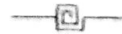


Lean In:
What Would You Do If You
Weren't Afraid?

SHERYL SANDBERG



MY GRANDMOTHER Rosalind Einhorn was born exactly fifty-two years before I was, on August 28, 1917. Like many poor Jewish families in the boroughs of New York City, hers lived in a small, crowded apartment close to their relatives. Her parents, aunts, and uncles addressed her male cousins by their given names, but she and her sister were referred to only as “Girlie.”

During the Depression, my grandmother was pulled out of Morris High School to help support the household by sewing fabric flowers onto undergarments that her mother could resell for a tiny profit. No one in the community would have considered taking a boy out of school. A boy’s education was

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the family's hope to move up the financial and social ladder. Education for girls, however, was less important both financially, since they were unlikely to contribute to the family's income, and culturally, since boys were expected to study the Torah while girls were expected to run a "proper home." Luckily for my grandmother, a local teacher insisted that her parents put her back into school. She went on not only to finish high school but to graduate from U.C. Berkeley.

After college, "Girlie" worked selling pocketbooks and accessories at David's Fifth Avenue. When she left her job to marry my grandfather, family legend has it that David's had to hire four people to replace her. Years later, when my grandfather's paint business was struggling, she jumped in and took some of the hard steps he was reluctant to take, helping to save the family from financial ruin. She displayed her business acumen again in her forties. After being diagnosed with breast cancer, she beat it and then dedicated herself to raising money for the clinic that treated her by selling knockoff watches out of the trunk of her car. Girlie ended up with a profit margin that Apple would envy. I have never met anyone with more energy and determination than my grandmother. When Warren Buffett talks about competing against only half of the population, I think about her and wonder how different her life might have been if she had been born half a century later.

When my grandmother had children of her own—my mother and her two brothers—she emphasized education for all of them. My mother attended the University of Pennsylvania, where classes were coed. When she graduated in 1965 with a degree in French literature, she surveyed a workforce that she believed consisted of two career options for women: teaching or nursing. She chose teaching. She began a Ph.D. program,

got married, and then dropped out when she became pregnant with me. It was thought to be a sign of weakness if a husband needed his wife's help to support their family, so my mother became a stay-at-home parent and an active volunteer. The centuries-old division of labor stood.

Even though I grew up in a traditional home, my parents had the same expectations for me, my sister, and my brother. All three of us were encouraged to excel in school, do equal chores, and engage in extracurricular activities. We were all supposed to be athletic too. My brother and sister joined sports teams, but I was the kid who got picked last in gym. Despite my athletic shortcomings, I was raised to believe that girls could do anything boys could do and that *all* career paths were open to me.

When I arrived at college in the fall of 1987, my classmates of both genders seemed equally focused on academics. I don't remember thinking about my future career differently from the male students. I also don't remember any conversations about someday balancing work and children. My friends and I assumed that we would have both. Men and women competed openly and aggressively with one another in classes, activities, and job interviews. Just two generations removed from my grandmother, the playing field seemed to be level.

But more than twenty years after my college graduation, the world has not evolved nearly as much as I believed it would. Almost all of my male classmates work in professional settings. Some of my female classmates work full-time or part-time outside the home, and just as many are stay-at-home mothers and volunteers like my mom. This mirrors the national trend. In comparison to their male counterparts, highly trained women are scaling back and dropping out of the workforce in high numbers. In turn, these diverging percentages teach institutions



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and mentors to invest more in men, who are statistically more likely to stay.

Judith Rodin, president of the Rockefeller Foundation and the first woman to serve as president of an Ivy League university, once remarked to an audience of women my age, "My generation fought so hard to give all of you choices. We believe in choices. But choosing to leave the workforce was not the choice we thought so many of you would make."

So what happened? My generation was raised in an era of increasing equality, a trend we thought would continue.

