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SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

**“Achievers and Believers: Women Overcoming Obstacles in
Business”**

written by

Harly Dearing

and submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for completion of
the Carl Goodson Honors Program
meets the criteria for acceptance
and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

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April 16, 2021

Achievers and Believers: Women Overcoming Obstacles in Business

A Thesis by Harly Dearing

Ouachita Baptist University

Spring 2021

*For the strongest women in my life, who never let me dream lower than the stars: Nana, Mom,
Greta, and Mindy*

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Part 1: Challenges that Women Face from Others.....	3
Chapter 1: Stereotypes and Misconceptions.....	3
Chapter 2: Physical Obstacles.....	12
Part 2: Challenges Women Create for Themselves.....	21
Part 3: How to Overcome.....	24
Conclusion.....	28
References.....	29

Introduction

Ever since I was a young girl, the people in my life have always told me that I could do anything I set my mind to if I worked hard for it. Whether it was making a certain sports team, or trying to be the top in my class, their answer was always the same, “if you want to be the best you have to outwork the others.” So, that’s what I’ve been doing my whole life; only now I’m working to be the top student in the Hickingbotham School of Business and trying to be the best mom I can be, not trying to start on a high school basketball team or pass an AP test.

As I continued to grow though, I began to see things that contradicted what I was told when I was young. I saw challenges that plagued women while watching tv and movies and listening to my mom talk about her work, and I even experienced some as a new mother who recently started working. These challenges seemed to almost always be set in place by men or a time-old society that refuses to change. Seeing how more and more women every day are overcoming these struggles and thriving in a “man’s world” was inspiring to me as a young girl and is only becoming more inspiring.

Most of the challenges that I saw were challenges that were put in place by other people to hinder women. There are non-physical challenges like stereotypes that postponed women’s rise in the workforce. There are also physical challenges that may not all have been designed with hindering women in mind that do it just the same. These challenges are some of the most difficult to overcome because women cannot control them.

While it is hard for a woman to overcome an obstacle that she cannot control, it can sometimes be more difficult for her to face the obstacles that she creates for herself. These

challenges can include mental roadblocks that sometimes are detrimental to a woman's career and can permanently affect how a woman works toward her career.

Thankfully though, after numerous years and countless women coming before us, we can try to fight these old-school stereotypes and mental roadblocks. Women are being treated as equals in the workplace now more than ever, and I like to think that is because women are starting to stand up for themselves a lot more and are demanding boundaries. Hopefully one day the need for such measures will no longer be necessary.

Lastly, what is the point of thinking of boundaries you can set and mental roadblocks to avoid now if you cannot remember them in 10-15 years when they are going to be most useful. Thinking of a way to remember in the next ten years what I have learned during these four years of college has been a difficult task, to say the least. The best idea I have heard in the last few years that is discussed later actually came from one of my friends in my Business Leadership class and permitted me to share it with you.

This thesis intends to bring together all the stories and scenes from movies that people have seen and put things in a more appropriate perspective.

Part 1: Challenges that Women Face from Others

Chapter 1: Stereotypes and Misconceptions

One of the first areas that my mind jumps to when considering different challenges that women face in professional settings is to outdated stereotypes and misconceptions about women. There are countless stereotypes and misconceptions that can affect how a woman is treated and perceived within a company. You can find numerous examples of these situations in news and media every day, especially if you watch some of the older tv shows and movies.

Let's start with one that not everyone will immediately think about but is important to bring to attention: women should plan all the company parties. Now, I know what you might be thinking, women volunteer to do this because they enjoy it, and while that may be the case for some women, it is not the case for everyone. A lot of women are not the type of people who are good at party planning, or maybe they just don't want to, or perhaps their jobs are extremely demanding, and they just don't have time to plan office events. All these reasons still don't stop managers from gathering the women when it is time for a party and telling them to have it ready to go for a certain day and then never thinking about it again while the women of the office have another item added to their plates in addition to their ordinary workload. This can cause unnecessary stress and lead to a lower quality of work.

One good example of this is from the popular tv show *The Office*. During numerous episodes, the office's "Party Planning Committee" would come together and share ideas about the upcoming party. While in the beginning, this committee was comprised of all the women in the office, they soon added Oscar, a homosexual male, and Karen, a woman who transferred into the office. This implies that straight men cannot plan parties, which is surely not the case. While

The Office is known for its jokes about office settings and working for a hard boss, I think this is a good example of what still occurs in a more modern-day setting.

