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Women in Business: Social Status Recognition, Prejudices, Power Usage, Challenges and Solutions

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**Women in Business: Social Status Recognition,
Prejudices, Power Usage, Challenges, and Solutions**

By

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A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of

Ouachita Baptist University

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For Completion of Honors Program

Major: Business Admin/ Management and Finance

Under the Supervision of Dr. Kent Faight, Dr. Amy Sonheim, and Dr. Jennifer Fayard

Arkadelphia, Arkansas

April 11th, 2021

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Abstract

Although there has been a recent surge of business women in the workplace, there are many challenges that business women have everyday. Business women are more likely to face unfair treatment than men at work. Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, wrote in her book *Lean In* (2013) that these problems for women can include gender discrimination, lack of access to mentorship, and imbalance between work and life, to name a few. The primary reasons that business women face those difficulties at work are from social influences of stereotypical group thinking as well as different expectations of each gender. The concerns of this thesis are to identify major challenges that professional females face at work in the United States as well as to explore several helpful ways for them to cope. In addition, I will also dedicate a section for how these work issues pertain to Asian business women. To start, I will analyze stereotypical group and prejudicial mindsets, status for Asian business women in America, and the effective usage of power from business women in the workplace. In the end, I will give a detailed examination of a variety of challenges that business women have and ways to cope with them.

With a better understanding of these issues, individuals will be better prepared to cope with these challenges and work towards a fair working environment, where female professionals have healthier relationships in the workplace.

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Introduction

Although there has been a recent increase in the number of women who work in the business field, business women also face many challenges everyday. Common rising issues for business women at work include biases against females, limited opportunities for mentorship, imbalance between work and family, and many others. Major contributing factors for those rising issues are inaccurate stereotypical views of business women, low expectation for working-class women, and gender gaps between males and females. In addition, Asian business women in America are facing the same problems at work.

It is becoming a norm for women to have jobs in the business field, such as accounting, marketing, management, and finance. With the wide spread of education and the rise of feminist movements, more females today in America are inspired to study and work for the business world. However, there has been an unfulfilling gap between traditional, stereotypical views of women and the social recognition for business women. The traditional views of women come from when women had very limited opportunities to work. As a result, stereotypical women are often depicted as kind, but incompetent. However, with the rising opportunities for women to work competitively, women who work in business and other professional fields are seen as “breaking the traditional norm” and thus are seen differently. According to Susan Fiske, a psychologist known for her work on social cognition, stereotypes, and prejudice, in her book *Envy Up, Scorn Down--How Status Divides Us* (2011), business women are included in the “Envy group”, described as competent and cold. As the name implies, people often envy the “Envy group” because they feel intimidated by women that work in professional jobs.

Gender gap is another big reason that causes issues at work. Because it is easier to picture men taking leadership titles and high-level positions, there have been subtle

discriminations towards women, such as setting low expectations for them and neglecting their opinions. These gender-based prejudices have always been imprinted in our mind, and everyone is influenced by them, which I will address further in my thesis. These prejudices become more obvious when a woman climbs higher along the career ladder, especially in senior leadership positions. Moreover, as an international student from China who wants to choose my career in the business sector, I will analyze Asian immigrants as well as how Asian business women are positioned in America.

Despite the disadvantages that business women face from work and society, it is important for them to pursue power and use it effectively. Business leaders need to first have the will and capabilities to take on work responsibilities, and other skills such as self-confidence and wide networking that can help them to sustain management at work. Moreover, business women in high positions need to wield power wisely to build strong images.

At the end of my thesis, I will be presenting some solutions to address the challenges at work, such as setting life priorities between family and career, embracing new challenges, and setting the right self-perceptions at work to help business females cope with obstacles.

Last but not least, I wish to clarify that although the working challenges presented in this thesis are common experiences for professional women according to my research, not every business woman will face these problems. Depending on different jobs and working environments, business women may or may not have the same issues. However, my goal is to make business women aware of a better understanding of possible challenges at work, and thus be prepared to face them.

Stereotypes

To understand why business women are more likely to face certain difficulties at work that men do not have to, we need to be aware that business women are less welcomed in the society because business jobs are more typically geared toward men, and that business women are considered as “stepping out of the social norm” when they appear competent and ambitious.

Stereotypical biases have a huge impact in our society. They are comprised of two important concepts -- warmth and competence -- which are interwoven to form our basic recognition for analyzing people around us. Warmth is related to appearance, behaviors, and personalities, whereas competence is related to talents, knowledge, and skills. When recognizing a person, we tend to see the perspective of warmth first. Chris Malone and Susan Fiske write in the first chapter of *The Human Brand* (2013) that when we meet someone for the first time, the very first question we subconsciously ask ourselves is “What are the intentions of other people toward me?”, and the following question is “How capable are they of carrying out those intentions?”. We have always been driven more by warmth than competence in all human interactions.¹

Two Instincts

We have two instincts that are derived from warmth and competence. Our first instinct, “Friend or Foe?” alertness, leads us to measure others based on their worthy intentions as a priority. When we feel the other person is generous and kind to us, we perceive him or her as a friend and therefore put our guard down. However, if we feel the other person is cold and is hard to get along with, we perceive him or her as a foe and therefore raise our alert. The second instinct, “Able or Unable?”, is related to competence. We pay special attention to those who are intelligent and competent, caring less for those who are less skilled. However, since warmth and

competence are interrelated aspects, we perceive intelligent people based on how warm they are toward us. In other words, it is a matter of deserving success rather than earning it. For those who are both competent and warm, we are happy to see their success and would love to work with them because we perceive them as our allies. But if they lack skills, we would still like to be friends with them but avoid working with them. For those who are both cold and incompetent, we would feel antipathy towards them and would avoid interacting with them. However, if our “foes” are competent, we tend to envy and even suspect their success because we think that they don't deserve what they accomplished. As a result, this perception linked with warmth and competence leads us to categorize people into four basic stereotype groups: Pride, Pity, Scorn, and Envy. These four classifications are known as the famous Stereotype Content Model developed by Susan Fiske, who has published over three hundred works, won numerous scientific awards, and serves on the Psychology faculty at Princeton.

