**BOOK REVIEW**

**Successful Strategies Against Workplace Sexism**

*What Works for Women at Work: Four Patterns Working Women Need to Know*


Reviewed by Keshanti Nandlall

Young women just beginning their careers today often enter workplaces with more women in senior positions than ever before. But Joan C. Williams and Rachel Dempsey argue that, regardless of age or occupation, most of America’s working women still face persistent patterns of bias. They have written a book for women of all ages, races and careers to help them identify discriminatory behaviors that they could potentially face on the job and learn appropriate, effective responses that can protect their rights, integrity and career progress. Men can learn a lot from this volume too about the stereotyping of women (for example, when women gather together they often assumed mere gossiping) and the mutual benefits they could gain by fighting bias against them.

The book draws on interviews with 127 successful working women, the majority of whom are people of color. Its authors are a Harvard Law grad (Williams) who directs the Center for WorkLife Law at the University of California’s Hastings College of Law, and her daughter (Dempsey), currently a student at Yale Law School.

What Works for Women at Work has a clear writing style and simple structure. After a forward by Anne-Marie Slaughter and an introductory chapter (“It’s Not [Always] Your Fault”), the first four parts are about the main patterns of bias that women face in the workplace, followed by suggestions for taking action. The fifth part describes the double standard women of color face in terms of gender discrimination and race discrimination. Part 6 offers insights on the question whether it is more beneficial for one to stay or leave a job in which she experiences discrimination. The final, seventh section has a list of twenty lessons women and men should take away from the book to help them in combating gender bias in the workplace, as well as a conclusion encouraging women and men to jump-start the stalled gender revolution.

The book describes four patterns of discrimination women face in the American workplace today: “Prove It Again,” “The Tightrope,” “The Maternal Wall,” and “The Tug of War.” The first requires women to constantly prove their competence, often based closely with ones’ mentor or supervisors so that those women who go on maternity leave can re-enter the workforce with an integration plan to help them move along with their careers rather than stay stagnant.

The second pattern, “The Tightrope,” forces women to find balance between masculinity and femininity. “Masculine” woman are deemed competent, but lacking emotional intelligence, whereas more feminine woman judged as having low competence, but are treated kindly and not taken seriously. As a result, one is either seen as a Queen Bee or a Doormat. “In an experiment given to students by their professor at Stanford Business School, the students looked at a case study of two individuals who were both competent and accomplished, except one was a man and the other a woman. The class deemed Heidi to be more selfish, and therefore less hirable.” This may explain why a woman who viewed as more masculine is less desirable as a potential employee, despite the similar success they achieved in their career.

The third pattern, “The Maternal Wall,” pushes mothers to be at work and not be appreciated. “The Maternal Wall” causes a drop in women’s labor force participation, due to a decrease in their promotional opportunities, or their workload becoming too much for them. Employers immediately see young women as likely to have children, making them perceived as risky long-term hires. Those expected to interrupt their job duties with more frequent parental leaves will be offered fewer training or promotional opportunities than a man of the same age. Finally, there are the women who have succeeded in having successful careers and raising their children, but are deemed as freaks of nature due to their success. In a study by sociologists, “when subjects were given identical resumes, one but not the other being a mother, non-mothers received 2.1 times as many callbacks as qualified mothers and were recommended for hire 1.8 time more frequently than mothers.”

In conclusion, What Works for Women at Work is an exceptional read that is eye-opening in the many ways women face bias in the workplace, whether due to their looks, personality, drive or even biases against one another. The data that accompanies the main arguments illuminate what women can do to help their progress in diverse work situations. Given how long and hard is the typical struggle to change the minds of the many, the authors suggest that one is better off starting the changes within oneself in order to jump start the needed revolution. The revolution in question is the fight for women to receive, not just equal pay, but equal opportunities in their career and their advancement to the top, regardless of their personality, their dress, or their having, or lack of, children. For those who want to compete, the world should not push them out of the running just because tradition says otherwise. To hell with tradition, do what one feels is right, and make ones’ own choices. Women do not need to hate one another in order to make themselves fit in, nor should they have to deal with the horrible behavior of others just because they are wrongly seen as incompetent. This book does an amazing job of showcasing that, and as such, is a highly recommended read to anyone, regardless of race, age, and yes, even gender.

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