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A SEAT *at* THE HEAD *of the* TABLE

From the 1970s into the '90s, women made serious progress in the workplace. Then that progress stalled, especially at the top.

By EMILY BAZELON
Illustration by TRACY MA

MORE THAN 40 years ago, the Harvard business professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter published a pivotal book, “Men and Women of the Corporation.” Kanter showed that the disadvantages women experienced at work couldn’t be attributed to their lack of ambition: Women aspired to leadership as much as men did. But organizations often funneled women into jobs that didn’t have much of a career ladder.

By understanding gender-based expectations at work, some women were able to overcome them. From the 1970s into the 1990s, women made serious progress in the workplace, achieving higher positions, closing the gender wage gap and moving into male-dominated fields. Then that progress stalled, especially at the top. Why?

To answer that question, I talked with two experts who direct centers for leadership: Katherine W. Phillips, a professor of organizational management at Columbia University, and Shelley Correll, a sociologist at Stanford. They’ve known each other for a long time; they went to graduate school together.

[Why are some of America’s wealthiest professionals so miserable in their jobs? Read more in our Future of Work Issue.]

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when they take charge to get things done, they're often seen as angrier or more aggressive than men. It's like a tightrope women are asked to walk: Veer just a bit one way or the other, and they may fall off.

SHELLEY CORRELL: Yes, women in leadership positions are seen as less likable when they do the same things male leaders do. That was a problem for Hillary Clinton and now Nancy Pelosi.

BAZELON: I'm interested in how the double bind affects women when they negotiate salary. In one study from 2003, the starting salaries of men graduating from business school were \$4,000 higher on average than those of women graduating from the same program. Other research has replicated this kind of finding. The implication could be that women get what they settle for, as an article in *The Harvard Business Review* puts it. If women did negotiate, the assumption is that the gender wage gap would go away. But research also shows that when women bargain over salary, they may get paid more but at a social cost.

CORRELL: Yes, women can't easily overcome the double bind themselves. In another study, when women negotiated their salaries, other people were less willing to work with them, though they didn't feel the same way about men who negotiated. In other words, some people don't want women who ask for more money on their team. That's the double bind.

BAZELON: I get filled with righteous indignation thinking about this. Though I suppose at the same time, understanding the double bind suggests that if you're a woman who doesn't negotiate, maybe you're picking up on that social cost.

CORRELL: I think that's right. Research also shows that we don't judge women for negotiating on behalf of someone else. In this scenario, they can be just as aggressive as men and succeed as much, because their actions fit with the gender-role expectations that women should be looking out for other people.

PHILLIPS: Here's an example of a different kind of double bind from research

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whose rankings exhibited expertise were actually perceived as less influential than the women without expertise — and in fact exerted less influence over the group. For men, the dynamic was the opposite: Men with expertise were perceived as more expert than nonexpert men and also had more influence. Maybe this was because the women acted stereotypically female — we need more research to answer this question.

CORRELL: Natasha Quadlin, a sociologist at Ohio State University, sent more than 2,000 job applications, with résumés, to employers that advertised they were hiring on a job-search website. About half the résumés had women's names at the top and the other half had men's names. Quadlin found that the employers were only half as likely to follow up or offer job interviews to women with high grades than with men with high grades. The effect was even larger for women who were math majors with top grades. Math is symbolically tied to a certain kind of masculine genius, and to acknowledge women in this realm is a real threat to male power.

Women with high grades were also less likely to be called back than women with average grades. All of this was true for employers all over the country, though the study design does not permit tracking whether men or women were evaluating the applicants. Quadlin also did a survey of employers that suggested — surprise, surprise — that they valued competence more for men and likability more for women. This is what we're often up against.

BAZELON: Kathy, can we talk about another study you did, showing that black women may be less subject than white women to traditional expectations about femininity?