Susan Fiske's Stereotype Content Model Elaborated

Malone and Fiske believe that “Each combined pattern of warmth and competence perception leads to human emotions, which stimulate a predictable pattern of behavior”.¹ According to Fiske's Stereotype Content Model, the first group is Pride, consisting of those who are regarded as both warm and competent, such as middle class Americans and Christians.

The second group is Pity, consisting of those who are regarded as warm but incompetent, such as

Fiske's Restatement

Fiske et al. (2007)

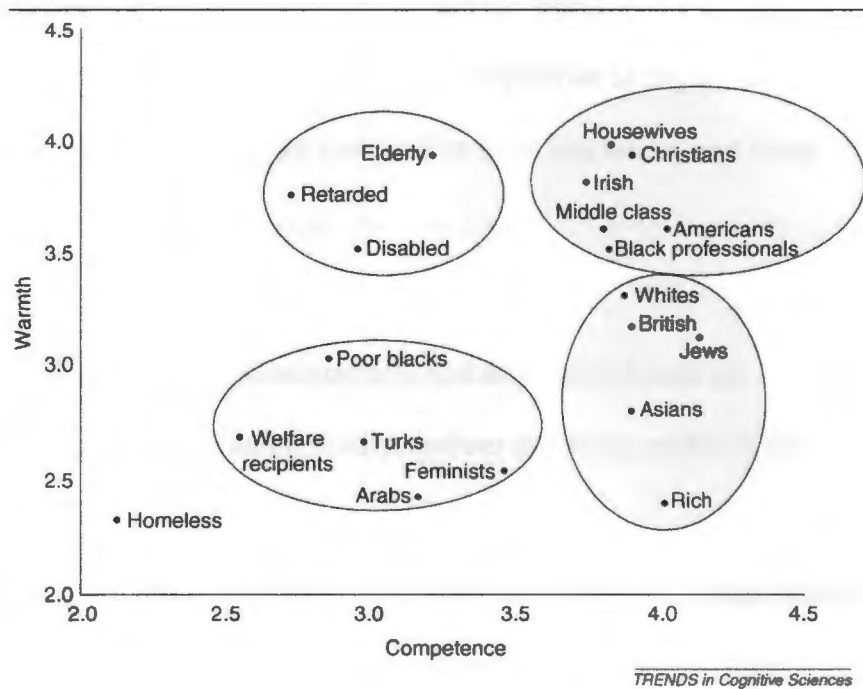
	Warm	Cold
Competent	“Our IN group” “Us”, as opposed to “Them”	“Objects of Envy” Jews Asians “The 1%” Female Professionals
Incompetent	“Mean Well” Elderly Disabled Mentally Ill	“Society's Outcasts” Poor Homeless Substance Abusers

children and elders. The third group is Scorn, consisting of those who are regarded as both cold and incompetent, such as the homeless, drug addicts, and criminals. The last group is Envy, consisting of those who are regarded as cold but competent, such as professionals, the rich, immigrants, and women managers. In the United States, since business women are included in the Envy group and are seen as “competitive” and “cold” to their peers of both genders, it would be no surprise that they get negative comments and receive unfair treatment at work.

For Envy groups, being perceived as unfriendly is the same as being seen as “out-groups” that are excluded from other homogeneous social groups with similar tastes, classification, and cultural views from the “in-group” view. The cognitive aspect for the in-group to value other groups is competence. Depending on how competent the out-groups are, in-groups would feel either scorn or envy towards the out-groups. If they perceive the out-groups to be weak and contemptible, the in-groups gossip, mock, and even attempt violence towards the out-groups to make themselves feel superior. But if the out-groups are competent, in-groups have the most complicated feelings toward them: envy, fear, injustice, and even bitterness. Feeling threatened by out-groups’ power, in-groups would often seek subtle revenge called *Schadenfreude*. “*Schadenfreude*” is a German word meaning “malicious glee” due to other people’s misfortune to make themselves feel better.² Therefore, in-groups secretly wish for the Envy group to fail. In other words, feeling threatened by female power with the new movements of feminism, the evolving society still secretly wishes for female professionals to fail.

Prejudices

In the business world, where jobs are structured for men, business women are more prone to be judged than business men because business women in general are seen as potential “competent foes”. Prejudices against other individuals come in several different aspects



such as wealth, education, gender, classification, and race. Everyone has prejudices, and certain prejudicial views are universal across the cultures. Moreover, according to Fiske, individual prejudices occur automatically and often subconsciously. Regrettably, emotions such as envy and scorn have an adverse impact on our society.

Prejudices Are Universal across Cultures

Although each country has its own different standard for stereotypes, major norms of stereotypes across the countries are the same regardless of cultural difference. In Fiske's "Universal Dimensions of Inequality -- Why Warmth and Competence Matter to Social Work", German data shows those in the "Envy" group are "millionaires, politicians, feminists, career women, and managers". Similarly, data from Japan and HongKong also label "Professionals" as high competence with low warmth, which are the typical traits of "Envy" groups.³ Therefore,

since major norms of stereotypes pictured in people's heads are similar across cultures, it is not surprising if the same prejudices happen in different places around the world.

In addition, our brains are wired to perceive warmth and competence as negatively correlated. In other words, we perceive those who are competitive to be less warm, and those who are nice and warm to be less competent.

It Happens Subconsciously

Fiske discovers that prejudices happen subconsciously and that not all biases are equivalent. Prejudices occur automatically and ambiguously, and our emotions produced are ambivalent.³

People are wired to judge. Most of the time people are not aware when they judge others because it happens unconsciously. For example, we may not notice that our brains produce different reactions when we see different groups of people, such as admiration for the Pride group and contempt for the Scorn group. Our feelings are derived from prejudices. Although we can easily feel different emotions, our prejudices are harder to detect. However, most prejudices produce ambivalent and mixed feelings, since not all biases are equivalent. In other words, stereotypes are ambivalent because we have mixed feelings towards individual groups. For example, when we see disabled elders, although we feel pity and empathy toward them, we are less inclined to form working relationships or allies with them because they are perceived as incompetent. On the other hand, although we might despise drug addicts and the homeless, we still pity them for not living up to a standard of life. In addition, our prejudices can change based on events in our life. For example, when we form interpersonal relationships with an individual, our original presuppositions may change after we get to connect and learn more about the

individual, and even our prejudicial concepts toward this particular stereotypical group can be altered.