Another outdated stereotype is that the only work suited for a woman is clerical work and the only job they should have is that of a secretary. This stereotype is, thankfully, on its way out, but there are still a few in the older generations who are sticking to their beliefs. Unfortunately, there are still a few younger men who share these beliefs as well. This thought can lead to some uncomfortable conversations and the need to set professional boundaries with some members of the office. It can subtly creep into other areas of a woman's office life as well. The basis of this stereotype is that women are better at detail-oriented clerical work. While most of the time this leads people to believe that being a secretary is best for women, but this can also lead to managers giving women employees tasks that are well below their pay grade because they think it is something that a woman should be doing. This can lead to a woman thinking that she is stuck in a dead-end job and cannot do anything else with her talent. This can also lead to unnecessary turnover for the company if that woman realizes that she is worth more than the clerical work that is being thrown her way.

Now, onto yet another stereotype that just cannot seem to die: Women must be pretty to be smart, but only a certain type of pretty. It's no surprise that men pay more attention to a woman that is pretty, but it may surprise you that it is hard for women to dress "professionally" at work.

It is, unfortunately, true that we live in a society that bases merit on appearance, and I don't think that will be changing anytime soon. This misconception that women must look good to be smart leads women to spend more time trying to improve their looks to get a promotion or achieve funding for a project instead of improving upon their knowledge of the subject and

increasing their ability to do their job, but this also comes at a price. Even if a woman dresses up to receive funding or get people to pay attention to her, there is always the chance that they aren't listening to what she has to say. I once had a business professor, Dr. Faught, who coined a term for this: PMS or pure male stupidity. Essentially, this means that if a woman looks good enough, it will not matter what she is saying. The men will just agree with her because they are so distracted by how she looks. This can lead women in the office to feel like they are only there because of how they look, and people do not take what they say seriously. This can also lead to decreased productivity and increased turnover.

Dressing professionally is another area where women can be affected more strongly than men. Historically, women's professional dress has leaned more toward skirts and dresses because it seems that these items tend to make women appear more feminine. More recently, a woman's professional wardrobe has expanded greatly, but not without a price. The clothing options for women in professional settings seem endless in today's time: button-up shirts, sweaters, blouses, blazers, slacks, skirts, dresses, heels, flats, and the list goes on. Some employers limit these items though. Now, a woman can wear slacks and a blazer and look just as professional as a man in a suit, but many companies have strict dress codes when it comes to color. Some employers require that a woman wear a blazer every day in the office, while a dress looks equally professional as a pants suit. Overall, women's professional style is continuing to grow and evolve while company dress codes remain stagnant and restricting.

Let's talk about a couple of the oldest misconceptions about women who work and are successful: if a woman is strong-willed, she must be cold and distant, or if she is nice, she must not be competent in her field. Susan Fiske, a social psychologist at Princeton University, has done many presentations on this topic. Most women at the top will tell you that they have been

called every name in the book on their trip to the top. Most of these insults center around a word that many women do not appreciate being called. Unfortunately, many people believe that for a woman to be successful in a professional environment, ‘she must not have friends’, ‘she takes work too seriously,’ ‘don’t ask her for a day off to spend time with family, she only cares about company profit,’ and the list of examples goes on and on. One way that this misconception is shown in the media is in the hit movie “The Proposal.” In this movie, Sandra Bullock portrays a strict executive in a New York City publishing house. The movie begins with her walking into an office where everybody was talking about how unreasonable and mean she was. The character she portrays is also very unfair and demanding of her personal assistant, with who she ends up falling in love. While this makes for a great movie, these actions are driving home the fact that Fiske is trying to make: women at the top must be aggressive and unapproachable to be effective, which is sadly just not true (Fiske). Seeing this misconception in media throughout history cements these thoughts into the minds of young, upcoming workers and is hard to reverse.

Now, if cold-hearted, distant, and effective is one end of the spectrum; the other end is the complete opposite: warm, approachable, and incompetent. People who believe these misconceptions think that if a woman is nice, open to conversation, and is helpful, she must have no idea how to do her job (Fiske). Unfortunately, this misconception affects countless women in professional settings who try so hard to be nice to their peers and superiors that they end up hurting themselves unintentionally. The major issue with this misconception is that the world is not fair and nice people do not always get what they deserve. When managers are thinking about who to give a promotion to, they usually pick those who are cut-throat and competitive, not those who are nice and approachable. Another downside to this misconception is that women who fall

into this category are often thought to be pushovers who can't say no. This leads to women who are trying to be helpful and nice becoming overworked and overwhelmed.

This behavior leads to yet another stereotype that has affected women for centuries. The stereotype that women are timid and unable to say no to a request without it coming off the wrong way. For example, when a man tells someone that they do not have time to do something, their answer is accepted, and the requestor moves on without another thought. On the other hand, if the person asks a woman and she says no, then the first thoughts are “why can't she help me”, “she's not even that busy”, or “she probably just doesn't want to do the extra work.” She may just in fact be extremely busy at the time and unable to perform whatever extra task that is being added to her plate.