In retrospect, we were naïve and idealistic. Integrating professional and personal aspirations proved far more challenging than we had imagined. During the same years that our careers demanded maximum time investment, our biology demanded that we have children. Our partners did not share the housework and child rearing, so we found ourselves with two full-time jobs. The workplace did not evolve to give us the flexibility we needed to fulfill our responsibilities at home. We anticipated none of this. We were caught by surprise.

If my generation was too naïve, the generations that have followed may be too practical. We knew too little, and now girls know too much. Girls growing up today are not the first generation to have equal opportunity, but they are the first to know that all that opportunity does not necessarily translate into professional achievement. Many of these girls watched their mothers try to “do it all” and then decide that something had to give. That something was usually their careers.

There’s no doubt that women have the skills to lead in the workplace. Girls are increasingly outperforming boys in the classroom, earning about 57 percent of the undergraduate and 60 percent of the master’s degrees in the United States. This gender gap in academic achievement has even caused some to worry about the “end of men.” But while compliant, raise-your-hand-and-speak-when-called-on behaviors might be rewarded in school, they are less valued in the workplace. Career progression often depends upon taking risks and advocating for oneself—traits that girls are discouraged from exhibiting. This may explain why girls’ academic gains have not yet translated into significantly higher numbers of women in top jobs. The pipeline that supplies the educated workforce is chock-full of women at the entry level, but by the time that same pipeline is filling leadership positions, it is overwhelmingly stocked with men.

There are so many reasons for this winnowing out, but one important contributor is a leadership ambition gap. Of course, many individual women are as professionally ambitious as any individual man. Yet drilling down, the data clearly indicate that in field after field, more men than women aspire to the most senior jobs. A 2012 McKinsey survey of more than four thousand employees of leading companies found that 36 percent of the men wanted to reach the C-suite, compared to only 18 percent of the women. When jobs are described as powerful, challenging, and involving high levels of responsibility, they appeal to more men than women. And while the ambition gap is most pronounced at the highest levels, the underlying dynamic is evident at every step of the career ladder. A survey of college students found that more men than women chose “reaching a managerial level” as a career priority in the first three years after graduating. Even among highly educated professional men and women, more men than women describe themselves as “ambitious.”

There is some hope that a shift is starting to occur in the next generation. A 2012 Pew study found for the first time that among young people ages eighteen to thirty-four, more young women (66 percent) than young men (59 percent) rated “success in a high-paying career or profession” as important to their lives. A recent survey of Millennials found that women were just as likely to describe themselves as ambitious as men. Although this is an improvement, even among this demographic, the leadership ambition gap remains. Millennial women are less likely than Millennial men to agree that the statement “I aspire to a leadership role in whatever field I ultimately work” describes them very well. Millennial women were also less likely than their male peers to characterize themselves as “leaders,” “visionaries,” “self-confident,” and “willing to take risks.”

Since more men aim for leadership roles, it is not surprising that they obtain them, especially given all the other obstacles that women have to overcome. This pattern starts long before they enter the workforce. Author Samantha Ettus and her husband read their daughter's kindergarten yearbook, where each child answered the question "What do you want to be when you grow up?" They noted that several of the boys wanted to be president. None of the girls did. (Current data suggest that when these girls become women, they will continue to feel the same way.) In middle school, more boys than girls aspire to leadership roles in future careers. At the top fifty colleges, less than a third of student government presidents are women.

Professional ambition is expected of men but is optional—or worse, sometimes even a negative—for women. "She is very ambitious" is not a compliment in our culture. Aggressive and hard-charging women violate unwritten rules about acceptable social conduct. Men are continually applauded for being ambitious and powerful and successful, but women who display these same traits often pay a social penalty. Female accomplishments come at a cost.

And for all the progress, there is still societal pressure for women to keep an eye on marriage from a young age. When I went to college, as much as my parents emphasized academic achievement, they emphasized marriage even more. They told me that the most eligible women marry young to get a "good man" before they are all taken. I followed their advice and throughout college, I vetted every date as a potential husband (which, trust me, is a sure way to ruin a date at age nineteen).