Prejudicial Impacts on Our Society

Envy and scorn cause us to drift apart.

Envy combines with hurt and anger because upward comparison stresses people more than downward comparison does. Upward comparison occurs when we compare ourselves to those whom we perceive as superior or possess some desired advantages that we lack, and downward comparison is the opposite. Unlike downward comparison, which occurs when we compare ourselves to those whom we perceive as inferior, upward comparison brings up envy and frustration. Envy is different from jealousy or admiration, but it is a state of mind that “I wish that I had what you have, and that you did not”.⁴ Compared to jealousy, which is a personal attachment that changes faster, envy is related to social status and makes the envious feel humiliated. According to W. Gerrod Parrott, those who are jealous are to feel afraid, threatened, suspicious, or betrayed, whereas they themselves often feel inferior, ashamed, insulted, and bitter.⁵ Envy occurs because all social systems entail inequality, while the essence of envy is wanting to damage the privileged other person. People who are prone to envy have a greater tendency to harm because they are subject to *schadenfreude* and aggression. Moreover, envy produces adverse health effects. Resentful vigilance of envy imports hostility, which is a risk factor for heart disease. Even worse, resentment, shame, and hostility can motivate envious people to hurt others even at risk of harming themselves, causing self-destruction.⁴ With envy being one of the seven deadly sins, Proverbs 14:30 warns us “A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones” (KJV).

Contrary to envy, scorn is thoughtless and less bothersome. It is the state of mind that “You are not worth my attention, and I wish you would go away”.⁴ Scornful people choose to either neglect or disparage the objects that they scorn, and their self-enhancement blinds the scornful from knowing the objects, leaving themselves clueless. Fiske elaborates that the scornful become less sensitive because “They fail to identify others’ emotional expressions, to consider others’ perspectives, and to appreciate others’ knowledge”.⁴ Even worse, scornful people tend to dehumanize scorned objects to animals, even down to the point that the scornful don’t care to actively impose harm. However, scorn and contempt are worse than sheer anger, for bitter emotion is the enemy against well-being. In contrast, both persons who judge and also the judged face adverse health issues because being under constant harassment creates stress that undermines a person’s heart health and immune system.⁶

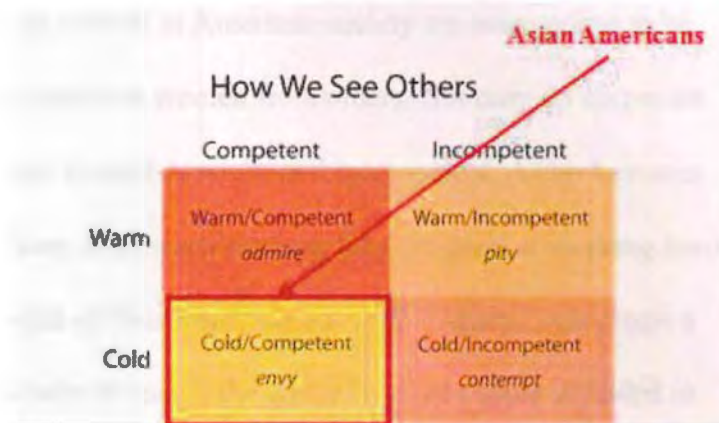
Asians, and Asian Business Women

Asians in America are universally considered as a part of the Envy group; likewise, Asian business women are particularly considered hard working but cold.

One reason for Americans to perceive Asians as expressing low warmth is that, typically, Asians fit their stereotype of being very competitive. As mentioned before, our

perceptions of competence and warmth are negatively related. Rooted in their Confucian values, Asian cultures prize academic performances more than warmth. For example, when I was in middle school in China, the teachers favored the few students who always had the best scores in the class, with little or no focus on their characters. This favoritism made other kids jealous, competing to get higher scores to draw the teachers' attention and praise. Consequently, Chinese students were conditioned to treat their peers coldly because they are raised in highly competitive environments, especially in cities with dense-populations such as Beijing and Shanghai with billions of people each. Asians are generally regarded as highly competent but low warmth.⁷

Another reason that Asians are seen as low warmth is that Americans view Asians from the "out-group" perspective. Hard language barriers, frustration from strong cultural shocks, and stress for being in a completely new environment result in social awkwardness for Asians visitors and immigrants to American society for the first time. In other words, unless someone is raised in American culture, it is hard for him or her to blend in well or assimilate. As a consequence, Asians are stereotyped as low warmth, despite the fact that most Asians want to be



nice and friendly toward others. The fall out is that envy groups express bias against outsiders who are unwilling to put effort into knowing them as individuals.

On top of everything, Asian business women in American society are more prone to be perceived negative impressions than White business women from others. Not only do corporate females violate the traditional view of seeing women as warm and incompetent, Asian business people are also considered “job-stealers” from Americans because they are good at working hard to be competitive. By combining the concepts of “business women” with “Asians”, we create a specific group of people called “Asian business women”, the typical type of people included in the Envy group who are stereotyped as cold-hearted, bossy, aggressive, and manipulative, a persistent trope of “the Dragon Lady”. With these wrongheaded biases against them, it is not hard to foresee Asian business women facing huge social pressure and challenges in The United States.

Use Your Power

In America, professional women's opinions are less heard and valued than those of professional men. To cope with this phenomenon, business women have to be emotionally mature. However, it doesn't mean that business women should give up climbing their career ladder. With the first female Vice President in the White House, it is inspirational for females to excel and even land leadership positions in the business world, and business women have the same rights as business men to pursue their dream in their careers.

Why People Want Power

Power is beneficial. According to Jeffery Pfeffer, the author of the book *Power* (2010) and an American business theorist, people who have power tend to live a longer and healthier life, and their entitled leadership positions can produce considerable wealth. People with power are great at self-presentation and projecting positive images, which help them to preserve self-esteem and to cultivate satisfaction. Moreover, power is a part of leadership necessary to get things done successfully because, according to Pfeffer, people who are smart and outstanding can be trusted in their talents and leadership skills.⁸ With power, a person feels smart and needed, and their self-esteem increases.