The next area of misconceptions and stereotypes center around one topic that is very personal to me: motherhood. There are so many ways that companies treat women regarding motherhood, some that may not even be easily identified. The way that a company treats mothers can permanently affect how a woman feels about that company, the industry, and even working in general.

One of the very first impressions that a company can have of a woman and a woman can have of a company occurs in the first interview. Here, the company can either make a good or bad first impression, and I have experienced both. At the beginning of my junior year of college, I began searching for summer internships at large corporations around the United States. At the time of the interviews, my son, Beau, would have been around 6 months old. After applying to numerous internships and submitting applications to almost every large corporation I could think of, I was fortunate enough to receive two phone interviews with some sizable organizations: one with Nestlé and one with Walmart. These interviews could not have been more different. My

Walmart phone interview was first, a couple of weeks before Nestlé's. In this conversation, the interviewer focused on my activities and accomplishments and the interview was going quite well overall. I did not want to end the interview without the mention of my son to be completely transparent with the interviewer as well as ask if there would be any issues with my potential work schedule. This was a turning point in the interview. The interviewer's immediate reaction was astonishment that I was able to accomplish more than an average student with so many obligations and responsibilities. He then assured me that the work schedule at Walmart worked well with mothers because of the flexibility that they offer. He ensured that as long as the required work was being completed, the hours could be flexible. Overall, Walmart's reaction to finding out about one of their potential candidates' motherhood was extremely positive and helpful. Nestlé, in contrast, was not as welcoming. I secured their interview a couple of weeks after the one with Walmart, and after how well that one went, I was very hopeful. The day came and the interview went along quite well. I would even say I was making a good impression. They mentioned travel to a different part of the United States, and I was up for the challenge. As the interview wrapped up, I again mentioned that I had a young son and asked if there would be any issues. This is where the interview took a turn for the worse. Where Walmart was accepting and impressed, the Nestlé interviewer was instantly defensive. They started backtracking saying that the travel involved might be more than I might have originally thought, and, overall, the interviewer shut down. What began as a very welcoming introduction into the company, quickly turned sour. This was one of my first negative reactions in my recent entrance to motherhood, and it shook me to the core.

What happened to me is, unfortunately, happening to thousands of women every day, and I believe it is because of one major misconception: that all women will have kids and quit to stay

home with them. This misconception can cost a woman a job before she even walks into an interview. A professor once used a great example for this in one of my management classes. It centered around men with feminine names being called back less often than their peers (who have identical credentials) with masculine names. One particular man had a more “feminine” nickname that he used on resumes. After a couple of months with no luck job searching, he was venting to a close female friend. She volunteered to look at his resume and saw the “feminine” nickname he was going by. After a quick name change on his resume back to his more masculine full name, this man was called back into interviews almost immediately. The cause of this may be that many companies do not want to spend the time and money on a woman who is going to leave in less than five years when she has a child. While I believe it is within every woman’s right to stay home, the fact that so many leave the workforce to stay home severely hinders the rest. Even if this is the case for thousands of women across the United States, these companies should not be using it as an excuse to not hire women at all. I believe that until we reach a point where just as many men as women stay home to care for children, this issue will continue to occur.

Another issue that arises with motherhood is the thought that women must take on the role of primary caregiver of both her own family as well as the elderly relatives on both sides of the extended families. Forbes lists this balancing act as one of the top 8 major challenges that women face in business. Being working mothers who are fully committed to multiple areas of their lives can cause strain on these women and make it hard to do things for themselves especially when they “lack social support” (Cheng). This act of trying to be everywhere all the time leads to women using their “personal days” to take children and parents to various appointments and games instead of taking a day off to do something for themselves. Women who

are required to be primary caregivers have less time to spend on themselves, and thus, are more stressed at work. They are also then more absent than their male counterparts who rarely have to take time off to care for their children or elderly parents. This, combined with the previous misconception, leads employers to believe that women are less focused on their careers and care less about getting to high-level positions. The thought of this going through the wrong manager's head can hurt an entire building's worth of women's chances of getting to any level of true importance in a company's hierarchy. Thankfully, with each rising female executive, this misconception is being pushed aside and forgotten.

The next area of misconceptions and stereotypes center around the general idea that women are not as good as men. This category contains numerous stereotypes that combine into something quite larger and much more dangerous. The thoughts that women are weaker and less smart than men are the keystones to many erroneous ideas of men's superiority over women.