PHILLIPS: In this study, we asked people taking an online survey to rate Asian, black and white men and women for their hireability for two jobs: security guard, a traditionally masculine position, and librarian, a traditionally feminine one. Among other things, we found that both black men and women, like white men, were perceived to be good fits for the security-guard position because they're seen as more traditionally masculine.

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The reality is, I have walked through life in a body where I've learned that if I do not assert myself, I will be walked over. I will not be treated with any respect if I don't command it. Putting your hands on your hips and saying, "I am here and you have to see me" — my mother taught me that, and her mother taught her. If they didn't, I'm not sure I would be in this seat talking to you right now.

I use that stereotype as a source of power for myself. But it doesn't solve all the problems. It doesn't allow black women to be in leadership roles where they have power over others, especially white men. We can be assertive, but we can't be the boss. That's clear from the underrepresentation of women of color in executive positions, and research also shows that black women who do become leaders are punished more harshly than men when they make mistakes.

BAZELON: What about the stereotypes and expectations surrounding motherhood?

CORRELL: They have a great deal of impact. Not surprisingly, the wage gap for mothers explains most of the gender wage gap in the U.S.: It's mostly women who have children who are being underpaid. You can see this in the research comparing mothers and childless women. When they work the same number of hours, in the same type of job, with the same level of education, and are the same in other dimensions, mothers still earn about 5 percent less for each child they have than women without children. In my work I show that even when you're evaluating a woman who has the exact same résumé as someone else, if she has children, people see her as less committed to her job, and they're less likely to hire her. They're stereotyping her. Then there's pregnancy — employers make assumptions that women who are pregnant can't do certain things. It's such a visible indication of being a mother.

BAZELON: Is a struggle over power fundamental to understanding why women have gotten stuck on the way to equality?

PHILLIPS: Well, I believe that a lot of people want to uphold the power

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CORRELL: Only 8 percent of the presidents of universities that grant doctorates are women.

BAZELON: Why is that, do you think?

PHILLIPS: Some folks see change coming, and they say: “Wait a minute, where do you think you’re going? What does it mean for me?” When people earn something, or believe they earned something, taking it away from them is very painful. I’ve said to groups of white men, when I work within companies, I understand the situation that you’re in. If I was in an organization that has been designed and shaped for me and people like me to be successful, I’d also be asking, “What do you mean you want to change this?” The question is how do you acknowledge for those men that their perspective is understandable, but at the same time show that it’s not O.K.

PHILLIPS: When teams in the workplace are racially diverse and include men and women, they tend to be more creative, considering more alternatives and searching for novel information. But diversity also requires people to put in more effort than they would prefer. It’s easier to stick with your own than to think about other people’s perspectives.

CORRELL: The lesson that diversity enhances team performance can fall on deaf ears when people think about what’s best for themselves and their in-group. So what if Ford Motor Company could be more innovative and productive, if I’m not going to be in a position of power?

PHILLIPS: That’s a really good point. I was meeting yesterday with a group of new managing directors at one of the banks here in the city, and one question they asked was, “How do you explain to the white man with equivalent qualifications to a woman or a person of color the decision to hire or promote them instead of him?” And I said: “Well, what do you say to the woman or person of color who was equally capable? Why do you assume that the position belonged to the white man?”

BAZELON: Let’s talk about potential solutions. I just read a study about how Carnegie Mellon increased the representation of women in its computer-science majors to 49 percent from 7 percent in five years. How did that

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technology for making social improvements rather than focusing only on computing itself. The changes made the major appealing to more women, and more of them applied and were admitted.

We're seeing this now in the corporate sector. At the lab I direct at Stanford, we worked with a company, for example, that was hiring a software engineer. Their job ad literally said they were looking to hire a ninja coder who wrestles problems to the ground. Now whom does that appeal to? The company changed their job ad, which increased the number of applications for their position over all and increased the percentage of women in the pool.

BAZELON: What advice do you have for young women?