Power Persuasion Skills

There is no shortcut for gaining power overnight; it is a challenge for both business men and business women to perform well enough at work to get promotions, and much effort and certain personal qualities are needed to increase control. According to Pfeffer, there are two fundamentals for a person to achieve amazing things: will and skill.⁸ In other words, a successful person is willing to take on big challenges and is competent enough to solve them. However, it is

not enough to gain power for having only will and skill because other personal qualities such as ambition, energy, and focus are also needed for a person to achieve.⁸

In essence, for a business woman to reach high positions and gain power at work, having ambitions can set her to focus on the outcomes and on achieving influence; meanwhile, being energetic not only can be contagious to her surroundings, but it also signals her strong working commitment for success. Last but not least, being acute in a particular field by focusing on a limited set of skills can greatly help a business woman to gain the power to speak and direct.

On top of needed personalities, work ethics such as self-knowledge, confidence, empathy with others, capacity to tolerate, and intelligence also equally play a big part in being successful at work.⁸ To be powerful in a certain area, one needs to gain self-knowledge through reading, taking notes, and reflecting for self-improvement. In addition, having confidence can impact one's surroundings, making a difference. To gain power, leaders often have to act and speak assertively to attract more people for support, because no one likes having indecisive leaders! However, since women generally have less confidence than men, it is very important for business women to cultivate confidence rather than blindly follow others. Lacking confidence not only stops business women from being powerful, but also causes other problems such as less pay, fewer promotions, and even harassment. Therefore, to be powerful at work, business women need to be bold enough to constantly push themselves forward. Having empathy with others, however, is what business women usually excel at. By detecting other people's thoughts, business women can put themselves in other people's places to work with them. Finally, business women need to be mentally and emotionally resilient to be capable of tolerating work conflicts.

Power Persuasion Strategies

Aside from personalities and work ethics, external factors such as reputations, social network-working skills, and self-representation also determine one's success for obtaining power. Two ways for getting noticed at work is to know your boss and to break the norm.

Knowing your boss is one of the most accessible ways to get promoted for gaining power.⁸ You can get a better chance for promotion by doing what your boss likes to get done at work, not only because of your performance, but also because of his preference for making his life easier and more efficient. Believe it or not, perceived personal favor can influence the way your accomplishments are measured by your boss, so keeping your boss happy is one important factor for gaining power. According to Pfeffer, CEOs are more likely to put loyalists in senior positions, regardless of what past incumbents have accomplished. The mere exposure effect, which is that supervisors favor whom they are familiar with, is one direct way to get noticed, so actively engaging with your boss can gain your boss's favor and trust. After gaining your boss's trust, gradually take certain tasks that have greater direct resource control such as budget and staff to expand your power dynamics, because titles and resources connected to the positions held matter more to the power expansion.⁸ In addition, to make your boss feel good, it is appropriate to offer sincere compliments. The key for gaining favor from your boss is to avoid creating sentiments, because your boss has direct rights to determine your power control. However, while trying to gain favor and trust from your boss, both business men and business women need to prioritize work ethics by communicating with the bosses in a positive way with integrity and honesty instead of manipulation.

In addition, one needs to step out of the comfort zone on occasions to break the norms to get noticed, especially for business women. Although behaviors such as asking for help, building

your own personal brand, and promoting yourself can feel uncomfortable at first, they are advantageous in distinguishing yourself from other candidates in an intensely competitive workforce. Therefore, to be noticed, a business woman needs to get over the idea of being liked by everybody by “showing off” to break the traditional norms.

Stay Powerful

Once the business woman has gained power or been promoted, she must exercise techniques such as being competent, building confidence, being feared, and building social networks to stay powerful.

Though displaying anger is one of the signs for business men to have power, it does not apply to business women. Business women are expected to be communal without displaying frustrations at work. Thus, business women need to choose being competent instead of showing emotions. Being competent is one of the fundamentals to lead, and competent women are more trusted and respected at work.

Moreover, in competing with business men, business women need to build enough confidence for being perceived as powerful, because acting and speaking with power can produce a significant physiological impact on both you and your colleagues. Two ways for building confidence is by faking and using powerful gestures. “Fake it til you can feel it”.¹¹ Even though you may have little confidence, studies show that it can boost your confidence and make you feel powerful when you act like you have power. The reason is that attitudes follow behaviors; once the attitudes are generated, they are likely to remain stable.⁸ Therefore, it is important for business women to project that confidence because it can be transformed to real confidence! Moreover, using powerful gestures can also help to boost confidence. One’s postures and gestures are good indicators for power status. For example, postures such as slouching,

dressing slovenly, and mumbling are perceived as signs for a lack of confidence and power; in contrast, professional appearance, brief yet commanding gestures, and spreading limbs are perceived as demonstrating power. Therefore, it is best for business women to dress up and act professionally to indicate their power dynamics.

A moral dilemma that every leader struggles with is to choose between being loved or being feared. Though everyone wants to be liked, bear in mind that the likability is overrated because most people are busy with their own business. A leader who is too nice risks being underestimated and betrayed, because people can possibly betray someone they love, especially in terms of power control. One reason is that although nice people are perceived as warm and easy going, niceness often comes across as a sign of weakness or even a lack of intelligence.⁹ Moreover, power almost certainly creates likability, because people tend to approach those with power for wanting to be close to success. Thus, under a strict, top-down hierarchical system in a business society, it is better for a business woman to be feared than loved.

Lastly, the influences from social networks should never be underestimated. Stated by Pfeffer, "Networking makes you more visible; this visibility increases your power and status; and your heightened power and status then make building and maintaining social contacts easier".⁸ Globalization and the diffusion of technologies not only makes it easier for people to expand their social networks, but also for boosting their resources and support. Thus, business people need to spend enough time and effort in broadening and maintaining their social connections. However, to avoid being overwhelmed, business leaders need to use time on networking efficiently. The most optimal strategy for networking is to build both strong ties and weak ties. Strong network ties with the right people can help you to find better jobs such as managerial jobs because they are more likely to be discovered through close contacts. To develop necessary

strong ties, according to Pfeffer, it is best for managers to “make a list of people you want to or need to meet and the organizations where some personal connection might be helpful”.⁸ Weak ties, on the other hand, serve the function of linking you to new people and organizations and providing new information and contacts.¹⁰ To maintain weak ties is to “know lots of different people from different circles, and multiple organizational affiliations in a variety of different industries and sectors that are geographically dispersed, but not necessarily to know the people well or to develop close ties with them”.⁸