One major misconception that the previous two thoughts contribute to and feed is that men should be in charge. This is a timeless misconception that has no justification other than historical norms. Historically, men have been the leaders of society for hundreds of years, and women have been at their beck and call. The thoughts of men's supposedly superior strength and knowledge kept women at their mercy during this time. The aftershocks of the breakdown of this major misconception seeds doubt in many men's minds about the effectiveness of a woman leading. This doubt usually doesn't occur until a woman is in a position of power over a woman. Once this occurs, both men and women will try anything to plant seeds of doubt into peoples' minds. This doubt can come in many shapes and forms, but one of the most common is the thought that women had to sleep their way into a position of power. This thought can be decremental to a woman's self-esteem and reputation. Once people believe that a woman got to

her position illegitimately, where it be true or not, people will cease to listen to her. If this ever does happen, a woman can lose her ability to lead effectively and efficiently.

The last thought explained here reflects upon almost all the stereotypes and misconceptions mentioned in this chapter. That thought is that most of the time men think of women as enemies instead of potential friends and allies. There are numerous reasons that men might think this way; one being the time-old stereotypes that men are smarter and stronger than women. The thought that a woman could hold a higher position than a man can easily turn these women into foes. Another misconception about men and women that leads men to shy away from women is the illogical thought that men and women cannot be friends or acquaintances without a secret romantic meaning. Most of the time, you will hear about the men in the office going to play a round of golf or going out one night for drinks. While this is okay to a certain degree, it does put women at a disadvantage. When men go on these outings, they usually talk about work for at least a portion of the time, and when the leaders of an office are men, this leads to men being promoted and favored in the office setting because of their friendship with the company's executives. Hopefully, in the future, these events will become more open and acceptable for the women of the office, and they can get in on the promotions as well. These are only a couple of the thoughts that lead to this hesitation on the men's part, but until all are wiped away, men will never see women as equals and allies.

Overall, numerous different misconceptions and stereotypes affect the way that women are perceived and treated in professional settings. These thoughts can ruin a woman's reputation and her ability to lead successfully. Women in leadership positions are ridiculed and questioned at every turn if they are not dressed how a man thinks is professional or if they happen to not be an open and caring individual.

This chapter focused on more of what goes through peoples' minds in the office and, with any luck, got you thinking about some of the stereotypes and misconceptions that you have fallen into in the past on a whim. The next chapter will address more of the physical barriers that affect women in everyday professional settings and how they also create challenges in these workplaces.

Chapter 2: Physical Obstacles

Stereotypes and misconceptions create the majority of challenges that women face, but there are also numerous physical obstacles that should not be overlooked. Whether it is actions that men take towards women or the way that different aspects of the office are designed and controlled, women can be affected negatively and struggle because of it. Some of these obstacles are those that I had never even thought of or considered being important before digging into research for this project.

The area of physical changes that shocked me the most was the way that so many office buildings are designed. The book *Invisible Women* by Caroline Criado Perez opened my eyes to so many unnecessary challenges that plague women in offices. Many times, buildings that companies use for office space are built decades in the past and are only renovated once every 10 years. When these buildings were built, they were built by male architects; therefore, the buildings' layouts were designed to suit males' needs (Perez). While updates and renovations do happen, they are still mostly controlled by male managers and executives. These simple facts lead to the conclusion that a lot of older office buildings create physical obstacles that almost always affect solely women, no matter what the creators intended.

While many may believe that this is an exaggeration and the way offices were designed does not harm or inhibit women, that is simply not the case. One common topic that is brought up during discussions about this subject is the matter of cabinet heights. Most often in older constructed buildings, cabinets were built to male specifications. More specifically, cabinets were built to male *height* specifications (Perez). This results in cabinets that are built too high for many women to reach unless standing on a chair or ladder, which is neither safe nor sensible. Cabinets that are not easily accessible are not used and cause functioning space to become vacant. This impediment could easily be avoided with a slight redesign of offices and the lowering of the cabinets.

Another physical obstacle that women face in office settings is the temperature at which the office is held (Perez). This is another control that is often controlled by and suited for males. Men by nature are more warmed-bodied and are more comfortable in lower temperature settings than their female coworkers (Perez). You can walk into almost any office around the United States, whether that be a multimillion-dollar law firm or a school financial office, and women will have on extra jackets or blankets at their desks. I firmly believe that when someone is cold, they are less productive and efficient. This obstacle can also become a liability issue when women introduce space heaters into their workspace. Using space heaters can lead to electrical fires and hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of damage that could easily have been avoided. By keeping the offices only a couple of degrees warmer, companies could not only save money on electric bills and potential fire damage, but they could also keep more of their employees comfortable and productive.