When I was graduating, my thesis advisor, Larry Summers, suggested that I apply for international fellowships. I rejected the idea on the grounds that a foreign country was not a likely place to turn a date into a husband. Instead, I moved to Washington, D.C.,

which was full of eligible men. It worked. My first year out of college, I met a man who was not just eligible, but also wonderful, so I married him. I was twenty-four and convinced that marriage was the first—and necessary—step to a happy and productive life.

It didn't work out that way. I was just not mature enough to have made this lifelong decision, and the relationship quickly unraveled. By the age of twenty-five, I had managed to get married . . . and also divorced. At the time, this felt like a massive personal *and* public failure. For many years, I felt that no matter what I accomplished professionally, it paled in comparison to the scarlet letter D stitched on my chest. (Almost ten years later, I learned that the “good ones” were not all taken, and I wisely and very happily married Dave Goldberg.)

Like me, Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, deputy director of the Council on Foreign Relations' Women and Foreign Policy Program, was encouraged to prioritize marriage over career. As she described in *The Atlantic*, “When I was 27, I received a posh fellowship to travel to Germany to learn German and work at the *Wall Street Journal*. . . . It was an incredible opportunity for a 20-something by any objective standard, and I knew it would help prepare me for graduate school and beyond. My girlfriends, however, expressed shock and horror that I would leave my boyfriend at the time to live abroad for a year. My relatives asked whether I was worried that I'd never get married. And when I attended a barbecue with my then-beau, his boss took me aside to remind me that ‘there aren't many guys like that out there.’” The result of these negative reactions, in Gayle's view, is that many women “still see ambition as a dirty word.”

Many have argued with me that ambition is not the problem. ²⁰ Women are not less ambitious than men, they insist, but more enlightened with different and more meaningful goals. I do not dismiss or dispute this argument. There is far more to life than

climbing a career ladder, including raising children, seeking personal fulfillment, contributing to society, and improving the lives of others. And there are many people who are deeply committed to their jobs but do not—and should not have to—aspire to run their organizations. Leadership roles are not the only way to have profound impact.

I also acknowledge that there are biological differences between men and women. I have breast-fed two children and

See p. 89 for tips on making concessions while still standing your ground.

noted, at times with great disappointment, that this was simply not something my husband was equipped to do. Are there characteristics inherent in sex differences that make women more nurturing and men more assertive? Quite possibly. Still, in today's world, where we no longer have to hunt in the wild for our food, our desire for leadership is largely a culturally created and reinforced trait. How individuals view what they can and should accomplish is in large part formed by our societal expectations.

From the moment we are born, boys and girls are treated differently. Parents tend to talk to girl babies more than boy babies. Mothers overestimate the crawling ability of their sons and underestimate the crawling ability of their daughters. Reflecting the belief that girls need to be helped more than boys, mothers often spend more time comforting and hugging infant girls and more time watching infant boys play by themselves.

Other cultural messages are more blatant. Gymboree once sold onesies proclaiming "Smart like Daddy" for boys and "Pretty like Mommy" for girls. The same year, J. C. Penney marketed a T-shirt to teenage girls that bragged, "I'm too pretty to do homework so my brother has to do it for me." These things did not happen in 1951. They happened in 2011.

Even worse, the messages sent to girls can move beyond encouraging superficial traits and veer into explicitly discouraging

leadership. When a girl tries to lead, she is often labeled bossy. Boys are seldom called bossy because a boy taking the role of a boss does not surprise or offend. As someone who was called this for much of my childhood, I know that it is not a compliment.

The stories of my childhood bossiness are told (and retold) ²⁵ with great amusement. Apparently, when I was in elementary school, I taught my younger siblings, David and Michelle, to follow me around, listen to my monologues, and scream the word "Right!" when I concluded. I was the eldest of the neighborhood children and allegedly spent my time organizing shows that I could direct and clubs that I could run. People laugh at these accounts, but to this day I always feel slightly ashamed of my behavior (which is remarkable given that I have now written an entire book about why girls should not be made to feel this way, or maybe this partially explains my motivation).