Prices of Power

As there is no proverbial free lunch, power also comes with prices. In fact, status and the price of power is positively correlated. Regardless of gender, every leader faces the problems of visibility and public scrutiny, loss of autonomy, required time and efforts, dilemmas with trust, loss of power, and the adverse effect of losing power.⁸

The higher the power status you have, the more frequent public exposures there will be. The public loves to scrutinize famous individuals -- CEOs, governors, and elites, etc. -- from every aspect of their life. Since those individuals generally lack personal privacy, they must “look good” under constant public pressure. Moreover, powerful people may need to host countless visitors, and overscheduling can be very draining leaving them unable to cope with unexpected challenges. Life-work balance is especially difficult for influential females who need to spend time with their families and alone. Thus, higher level business women constantly feel no time for themselves. Yet, professional females are likely to be single because the males typically regard them as “threatening” for being strong and successful, which is unfair for professional females.⁸

Powerful people can lose power, most likely because they lose their follower's heart and put trust in the wrong people. Without putting others' interests in consideration, the leader's reputation will go bad and thus lose followers. Thus, for business people, to have power doesn't mean to abuse power. In addition, business professionals also need to be aware of obsequious colleagues who flatter for the proximity of obtaining power after they successfully let you put down your guard. Therefore, trusting the wrong people can make you lose power.

Power can be an addictive drug. Having once tasted the sweetness of power, it is difficult to not want more. For those who have been successful in power-and-money games, losing power means losing identities and the losses are felt intensely. Consequently, both adverse physical and physiological reactions for losing power can be detrimental to someone's health. Physically, the danger of suddenly ending a person's adrenaline rush is like "...as Binkley put it, a car going from ninety miles an hour to a dead stop", which is damaging to the body.⁸ The loss of elite associations can leave the person desperate, causing physical decline. Moreover, with additional stress for financial support and future living, those who lose high positions risk a high chance of immediate death.

Challenges for Business Women

Contrary to ages ago, with the awareness of equality and feminist movements around the world today, more females choose business jobs as their career choices. However, business women are facing challenges from both work and family because they “break the norms” from traditional views that business jobs are only for men and that women are entitled to low-ranked jobs. One reason for this stereotypical view is that the paternal social norms have been passed through thousands of generations, from back when men went out hunting to provide food for the family and women stayed at home to take care of the kids. Even though there has been an awakening toward gender-equality, our cognitions are still subconsciously influenced by the old paternity societal rules. Therefore, business females today who work at higher ranked business jobs like management, finance, and analytics are more likely to be perceived as abnormal and, therefore, as a threat to males, although in reality it is not true. Challenges that business women face predominantly come from gender bias, harder access to mentorship, homogeneous bias, negligence from male colleagues, ignoring their own limits, less popularity, wrong self-perceptions, and even attacks from other business women.

Gender Biases and Social Pressure

The first challenge a female leader faces is gender bias. While both men and women are equally important as they both contribute to society by working, it is easier to imagine a man than a woman to take more responsibilities at work, negotiate with opponents, earn higher salaries, and grab chances for promotion. Business women, however, are less privileged than business men. One reason is that because of paternal social structure, genders are not regarded equally at work. Therefore, females are often given lower expectations than men at work. Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook and a famous TED Talk speaker, mentioned in her book *Lean In*

that we are influenced by social pressure since childhood.¹¹ Boys and girls are treated differently from the moment they are born, gender stereotypes being introduced from childhood. Usually girls receive more hugs and comfort than boys from moms, because parents typically regard boys as stronger and more self-sufficient than girls. Moreover, proclamations such as “smart like daddy” and “pretty like mommy” to children subtly infuse the concept of gender differences, which result in encouraging boys to take on higher positions while discouraging girls to do the same. In fact, when a woman tries to lead, she is more likely to be labeled as bossy.¹²

In addition, women are often surrounded by headlines and stories warning them that they cannot be committed to both families and careers at the same time. This overwhelming social pressure often makes working females feel afraid of failing to meet social standards, resulting in many working women holding back to let go of new opportunities. Men, however, have less family concerns than women do.¹¹ As a consequence, women in the work field are typically less ambitious than men.

Another subtle gender bias appears in which men hold positive but traditional views of women, so-called benevolent sexists.¹³ Although they do not deny the talents and strength that women have, they reason that those skills are better equipped for women to raise children and nurture families. Benevolent sexists don't think they are biased, but in reality their ignorance puts them in a “bias blind spot”, from which their conscious and unconscious biases will hurt other female colleagues and even their wives. Moreover, studies show that the higher the degree of a traditionally married man, the higher the chance he has of being a benevolent sexist.

Limited Mentorship Accessibilities

It is harder for business women to obtain mentorship than men. Because men are perceived to be more ambitious at work and are more likely to stay, many teaching institutions

are willing to invest in men. However, women in general lack this advantage because they are regarded as less ambitious and are less likely to stay at work. In other words, it is harder for business women to obtain guidance because they are usually seen as less dedicated to work because of family duties, such as giving birth.

Moreover, it can be awkward for a female worker to ask a male to mentor her because it means that they will be spending lots of time together at work. Since mentorship requires well-known knowledge of each other's career progressions, both parties need to consider how well they know each other before asking for mentorship. In addition, rumors may rise if both mentors and mentees are of different genders, even though there are no affairs involved. So, if the majority of mentors in a company are men, there will be less mentorship opportunities for women because their selection is narrowed. People won't gossip if parties involved in mentorship are of the same genders. However, there are fewer senior-leadership options available for women than men. But if a woman tries to get to the top of the ladder without mentorship, her career would likely stall and goals may not be achieved. As a consequence, genders can directly impact a person's success based on accessibility to mentorship.¹¹

ASA Theory: Business Males Homogeneity

Developed by B. Schneider, the ASA Theory, also called Attraction-Selection-Attrition Theory, is the best way to frame the homogeneity bias concept. As we can see from the framework on the right, the ASA model is a fierce competition among business workers. To elaborate, the "Attraction" stage is where many candidates compete to get into an organization or a specific collaborative group. The "Selection" stage is where the organization or the group selects candidates based on their own organizational culture and values, preferring to hire those

Negligence from Male Colleagues

Another challenge for business women is related to working conditions, such as lack of designated parking places for pregnant women. Sandberg depicts her personal story in a humorous sense: because the parking lot at work was always crowded, she had to park on the far side of the parking lot. However, when she was pregnant with her first child, the inconvenience and pain of running from the parking place to her office made her miserable, until she could not stand it. Eventually she waddled into her senior male leaders' office demanding for pregnancy parking lots. In shock, the senior leaders confessed that they had never thought about making a designated pregnancy parking place and did what she asked for.¹¹

Imbalance between Work and Family

For business women with kids, ignoring self-limitation is hard for balancing work and family. Business women would often exhaust themselves by attempting to manage both the workplace and family perfectly. It is important to know that everyone has limits, and it is an unrealistic expectation to manage everything exactly.