Lastly, one of the less thought about physical obstacles that affect women more commonly than men is parking. Now, parking in itself is not an obstacle, but not having

designated spots can be. Sandberg in her book *Lean In* talked about how she never knew how hard pregnant women had it at the office until she became pregnant. Up until that point, there had not been a pregnant woman in a position to change policies and procedures. She realized that at 8 months pregnant, it was difficult and unreasonable for her to have to trek across concrete parking lots just to get to her office; for some with health conditions, this can even be dangerous. She knew that almost every mother in the office had experienced that same feeling, but no one had the power or influence to change anything. Now at her office, pregnant women have designated parking areas close to the building, like handicap spots, that are reserved only for them. This simple change should be implemented in all office buildings across America. It would greatly improve these expectant mothers' productivity and overall health (Sandberg).

The next area of physical difficulties that plague women are not related to building design or parking lots but the actual physical behavior of others inside the office. Whether it is sexual harassment or a hostile work environment, these issues most commonly affect women and make it difficult for women to work efficiently.

Sexual harassment has been an issue for as long as anyone can remember but has been brought more into light by the Me-Too movement. Women have been put in compromising positions for decades by men who wield their power over women's heads. Webster's Dictionary defines sexual harassment as, "uninvited and unwelcome verbal or physical behavior of a sexual nature especially by a person in authority toward a subordinate (such as an employee or student)." One of the most common news stories in the tabloids about male celebrities is that they have been accused of sexual harassment against a female secretary, costar, etc. Practically every time, the men believe that they have done nothing wrong, especially if they are a part of the older generations. For example, if a woman walks behind a coworker's desk to deliver him

some papers and that coworker puts his hand on her lower back, he may not find anything wrong with it, when in fact it made the woman extremely uncomfortable. Some still may believe this isn't a difficult challenge and that women should just "ignore it" or "stop reading into everything". But let's multiply this scenario by ten. Now a woman can be in a dangerous situation that can lead to her being harmed or traumatized.

There are two main types of sexual harassment: quid pro quo and hostile work environment. Quid pro quo is a Latin phrase that stands for "something for something." Quid pro quo harassment is most commonly used when a person in a high position of power tells a subordinate that they will receive something of significance if they perform sexual acts with or for their boss. This is a time-old issue that can be shown on most media platforms today. The movie industry even seems to have been built on this type of harassment that created forms of hazing rituals whose aftershocks are still being felt today. Decades ago, for a new actress to get a leading role in an upcoming show or movie, she was expected to perform certain "favors" for the directors or casting agency. While this seems to have gotten better with the rise of video surveillance, social media, and technology in general, it still affects many women behind closed doors. Until this issue is dissolved completely, whether it be by survivors coming forward or by harshly penalizing the aggressors, women will never feel completely comfortable in an office where they can be expected to perform sexual acts for favors.

The second type of sexual harassment that can occur in an office setting is a hostile work environment. A hostile work environment is defined as a workplace where there are serious instances of harassment and discrimination against employees with protected characteristics such as race, color, religion, sex and pregnancy, national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information (What is a Hostile Work Environment). Some of the more common issues with a

hostile work environment that affect women are comments made by male coworkers. While the occasional unintentionally offensive comment can be disciplined appropriately, it is the repetitive inappropriate comments that create the least healthy work setting. Some common examples of these remarks include “locker room talk.” This type of discussion can be uncomfortable for women, but completely normal for men, which is most likely the reason that so many men do not realize how offensive their words are. Perhaps the worst part of the locker room talk issue is the fact that women are branded as rude or prudish when they express their discomfort.

There are several age barriers to women’s success in a professional industry: unequal pay, fewer promotions, race/ethnicity, and work/life balance. The first three issues have been discussed in-depth in numerous papers, so I want to focus on the last one: work/life balance. This is another area that is extremely important to me. Trying to find a good balance between work and family was particularly hard to manage as a new mother taking on her first role. My family was extremely accommodating while I adjusted.

It is not a secret that women have a harder time finding balance than men, and that is due to one of the misconceptions described earlier: women should be primary caregivers. Women who are primary caregivers can have too much on their plate at any given time. In one day they may get the kids dressed and fed, dropped off at school, work for 8 hours, pick the kids up from school, take them to different activities, watch the activities, drive home, cook dinner, bathe the kids, get them in bed, clean, do laundry, and the list goes on and on until she is too tired to get an adequate amount of rest before having to get up the next morning and start all over again. This issue also arises when the topic of sick children and elderly parents are involved. When a woman leaves early to care for a sick child or elderly relative, she is often penalized for not being committed to her job; mostly because her male managers come across the same issues in life but

have a wife to carry out their duties for them. Hopefully, these mothers have help of some kind, whether it be from a non-stereotypical husband or a family member, to make the days a little more manageable and less hectic.

