toddler being fussy with his dinner. Rather than attempting to relate to each other’s frustrations, partners who both have a career and care for their family can relate to what the other is experiencing.

The benefits of having an involved mother and father do not stop with the unique ability it has to make motherhood and an occupation more realistic, it also contributes to the happiness of children. While she was observing the lives of various types of families,

Arlie Hochschild asked the babysitters or nannies about their general impression of the children they cared for. Regarding children from dual-income households, “the children of fathers who were actively involved seemed to them ‘more secure’ and ‘less anxious’. Their lives were less rushed” (Hochschild, 231). When they did not have to rely on just one person to care for their needs, children were more confident in themselves, as well as their parents. Without a doubt, having more stable children would make a working mother’s life that much easier.

Finally, women need to feel like they have the choice. Under the current structure, women are pressured into choosing either family or a career or attempting to do both. Without the ability to make the decision for themselves, women will not be comfortable with their choices. If a woman wants to be a full-time mother, then she should feel that she can do so without conforming to societal ideals. Similarly, if a woman desires to be successful in the boardroom, she should not feel guilty for doing so. The bottom line is that the opportunities are determined before a woman even encounters them.

Even women who chose to fall into traditional gender roles by becoming a full-time mother are faced assumptions about her resolution. Arlie Hochschild spoke to her female college students about their post-graduation plans and while most of them did say they wanted to establish a career for themselves, a few of them did say they wanted to be primarily mothers. These students said “that ‘all they want is to be a homemaker, offering long, hesitant explanations for why they would conceivably want to stay home, as if these days this choice for a college woman called for a social version of a medical excuse” (Hochschild, 255). The fact that women would feel ashamed about their decision to stay home shows how much society dictates the conclusions females make about what they

want out of life. By societal standards, the protectors of tradition should be applauding these women and making them feel as if they are fulfilling their duty as a woman. However, women who elect to do what society pushes them to do feel as if they are not worth as much as the lady in heels at the grocery store.

While women are presented with so many more options than they ever have before, they also face the daunting task of attempting to fit into the new set of gender stereotypes. Now the smiling housewife in a red gingham apron has a counterpart: a striking female standing in a power pose and a smart black pants suit. Women may have freed themselves from the inability to make the call, but they have opened themselves up to new ways for society to force them into a box. Concerning this new mental obstacle, Deborah L. Spar says: “rather than delighting in their opportunities, in other words, or seizing the incipient power that has been thrust upon them, women are laboring under the expectation of the ephemeral ‘all’” (242). In other words, women are balking at the new standards they are being held to. The societal standards that say they need to be perfect mothers who also rule the boardroom.

And this brings the aspiring career woman back to the relentless question: can you “have it all”? Regardless of what, exactly, “having it all” means, women today feel torn between their desires. Even young women in college are beginning to question the hopes and dreams that carried them to that far off city to seek a challenging degree. This sad truth plagues the mind of the modern woman – it tells her that she cannot have everything she wants. Young women look at their male peers and wonder why they do not feel similar pull; why they, too, do not seem to struggle against the disconnect between family and

career. Because these are two essential parts of the human experience, it is not a tension that can be ignored.

The answer to whether or not women can have everything they desire rests in their ability to recognize the issue and make strides to change the way the professional world operates. In her vastly popular article, “Why Women Still Can’t Have It All”, Anne-Marie Slaughter ends a long exploration of this disconnect by challenging women. She tells her readers: “if women are ever to achieve real equality as leaders, then we have to stop accepting male behavior and male choices as the default and the ideal. We must insist on changing social policies and bending career tracks to accommodate *our* choices, too” (Slaughter). Rather than lamenting the numerous obstacles and false opinions that women who want a career and a family face, Slaughter pushes women towards finding the balance for themselves.

The hope and ambition that Slaughter arms her readers with is the most important ingredient to breaking down the walls between family and career. Women need to believe that they can control the outcome of their lives – whether it includes a lifelong career or not. By doing this, women will have more confidence to reach for the leadership positions that will allow them to instill change in the professional world. It will provide them with the courage to find the correct partner in life. Preserving the hope that generations to come will not experience the same strain as women currently do is the strongest weapon women possess – and it will carry them far.

CONCLUSION

Looking Forward

After the exceedingly mixed reviews of being a woman in the professional world, I was more than a little worried about my own future. Being as ambitious as I am, it was painful to think that I may not be able to have everything I had ever dreamed of. However, I refuse to accept that I will not attain success in my career while enjoying a happy family of my own. Now that I stand on the cusp of my own professional life, I offer the following pieces of advice for the young women that are venturing with me into the abyss, as well as those who will come behind me. In order to be as accomplished as possible during my lifetime, both in my career and in my ventures outside of my occupation, I have come to believe a few key values are important.

First, confidence is not something that is exclusive to men. In fact, I think women are far surer of themselves than their male colleagues, if they allow themselves to be. Too often, women are quick to focus on their flaws before appreciating their gifts and talents that have gotten them so far. Be confident in your ability to get the promotion you want and believe that you can tackle the obstacles placed in front of you. Male or female, everyone faces challenges. Women may have to deal with a few more than men, but I believe those challenges will seem much less significant that if they exercised confidence in their ability to beat those barriers. One of my professors tells all of her female students to “be bold” in every aspect of their lives. If women were bold and confident at every turn, then women could change the tide of the professional world even more than they already are.

Second, there will be instances where there is absolutely nothing you can do to make a situation better on your own. It might mean that the system is broken and there is no way that you can fix it without first feeling the impact that roadblock has on your life. In those instances, you might need to look around you for help or accept that it is unchangeable at the moment. I hope that in those in times, you look up to find yourself surrounded by people who will empathize with the situation at hand. It may come in the form of a mentor you are particularly close to, or in a female colleague who has been in the same situation but having people to promote your interest is crucial to success. Build alliances rather than competing amongst each other or putting yourself in a silo because they will be so important in the future.

The final and most important wisdom I have gleaned from the numerous professors, businesswomen, psychologists, and others that have gone before me is to have hope. While it can be easier to trade the dismal future for a safer and less stressful future, the possibility of accomplishing everything you have ever dreamed of should always be at the forefront of your mind. When I was reading the depressing statistics or anecdotes, what kept me pushing towards my own career goals was the hope that I could reach my full potential. All of these women have encountered hardships during their path to success, but many of them are writing from positions they dreamed of being in with families they love more than anything. There is hope simply in the fact that these women are able to write about their own experiences. If they truly believed it could not be done, they would not be spending so much time imparting wisdom on the generations below them. The hope that you can attain everything you set out to have is more powerful than any challenges you may encounter.

At the edge of launching my own professional career, I have added a new goal to my list of hopes and dreams. One day I want to look back and be able to identify a number of women whom I have impacted on their way to success. Rather than making my own path easier, I hope to fight some of the battles placed before me so that the women coming behind me do not have to. If I can build an easier tomorrow for both men and women, I will have accomplished a goal perhaps more important than any of the ambitions I have for my personal success. It may be a tough industry for women to exist in, but one day I would like to keep the promises I make to my daughter. When a young woman is promised that she can become an engineer or a businesswoman, I want her to be confident that goal is attainable. Broken promises will one day be in the past, and women will be able to happily exist in a baby pink pantsuit with toddler on their hip.

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