For work, business women who work remotely tend to extend working hours longer than usual, because they feel less dedicated than their peers who go to the office rather than stay at home. Even in workplaces that offer flextime arrangements, they would overwork to overcompensate in fear of reducing working hours will jeopardize their career prospects.¹⁵

At home, business women tend to do all the family chores, taking care of infants. Statistically, Sandberg states, "According to the most recent analysis, when a husband and wife both are employed full-time, the mother does 40 percent more child care and about 30 percent more housework than the father".¹⁶ One reason is that young mothers often forget that their partners are also capable of doing the same things. Feeling obligated for doing family chores and

taking care of young ones, many women take everything into their own hands and end up exhausting themselves. Another reason is that industries are less likely to provide paternity leave, and that is a problem for women. As parents, fathers are considered secondary to mothers because of different gender expectations. As a result, women inevitably need to bear more burden for domestic work. This phenomenon has been amplified during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Aimee Picci, a business journalist, “Moms are often bearing the brunt of that shift, with the Boston Consulting Group finding that women are shouldering an additional 15 hours of domestic work per week than men during the crisis”.¹⁷

Less Being Liked

Although it is hard to admit, business women are rarely considered attractive. As stereotypical women are often depicted as delicate, soft, and full of empathy, women are more welcomed in areas of art, music, theater, and teaching. In contrast, men are usually depicted as strong, professional, and with leadership skills, seen as more suitable for jobs that are high-stakes. Consequently, women who choose to work in business are seen as “out of the norm” and thus are less liked. To prove this point, Harvard Business School once did a case study to test the students' views toward business men and business women: a professor gave each student in his class a case about working experiences of a real-life entrepreneur who works at Silicon Valley. However, for half the students, the entrepreneur was called Heidi; for the other half, the entrepreneur was called Howard. The survey showed that although students respected both Heidi and Howard, the one with the masculine name “Howard” was more appealing to them than “Heidi” was.¹¹ The conclusion was that people in general favor successful men over successful women.

One of the reasons that businesses women are less appealing is that we hold biased views toward different genders. Men in general are seen as “providers, decisive, and driven”, while women are seen as “caregivers, sensitive, and communal”.¹¹ With this bias in mind, professional women are seen as “less communal” and their behaviors “take men’s play roles”. Therefore, even if recognized, a successful business woman in topnotch positions is more likely to be assumed to be “too aggressive”, “not a team player”, “a bit political”, “can’t be trusted”, or “difficult”. Professor Deborah Gruenfeld in Stanford University explains, “We believe not only that women are nurturing, but that they *should be* nurturing above all else. When a woman does anything that signals she might not be nice and foremost, it creates a negative impression and makes us feel uncomfortable”.¹¹ As a result, business women often need to downplay and even question themselves to be viewed as “polite and approachable”. But downplaying risks of being seen with a lack of competence and not being respected. Even worse, some business women are sexually harassed at work via inappropriate jokes and even physical violations.

Biased Self-Perceptions

Other challenges that business women face are the instability of jobs, lacking confidence, being indecisive in front of new challenges, and overusing apologies.

One big challenge for business women who plan to have a family in the near future is losing new job opportunities and even their present job titles. To plan for motherhood, they frequently have to decline new job opportunities. According to Sandberg, “Often without even realizing it, the woman stops reaching for new opportunities. If any are presented to her, she is likely to decline or offer the kinds of hesitant ‘yes’ that gets the project assigned to someone else”.¹¹ In addition, maternity leave may also lead to the risk of their present jobs being taken over by other colleagues. And last, studies show that 52% of women with husbands whose

income earnings are in the bottom quarter were more likely to stay at home because they struggle to find jobs that pay enough to cover child care expenses.¹⁸

In addition, business women generally lack confidence. One reason is that the “girls’ academic gains have not translated into significant higher numbers of women in top jobs”.¹¹ For example, although speaking out is encouraged for girls in class, it is less valued in the workforce.¹⁹ However, self-advocating is a necessary step for career progression even though business women are discouraged from exhibiting these traits. As a result, business women tend to be less confident. With self-doubts, business women are more prone to develop “impostor syndrome”, in which they feel fraudulent when praised for their own accomplishments. When recognized, instead of feeling worthy, people with “impostor syndrome” are prone to feel undeserving and guilty, as if a mistake has been made. Though both men and women may have experienced impostor syndrome, women tend to feel it more intensely. As Sandberg illustrates, “Multiple studies in multiple industries show that women often judge their own performance as worse than it actually is, while men judge their own performance better than it actually is”.¹¹ As a result, when business women are recognized, they tend to attribute reasons to external factors such as “effort”, “mentors”, or “luck”, while business men would give credit to their innate abilities and skills.¹¹

Girls tend to be more cautious and more likely to hesitate in the face of new challenges. This reserved mindset may not have much impact in school, but its drawbacks can be manifested in business jobs. New career opportunities and promotions are rarely given, but are seized by those who are ready. Compared to business men, women are more laid back about changing roles and prefer stability, resulting in letting go of many new openings or promotions.¹¹

Another disturbing phenomenon is that women tend to apologize more than men do. Though a proper use of apologies can be seen as polite, excessive apologizing risks someone being seen as weak. One reason women do more apologizing is that “women have lower thresholds for what constitutes offensive behavior”, according to Sloane Crosly, an editor from *The New York Times*.²⁰ It is a natural instinct to apologize for trying to be less obtrusive, so women would express many unnecessary “pleases”, “excuse me’s”, or even “sorrys” in daily conversation. Another reason is that the deeper meaning of “sorry” is not clearly addressed, which is best authentically used to express something truly meaningful. The third reason is that women use apologies as a prop to vent their frustration or anger. In this case, an “assertive apology” serves as a substitute for not being offensive. Significantly, women are raised to think that apologizing is one of the best ways to express warmth and kindness. As Crosly describes, “apologies are inexorably linked with our conception of politeness. Somehow, as we grew into adults, ‘sorry’ became an entry point to basic affirmative sentences”.²⁰ Although the right amount of apologies under the right circumstances are deemed as professional and polite, excessive and even unnecessary apologies when doing nothing wrong can confuse others.