Traditional, nonflexible work schedules only make these struggles worse. Most workdays in the office start at 7:30-8:00 in the morning. This is also when drop-off time at school is. In addition to that, most traditional work schedules end at 5:00 p.m. This is an issue because school is released around 3:30 p.m. These mothers must now decide whether they should leave their kids at home alone for 2-3 hours, hire a babysitter, send them to the neighbors, or any number of other options that would not be necessary if they could be at home with them themselves. Also, with a traditional work schedule, if a child were sick, the mother would have to take a vacation day to care for them. Allowing a mother to work from home can create more productive use of the time spent at home with sick children. Overall, with a more flexible schedule, more women can come in to and leave the office at times that work better for them, or even work from home virtually the entire day.

Perhaps the most frustrating part of trying to find a work/life balance, is how women are treated when they choose one or the other or even make it work with both. Either way, when a woman chooses one over another she is judged. For example, if she chooses to stay late multiple nights a week for work or work through a child's school activity or performance, then she must be a terrible mother who doesn't want to raise her kids. This category of mothers can often be judged not only by her male coworkers but also by her female coworkers, perhaps even more harshly because they believe they would have chosen better. But, if she leaves at 5:00 p.m. every day and occasionally leaves work for her children's activities, she must not care about or be dedicated to her job and career. Men who send their wives to get the child, if they are even aware

of what is going on at all, are often rewarded for being dedicated to the job and receive more promotions since they are at the office more often than their female coworkers. This work/life balance decision goes hand in hand with leaving work early to pick up a sick child from school and take them home to care for them; bosses seem to believe that they obviously must not be committed to their work, or they would have stayed and had someone else figure it out. The judgment that results from choosing one side of the work/life balance issue can severely affect a woman's mental ability to work effectively and can have her second-guessing herself at every crossroads.

The occasional woman can find a happy balance between the two areas. This is amazing and should be more common than it already is. Finding balance itself isn't the issue though, it's how women who do are treated. Women who "have it all" and find that balance are regarded as superheroes. These women are constantly asked how they juggle so much so effectively and if they have any tips on how to make it work. Being praised and asked for advice is not the area with which there is a problem though. Having people consider them a superhero when they may just have a spouse that treats his job as a parent just as seriously as the woman may create a problem. Women who find the balance are "superheroes," but men who do are just average. The fact that there is such a large difference between the two shows that there is still a large gap between men and women in the workforce, and even men's roles at home. Referring to my Walmart interview story above, I was considered a "superhero" for being able to accomplish as much as I did while still having a family, when in fact, I have a very supportive partner who does more than his fair share of the work. When a spouse does half of the work of parenting, a woman can find it easier to find the ever-escaping work/life balance.

Another barrier to success that a company can create for women is not adequately training another person to take her position so that she can advance to a higher position. Many times, a company withholds a raise from a woman because she is exceptionally good at her job and they do not want to train someone to take her place. This not only affects how often a woman can get a raise but also how much work is done in that position when she takes a vacation and does not work. Without a replacement that is adequately trained, a woman may feel like they cannot in good conscience take a long vacation and leave the company for up to weeks on end. For example, growing up, my mother was always working. Whether we were on the road to a vacation or sitting at a softball tournament, it never failed, someone would call her with a question that only she could answer. She has been in the same position for over twenty years and that's not without effort on her part. Maybe once a year she would come home saying she didn't get this promotion or that and they never gave her a definitive reason. One can only conclude that since she has done her job for 20+ years and cannot completely take a day off without getting work calls, the company does not want to go through the process of retraining someone who could not do the job half as well as she could. Which is extremely unfortunate for her. I believe that this is an issue with how the company is managed and the only thing a woman can do is leave if there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel.

One area where the United States seems to fall completely behind momentarily in is the maternity leave that they offer new mothers. The standard maternity leave required by law is 12 weeks of unpaid leave. While this sounds generous, most women cannot afford to not receive a paycheck for 3 months after undergoing a major life change that can result in significant hospital charges. Other countries around the world vary in their options for maternity leave. Some countries pay for a portion of the time off, so the women have a little income coming in.

Similarly, some countries offer to pay a reduced rate for a longer amount of time, so a woman has more time to bond with her baby or babies. I also believe that in the extreme competitiveness of the United States workplace culture, more women feel required to return to work before they are fully recovered and prepared. Now, my experience was different from most because I had my son towards the end of the second semester of my sophomore year of school, but I too felt the pressure to return very quickly. I only had two in-person classes that semester, but I was back in class by the end of the week after having him. And after the semester was over, I started an internship and by then Beau was only six weeks old. I still should have been in the middle of a traditional maternity leave, but instead, I went back to school and work almost immediately because I didn't want to fall behind my classmates. This pressure to return quickly to not trail behind peers creates a lot of unnecessary pressure for new mothers.

Part 2: Challenges Women Create for Themselves

Sheryl Sandberg is one of the most well-known women in the business world. Her book, *Lean In*, focuses on how women can create barriers for themselves without help from others. These challenges seem easy to overcome but can prove to be harder to prevail over than some of the outside opposers. This may be because some women don't even realize they are holding themselves back. Before reading Sandberg's book, I didn't realize how much I was hindering myself.