Even when we were in our thirties, pointing out this behavior was still the best way for my siblings to tease me. When Dave and I got married, David and Michelle gave a beautiful, hilarious toast, which kicked off with this: "Hi! Some of you think we are Sheryl's younger siblings, but really we were Sheryl's first employees—employee number one and employee number two. Initially, as a one-year-old and a three-year-old, we were worthless and weak. Disorganized, lazy. We would just as soon spit up on ourselves as read the morning paper. But Sheryl could see that we had potential. For more than ten years, Sheryl took us under her wing and whipped us into shape." Everyone laughed. My siblings continued, "To the best of our knowledge Sheryl never actually *played* as a child, but really just organized other children's play. Sheryl supervised adults as well. When our parents went away on vacation, our grandparents used to babysit. Before our parents left, Sheryl protested, 'Now I have to take care of David and Michelle and

Grandma and Grandpa too. It's not fair!" Everyone laughed even louder.

I laughed too, but there is still some part of me that feels it was unseemly for a little girl to be thought of as so . . . domineering. *Cringe.*

From a very early age, boys are encouraged to take charge and offer their opinions. Teachers interact more with boys, call on them more frequently, and ask them more questions. Boys are also more likely to call out answers, and when they do, teachers usually listen to them. When girls call out, teachers often scold them for breaking the rules and remind them to raise their hands if they want to speak.

I was recently reminded that these patterns persist even when we are all grown up. Not long ago, at a small dinner with other business executives, the guest of honor spoke the entire time without taking a breath. This meant that the only way to ask a question or make an observation was to interrupt. Three or four men jumped in, and the guest politely answered their questions before resuming his lecture. At one point, I tried to add something to the conversation and he barked, "Let me finish! You people are not good at listening!" Eventually, a few more men interjected and he allowed it. Then the only other female executive at the dinner decided to speak up—and he did it again! He chastised her for interrupting. After the meal, one of the male CEOs pulled me aside to say that he had noticed that only the women had been silenced. He told me he empathized, because as a Hispanic, he has been treated like this many times.

The danger goes beyond authority figures silencing female³⁰ voices. Young women internalize societal cues about what defines "appropriate" behavior and, in turn, silence themselves. They are rewarded for being "pretty like Mommy" and encouraged to be nurturing like Mommy too. The album *Free to Be . . . You and*

Me was released in 1972 and became a staple of my childhood. My favorite song, "William's Doll," is about a five-year-old boy who begs his reluctant father to buy him a traditional girl's toy. Almost forty years later, the toy industry remains riddled with stereotypes. Right before Christmas 2011, a video featuring a four-year-old girl named Riley went viral. Riley paces in a toy store, upset because companies are trying to "trick the girls into buying the pink stuff instead of stuff that boys want to buy, right?" Right. As Riley reasons, "Some girls like superheroes, some girls like princesses. Some boys like superheroes, some boys like princesses. So why do all the girls have to buy pink stuff and all the boys have to buy different color stuff?" It takes a near act of rebellion for even a four-year-old to break away from society's expectations. William still has no doll, while Riley is drowning in a sea of pink. I now play *Free to Be . . . You and Me* for my children and hope that if they ever play it for *their* children, its message will seem quaint.

The gender stereotypes introduced in childhood are reinforced throughout our lives and become self-fulfilling prophecies. Most leadership positions are held by men, so women don't *expect* to achieve them, and that becomes one of the reasons they don't. The same is true with pay. Men generally earn more than women, so people *expect* women to earn less. And they do.

Compounding the problem is a social-psychological phenomenon called "stereotype threat." Social scientists have observed that when members of a group are made aware of a negative stereotype, they are more likely to perform according to that stereotype. For example, stereotypically, boys are better at math and science than girls. When girls are reminded of their gender before a math or science test, even by something as simple as checking off an M or F box at the top of the test, they