Women Attack Women

The last challenge that business women might face is attacks from other women. Studies show that being attacked by peers of the same gender can hurt more than being attacked from that of different genders, because people automatically include those of their same genders as the in-group. Therefore, females expect harmonious relationships between themselves; and when expectations are not met, they feel betrayed by their own tribe.¹¹

The biggest cause of business women attacking each other at work is that the hostility and jealousy fueled by their ambitions make them view each other as rivals, especially when it

comes to new job opportunities and promotions. “Queen Bee syndrome” is developed where business women attack each other by ignoring, undermining, and even sometimes sabotaging each other.¹¹ As the name implies, the Queen Bee in the bee society is a prestigious role known for holding on to her title and leaving no chance for other females. Similarly, many top-level business women have this “Queen bee” mindset and therefore try to keep other female colleagues down. As a result, women can also be the workforce perpetrators.²¹

Regrettably, business women not only attack each other at work, but also attack women who choose to stay at home. The “Us vs. Them” view makes at-work females and at-home females resent and gossip, because neither regards the other as living up to ideals. However, both types of women have inner guilt and insecurity because at-work females are concerned with being judged for not prioritizing families, while at-home females are concerned of being judged for “not doing real work” or being “just a housewife”.

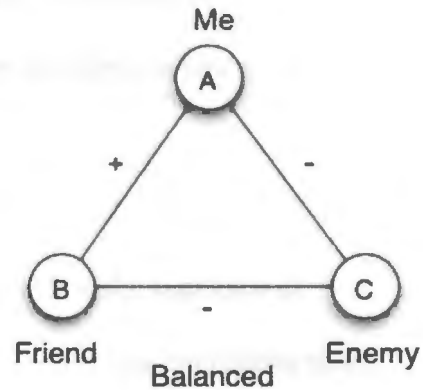
How to Face Challenges

Although there are challenges that women need to face in the business world, the majority of the problems are solvable. For example, organizations with gender-bias issues need to hold training programs for employers and employees to eliminate behaviors that contribute to unfair working place treatments and to constantly track employee performances and their satisfaction. In addition, business women can solve issues on their own such as boosting confidence for embracing new challenges, setting life and working priorities, sharing housework, learning to be emotionally mature, establishing correct self-perceptions, and to respect other business women.

Balance Theory: Unity Between Business Men and Business Women

It is possible to minimize the stereotypical gender biases, prejudices, and gender discriminations through unification of both genders. To create a fair working condition that ensures business women's working progress and satisfaction, companies should hold training programs for both employees and employers to eliminate any discriminatory and other negative behaviors at work and to track employee satisfaction. Moreover, businesses can launch programs that reinforce positive working environments for business women such as providing more accessible mentorship opportunities, letting both men and women work together, and encouraging business women to address their concerns confidentially. In addition, it is most important for both men and women who work in the same workforce to realize that they share mutual interests for the company. Instead of regarding colleagues of opposite genders as competitors, both business men and business women should see each other as friends and work together against their real competitors -- the other companies.

As shown on the right, Fritz Heider's Balance theory illustrates that while both "Me" and "Friend" each have a negative relationship with "Enemy", "Me" and "Friend" have a positive relationship. In the Balance Theory, both "Me" and "Friend" refer to business men and business women in the same corporation, while the "Enemy" refers to outside competitors. In this case, the triad is balanced because the



sum of two sides equals the third side (double negative equals positive). Therefore, for a company to run smoothly, every business man and business woman should focus on mutual benefits of their company instead of against one another.²² Company goals should be irrelevant to gender issues, and a co-ed company with harmony usually succeeds.

Therefore, to eliminate gender discrimination at work, both business men and business women need to work together and regard each other equally. For example, business men could welcome business women to sit at the negotiation table, give them credit for proposing new ideas, avoid interrupting, and allow working mothers to have flexible working hours. Moreover, changing leadership ratios by taking more business women into leadership roles can help women expand necessary experiences at work.

Embrace New Changes and Challenges

Many people have multiple careers throughout their lives, and one should be open to new career changes. For most people, a career is not just one ladder to climb, but is more like a jungle gym which has many available jobs. However, unlike business men who are prone to embrace new challenges and work changes, business women usually have many doubts and uncertainties that make them eventually step away. To solve this problem, business women need to shift their

opportunities.

Set Priorities

It is important for business women to set priorities to do tasks in the sequence of importance because they have limits. The thought of doing all and expecting everything to be perfectly done will only lead to disappointment. For business women who have both work and family responsibilities, it is important for them to set priorities by distinguishing the most important tasks needed to focus on. Sandberg elaborates, “Counterintuitively, long-term success at work often depends on *not* trying to meet every demand placed on us. The best way to make room for both life and career is to make choices deliberately -- to set limits and stick to them”.¹¹ For example, going home at a reasonable hour is a goal, and trivial life details such as the tidiest closet or well-folded linens can be neglected. However, there are no rules for defining what tasks are the most important because priorities depend on personal situations. Knowing what matters and what does not can increase efficiency and is an excellent energy saver. Moreover, letting go of little things that are less important in life can prevent business women from being overwhelmed and therefore increase life satisfaction. Sheryl Sandberg’s “Done is better than perfect” teaches us to know our limits and learn what to focus on.¹¹

Another way to balance time allocation between work and family is to focus on working efficiently rather than counting unnecessary clocking hours. Focusing on clocked hours instead of aiming to achieve goals efficiently will not only lead to excessive wasted working time that could have been spent with families, but also drag down the efficiency and competitiveness of a

business. The same method applies to business women who work at home as well. As Sandberg explains, “If there is a new normal for the workplace, there is a new normal for the home too”.¹¹

Share Housework with Your Partner

To alleviate burdens for taking care of families, business women should share house chores with their partners. Establishing a division of labor is necessary in a family. Research shows that sharing housework together not only makes it easier for the wife to work outside, but can also increase marital bliss. The reason is that when husbands do more housework, wives are less burdened and less depressed, and many conflicts can be avoided.²³ In fact, the risk of divorce reduces by half when both husbands and wives earn income and do house chores.²⁴

However, if a woman acts as a gatekeeper and is reluctant to hand over responsibilities, or even questions her partner’s efforts, the partner will do less. So although both parties should participate in doing housework and raising kids, a supportive and thoughtful partner will be the cornerstone for success in a business woman's career.