One of the main points she uses in her book is that women sometimes check out too early. In summary, she wants women to avoid slowing down their careers before necessary. For example, when a woman graduates from college without a boyfriend, she is focused solely on her career. This focus usually lasts until she finds a serious boyfriend and starts thinking about marriage. Once a woman is married or in a serious relationship, her mind seems to almost start planning, more importantly planning for children. The plan for children includes sometimes months of trying and eventually nine months of pregnancy. During these months, women start holding back and taking fewer risks at work. She may have had the opportunity to transfer to a new department or undertake a new long-term project but chose to decline the opportunity. While reasons can vary, it usually boils down to them not wanting to make a big change when their situation could be drastically different in just a year. Women checking out early and not taking chances when they have the opportunity leads to more regrets down the road (Sandberg).

The barrier that seemed to shock me the most may perhaps be the most common because it has already happened to me: not negotiating. When I first received my job offer, I was so grateful to have been offered a position, that I did not negotiate my starting salary before signing

my contract. Looking back, this was not a smart move on my part, but it is a mistake I will not make again. Most often when women realize that their male coworkers make a higher salary than they do, it is because the men negotiated while the women did not. I believe that women think they will come across as rude if they negotiate their salary or wage when in fact, managers offer lower salaries than deserved to save money and only raise that when asked. Women can counteract this barrier by going into job interviews having researched an appropriate wage for that position.

Another area where women can create trouble for themselves that goes hand in hand with negotiating is trying so hard to be polite that they end up hurting themselves instead. Sandburg addresses this in her book as well. She uses the example of a woman giving up her seat at a conference table. By giving up her seat, the woman probably believes she is just being polite, but the people in the room who do not think like that may believe that she is not interested in the meeting or even her career (Sandberg). This general concept can also be attributed to women not interrupting. In business settings, interrupting is seen as a show of power, while many times women see this as rude and unnecessary. Both not interrupting others and allowing someone else to interrupt you are displays of weakness to those who know what to look for. Perhaps in the future, women will not have to compromise their morals to be respected and comfortable in the workplace.

One of the more serious challenges that women can put on themselves is not giving themselves enough credit. In Jeffery Pfeffer's book *Power*, he discusses the difference between how women and men attribute their successes. It found that men usually attribute their success to themselves and their hard work (Pfeffer). Women, on the other hand, are more likely to attribute their success to outside sources. For example, if one man and one woman both accomplish the

same thing and get the same reward, when asked how they did it, a man is more likely to say his knowledge and skills pushed him above the rest (Pfeffer). A woman in contrast will more likely attribute her success to her team and those who helped her along the way. This difference between these two scenarios is who gets rewarded more. People who attribute success to themselves and their strengths tend to be more greatly rewarded than those who do not. Overall, the faster women realize that this is the case, the sooner they can be adequately rewarded (Pfeffer).

The next way that women can hold themselves back is by living up to certain stereotypes, specifically the stereotype about being timid. A woman's shy nature or lack of confidence can contribute to this stereotype. A lack of confidence can greatly hinder the ability of oneself to do one's job as effectively as it could be done. This issue can lead to other problems as well. When a woman lacks confidence, there is a chance that she will not be able to properly set boundaries for herself. A lack of boundaries can result in more harassment and work for women if they do not learn to set limits and stick by them. Being treated like a doormat and being walked all over can have negative effects on almost anyone, so there is no surprise when women with less confidence are less happy at work than others.

Overall, women can create almost as many problems for themselves as outsiders can. Learning how to recognize self-made barriers and identifying the best course of action to overcome them is going to lead to a happier and most efficient work environment where more people can thrive.

Part 3: How to Overcome

While it might seem impossible for anyone to overcome so many challenges and barriers, it is important to remember one thing: you can do anything that you set your mind to. Adapting to the changing environment and identifying ways to work with those who do not wish to work with you can make the time spent in the office much more enjoyable.

One of the first ways to control how you are treated in a work situation is to demand professionalism from your coworkers. “Locker room talk” should be left in high school locker rooms where it is expected and tolerated. There is no place for it in a professional setting. Another tactic that goes along with demanding professionalism is creating boundaries for yourself. When I interned from home virtually last summer, I found it easy to be on my computer working all day and into the night without much of a break. My lack of boundaries created problems that easily could have been avoided if I had learned to set limits earlier. It took me almost the entire summer to solidify when I would start/stop my days, when I would take breaks to play with Beau, and how long I would spend eating lunch. While workplace boundaries may not need to be so literal, they should be firm and important to an individual and customized to what they need to be successful.