PHILLIPS: When I talk to young women, I say: "I don't want you to think it's all on you. I'm working with the employers, too. But we as women can do some things. First of all, you need to get your circle of support around you, and in finding people to support you, sometimes you need to take a risk. I guarantee you that in a big workplace, there is a man who can support you. You have to find him. You have to make those connections and build those relationships, as hard as it might be. As many of the messages that we're getting these days, that men are essentially afraid to do this, there are men out there who are ready and able to be your champion."

BAZELON: We have to let go of our own stereotypes, too, instead of assuming that the white straight men are not going to be helpful.

CORRELL: I always say to my graduate students, as they go out to be professors themselves: "We're fundamentally changing organizations, but change is slow. In the meantime, you have to mentor people along the way and help them survive in the world that we're currently in." Sometimes, younger women point out this puts a burden on them. Yes. But all of us have been helped by the people that came before us.

BAZELON: You just made a classic, stereotypically female move, didn't you? It's not just about you, it's about everybody else, too. Which I'm all for! It's

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been more than 100 papers on whether organizations should frame discussions of race in the workplace in terms of color blindness or multiculturalism. Do you encourage people to ignore racial differences or to be aware of them? The research has shown that having a more aware perspective is helpful both for whites and for people of color.

We started thinking about whether the same logic applies to gender, and we found that it doesn't apply quite the same way. With race, you start with people being segregated, so you have to push them toward respecting the other group. But if you emphasize gender, people tend to focus on biology and innate personality differences, and you wind up reinforcing stereotypes. Organizations are better off giving messages that fade gender into the background a bit. We tested giving people a short article to read with messages such as "Social scientists encourage us to appreciate that at our core we are all the same." We found that women who took in these messages became more confident and willing to act. And men became more likely to give women opportunities.

BAZELON: So if you were rescripting the statements companies make about valuing diversity, maybe you would say: "As an organization, we value differences, but we also don't assume too much about them. We don't assume that they mean a whole lot. We also don't assume that everyone's going to conform to these differences."

PHILLIPS: Absolutely. Let's recognize that we've been talking about gender in a binary way, but in reality, gender is complex. It means a whole lot of things in between the traditional conceptions of male and female. Importantly, we have to recognize that it is differences in experiences and approaches to work that we can benefit from; that's what we need to be aware of.

BAZELON: Shelley, what are you working on?

CORRELL: Earlier in my career, every one of my projects uncovered a different moving goal post for women. I would teach this material to my students, and I would see them getting demoralized. At this point, I want to

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worked with the managers at one company to develop a scorecard for performance reviews, to set measurable goals for employees in advance, connected concretely to the company's values, and then assess them based on meeting those criteria. For example, a value for an employee like "be phenomenal" can't be measured, but "work collaboratively" can be. So on the scorecard, a manager would give a specific example of how an employee contributed to someone else's success.

After we created the scorecard, my team and I went to a meeting where the managers assessed people for promotion. Each manager turned up with the scorecard filled out for every employee. And compared to what we observed before, the managers were talking about the candidates in terms of the goals on the scorecard, no longer criticizing women's personalities, which had been common. And they were no longer disproportionately moving women out of the top bracket of the performance scale when there were too many people to promote or reward.

It's a simple thing, a scorecard. But it got rid of biases in the performance-assessment process. This is what I call a small win.

Once the managers made progress on that particular performance-assessment process, on their own they redid their criteria for hiring. Then they realized there were not enough women and people of color in their applicant pool, so they revised their job ads. Over time, the progress accumulates. The next question is, How do you scale that? We can't go work in every single organization, so we make the tools and methodologies available, and we ask organizations that use them to share what they've learned. If your job in the morning is to solve gender equality, you'll probably go back to bed. But if it's to help make a small but real change, you stay motivated.

Interview has been condensed and edited.

Emily Bazelon is the Truman Capote fellow for Creative Writing and Law at Yale Law School. Her new book, "Charged," will be published in April.

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