Be Emotionally Mature

A necessary feature for every business woman is to be mentally and emotionally mature. While staying kind and warm to other people, business women need to realize that it is unrealistic to please everyone at work. Rather than being a pleaser, a professional woman needs to know what she really wants to achieve at work and commit to it. When facing criticism or even attacks, instead of shutting down or forcing oneself to suppress emotions, business women should allow themselves a moment to get upset or even cry in private places before getting over those emotions quickly.¹¹

Establish Correct Self-Perceptions

Essentially, business women need to realize their value and self-importance. Since business women are universally perceived on the outside as competent and ambitious, they need to be strong and confident at workplaces.

For business women who plan to go on maternity leave, they need to consider the future cost for raising children and job stability when facing the dilemma between current work and preparing for motherhood. In fact, those who later rejoin the workforce are more likely to see their earnings decrease dramatically, and those who stayed through their career make much more.²⁵ For new mothers, although keeping pace with the current workforce can be exhausting, it is rewarding. Another reason that business women need to be open to new opportunities before maternity leave is that everyone is replaceable at work. Another aspect that business women need to cultivate is to boost confidence. Dressing up professionally, avoiding slouching, and speaking up are typical ways to increase individual confidence. In addition, to act professionally, it is best for business women to avoid excessive apologies. Last but not least, business women need to realize that while it is good to expand networks, work should often be put as a priority because it is impossible to create deep bonds with every colleague. Therefore, according to Adam Bryant, editor of *The New York Times*, instead of striving to build personal connections with everyone, business leaders need to let go and do the right things for businesses.²⁶

Respect Other Business Women

Business women need to respect and validate other business women. Whether they are at-work colleagues or housewives, both are necessary and contribute to our communities in different ways. According to Sandberg, to respect each other, both business women who work outside and housewives, one needs to understand and support each other.¹¹ In addition, female

office mates need to avoid attacking each other, and rather focus on building positive relationships. Ways for business women to know and appreciate each other include having lunch together, catching up, writing appreciation notes, and bragging on each other's achievements.

Asian Business Women: Break the Stereotypical Views and See Their Values

For Asian business women in the States to overcome obstacles at work, they need to break those stereotypical views of being viewed as "cold" and "threat" by showing warmth and genuineness to other people. One effective way to prevent prejudices and biased judgments from happening is to create interpersonal relationships with others. When expanding their social networks, it is best for Asian business women to present themselves well by being friendly and outgoing. Activities such as helping the needed, actively engaging in conversations, and exhibiting integrity at work can help them to earn more trustworthiness. In addition, Asian business women can share their life stories and fun experiences with other colleagues, which is excellent for making friends and getting involved in the American society.

In the end, Asian business women also need to value themselves at work. Although they as a minority group are perceived differently from their peers who are White, there is no need for them to shy away from socialization or deny their self-values. Rather, Asian business women need to be true to themselves by realizing that they are valuable at work just like other colleagues, and their unique backgrounds and experiences can bring more resources and diversification that help the companies grow. Therefore, instead of seeing themselves as "different" or "out-group", Asian business women need to consider themselves as "unique" and "working allies". These positive self-perceptions will not only raise their self-esteem but also boost their confidence at work.

Conclusion

With the understanding that the world is full of challenges and changes, it is essential for business women to acknowledge their dynamic positions and know what to do. As wide-eyed realists, individuals need to be aware of major stereotypes to see colleagues fairly. Although stereotypes can reflect general patterns of social status, they can only serve as a guideline and are not completely accurate because everyone is unique and doesn't have to possess every stereotypical attribute. For example, not all business women are cold and threatening, but they can also have fun and be warm to people around them. To overcome prejudices, I think the best way is to know other individuals personally and try to make connections with them instead of just assuming stereotype labels. This way, humans can create deeper bonds among themselves.

To be an excellent woman in business, essential skills and talents are necessary. To have a good reputation, business women can wield their power effectively at work to earn their own respect, respect others, and expand their social network. Besides, the most important thing is to be genuine and be honest with others at work. Integrity is never outdated and always needed in the workforce. Business women with integrity generally receive good reputations, minimizing or eliminating issues such as being disrespected or being disliked. Same method applies to Asian business women, which by showing warmth to others and forming friendships can make them more likable.

In conclusion, hiring women for businesses is beneficial. Having business women work for the company not only increases diversification, but also helps to contribute new ideas for the company. In addition, women's detail-oriented nature and diligence can be helpful for a company to reach its goals.

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who are similar to them.¹⁴ Common selection indicators include sex, race, age, and personality.

And, last but not least, the “Attrition” stage is where those who are not selected get dropped.

As expected, women are again at a disadvantage in the ASA model, especially when running for senior positions such as board directors or Chief in command. In fact, the group culture for high-level business leadership roles is set to be predominated by men, and women hold only less than 20% of

those jobs.¹¹ Because those jobs are generally in favor of business men, business women are less appealing when competing with many other talented business men and more likely to be overlooked.

Even though some women are extremely smart and are lucky enough to be selected for jobs that are high-stake, they may face challenges of belonging. Although gender issues may not be expressed explicitly, they are lurking below the surface. According to Sandberg, she “started noticing how often employees were judged not by their objective performance, but by the subjective standard of how well they fit in”.¹¹ For example, guys often like to gather for boy's nights with cigars and alcohol, while women may not feel comfortable in these situations. Therefore, some business women may have to reduce this type of social interaction with their male colleagues. The risk of not “fitting in” is that they have less common talk with their male colleagues and may have a harder time of being liked.

The Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) Framework



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