Building a strong network can ease the struggles created by the numerous challenges mentioned above. Having friendships with people in different departments can be a useful asset when the time comes to change departments or get a promotion because people are more likely to hire friends or acquaintances that they know will work hard. Finding a strong and helpful mentor can also help ease the burden brought on by these workplace challenges. Most often if you can find a female mentor in the same company, she will have faced the same struggles that

you are currently going through. This helpful insight can prevent you from doing something that could potentially make the situation worse. Making meaningful connections and finding people who will support you and be in your corner when times get hard is an important part of the success of any career.

Some of the ways to overcome can be a little more difficult to achieve. One being, to not allow others to intimidate or change you. You know yourself best. You know what you can do well and what you struggle with. Remembering that, it is easier to overcome opposition from others. Confidence plays a key role in this strategy. Like it was mentioned before, a lack of confidence in yourself can be extremely harmful to a career. Identifying weaknesses and working on them can help build confidence in oneself, which, in turn, lessens the effect that intimidating people have on you. Women will find intimidating people in almost every setting, both male and female. Knowing best how to handle situations where you find others intimidating can lead to one feeling more comfortable and eventually not being intimidated at all.

Focusing on growing strengths and limiting weaknesses is a sure way to gain confidence. Another is by speaking and acting with authority. Studies show that people who have more powerful body language, power poses, seem to have more confidence in themselves. For example, in Amy Cuddy's Ted Talk she uses the example of two people who are about to go into an interview. One interviewee goes straight into the interview. The second spends one minute in the bathroom in what is called a power pose, a body position that occurs when the body occupies a large area. The second interviewee's interview went much better than the first's. The second interviewee was notably more confident and impressive than the first, despite everything about them being comparable. This goes to show that how we carry ourselves can not

only affect how others see us but also how we view and see ourselves, which sometimes can be more important (Cuddly).

There are going to be some situations where others just will not want to listen to a woman whatever that reason may be. While not always the case, it may be because they see these women as the enemy. The solution to this is something that was addressed in one of my management classes in college: Balance Theory. Most people have a general knowledge of this theory whether they know the term or not. Almost everyone has heard the phrase, “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” This is one of the best-known examples of Balance Theory. This example under Balance Theory explains that two people who have a common goal or enemy should come together to achieve success. The same goes for women and their opposers in the workplace. The opposers need to realize that the best way for the company to succeed is for everyone, whether enemies or not, to work together. Together as allies are much more beneficial than separate as enemies.

While the previously mentioned examples are a great place to start, the more that women in the workforce can prepare for challenges and opposition, the better equipped they will be to handle every situation whether that be by finding strengths and focusing on them, or by acknowledging weaknesses and working to change them for the better. Having friends to help get you through tough times can also be a beneficial strategy when trying to overcome challenges.

Reading about this now will have no impact on your future if you don't remember any of it down the road. Perhaps the most important part of any college career is to remember what you learned to use it in the future when it is applicable. Life lessons like what are outlined in this thesis are somewhat easier to remember than random business facts, but to ensure you recall the

information when necessary, it is best to have a kind of memory system or acronym. For information that needs to be remembered years in the future it is also best to keep it short, sweet, and to the point, the simpler the message, the better. One of my former classmates, Brooklyn Parker, created a brilliant method to remember these lessons: the 4 B's. The 4 B's are Balance Theory, Body Language, Build Social Networks, and Be Prepared and Persistent.

This method combines all the strategies outlined previously. Whether it is showing opposers that everyone must work together to finding a good mentor and learning everything you can from them, finding what works best for you is what is most important. It may take a lot of trial and error, but usually, the trip is worth the destination. As for the method itself, discovering an effective way to remember information that may not be useful until 5-10 years down the line is one of the most valuable skills to master in college.

Conclusion

All things considered; women face many struggles both inside the workplace as well as inside their heads. Many struggles from outside sources stem from either misconceptions or physical obstacles. The most common and dangerous stereotypes and misconceptions seem to stem from time-old traditions and societies that refuse to change. Identifying these struggles before they become disastrous could be the difference between a long and happy career and one that is short and disappointing. Negative thoughts about women are not the only struggles that women can face in professional settings, though. Most older office buildings' designs can even create setbacks and challenges for women themselves, whether that be how they are designed or how they are managed. Shockingly enough, some women can even create setbacks and challenges for themselves unintentionally. Gaining confidence and knowledge can help remove some of those barriers which seem more personal and impossible to overcome. Thankfully, with the help of others, it is achievable.

Learning how to overcome these challenges, as well as anything else that may be thrown her way can make it or break it for most women. Hopefully, the next generation of businesswomen will not be subject to the challenges that the women before them were required to endure. Working together to eradicate these challenges, we can hopefully make professional settings more enjoyable to women everywhere.

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