Commission for Women - The Wings of Women: Taking Flight in the 21st Century

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THE WINGS OF WOMEN
Taking Flight in the 21st Century
Nicolette Brice
“We need to move beyond the idea that girls can be leaders and create the expectation that they should be leaders.”
– Condoleezza Rice
~With special thanks to my mentor Rew Woodruff~
INTRODUCTION

“I did everything that I was supposed to.

I didn’t cry in meetings.

I didn’t wear short skirts.

I put up with the weird upper management guys that kiss you on the mouth at Christmas.

Is it fair that to be the youngest VP in my company,

I will be the oldest mom at preschool?

Not really,

But that’s part of the deal.

I made a choice.

Some women got pregnant.

I got promotions.” (1)

This excerpt from the opening lines of the popular comedy, Baby Mama, wraps up the widely-held belief that young women must have only one priority: a family or a career. In these twelve lines Tina Fey tackles all aspects of this sacrifice. The opening few lines discuss the way women should “properly” act in the workplace. This proper behavior ranges from hiding the weakness of sensitivity and dressing as to not highlight ones sexuality to even tolerating minor forms of sexual harassment.

The other aspects that Fey draws attention to are the sacrifices she made in exchange for her professional success. There was “a deal.” She made “a choice.” But
who says she can’t have both? Why do women have to choose one or the other? Why does Hollywood insist on consistently portraying the impossibility of a successful working mother?

Sandra Bullock is similarly cast under this unglamorous light in The Proposal, where she stars as the controlling, despotic boss of a publishing company. Rather than being viewed by her coworkers as accomplished, she is characterized as “bossy” and frequently made fun of. Her assistant and co-star in the movie, Ryan Reynolds, is forced into marrying her so that she can maintain her citizenship in the United States. So there is an overbearing gender bias in what seems like a harmless romantic comedy. Bullock’s success is masked and the dynamic is almost predictably reversed so that Reynolds holds the power of her future professional success. They exchange a promotion for his hand in marriage so that she is not deported back to Canada. She is being robbed of her power meanwhile he is able to advance his career strictly because he is a male. The plot is playful but mirrors the larger issue of gender bias and inequality in the workplace today.

A woman’s ability to simultaneously take on motherhood and a career is the plot line of the 2011 comedy, I Don’t Knox How She Does It. The name of the movie speaks for itself. Kate, played by Sarah Jessica Parker, is a triple threat. She has the husband, the career, and the children at home. Meanwhile her male coworkers vocalize their doubt in her ability to do all of this even though they have more children then she does. They are fathers but because she is a mother, it is her duty to take care of her children. In the film Kate is compared to mothers who don’t work which
inevitably reveals her character to be less poised. She literally runs to work after dropping her daughter off at school in one scene. But the important message that young women might not take away from the movie is the difference between something that is too hard and something that is difficult but doable.

The 2003 comedy *Daddy Day Care* takes aim on the gender role debate but from a different angle. We have seen professional women mocked in movies and now the joke is on the men who try to be the primary parent figure. Eddie Murphy stars as the husband who loses his job and is therefore forced to stay home to take care of his son. Co-star Jeff Garlin, Murphy’s best friend, also loses his job so they decide to transform their misfortune into a business venture – a day care. Managing a large group of children proves to be nearly impossible for the two fathers. Kids go missing. The house gets destroyed. Kids are eating desserts all day. The movie was humorous but I believe that most viewers were not shocked by the men’s inability to successfully watch over the children.

It is “funny” when women are either hated at work or are unable to balance a career and family. It is “funny” when men are left in charge of young kids. I can place absolutely no blame on producers for scripting what is entertaining. Women who have their entire act together are not as fun to watch. But that unfortunately means that many young women do not have strong examples to look up to.
CHAPTER ONE

“The problem with gender is that it prescribes how we should be, rather than recognizing how we are.”
–Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Over ninety-three years ago, the woman’s suffrage movement took a huge leap when women got the right to vote with the 19th Amendment to the Constitution. Just fifty-one years ago the Equal Pay Act was passed guaranteeing women the same pay as men for the same job. Women can agree that both of these events are monumental in the fight for equality, but women should also not be satisfied. There is strength in numbers and right now the numbers are still favoring the men.

Women are at the wrong end of the spectrum in the majority of all gender-based studies, polls, and categories. Women only make up 17.7% of the House of Representatives and 20% of the Senate even though 50.8% of the United States population is female (3). Out of the Fortune 500 companies, 21% have female CEOs and women hold only 14.3% of the top corporate jobs (3). With regards to the fortune 500 company board seats, women hold a mere 16.6% of them and 10% of the companies have no women directors at all (3). Because women hold such small percentages of these positions, it can be difficult for them to get the respect they deserve. Real change will occur when more women sit on the corporate teeter-totter until it becomes level.
A huge step in evening out this teeter-totter has to begin with the acknowledgment that it is uneven in the first place and not just from a factual standpoint. Discrimination based on gender can be a hindrance for women seeking professional success. A 2003 study conducted by the Columbia Business School tested the likeability of successful men versus successful women. Students were given the resume of a venture capitalist with strong networking capabilities who had previously worked for Apple and now owned a software company. The students were divided into two groups – half of the students received a resume with the name “Heidi Roizen” and the other half received a resume with “Howard Roizen”. Everything else was identical. The students ranked the capabilities of “Heidi” and “Howard” equally based on their accomplishments. But when it came to their personalities, the students liked Howard better. Students described him as likeable and someone who could “get the job done” (7). The students described Heidi, on the other hand, as bossy and selfish and as someone they did not want to work with (7). Same facts. Different gender. We have not reached the point where powerful women are perceived as likeable.

The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) did a similar gender bias study in 2012 but narrowed their population to a strictly academic science field. Faculty members across the country evaluated a student applying for a position as a lab manager. The 127 faculty members evaluated the student’s resume based on 3 categories: competence, hireability, and the faculty members’ desire to hire the student. Half of the resumes had a female student name and the other half had a male student name. On average, the females were ranked lower in all three categories
attributable to the fact that she was “less competent”. The females were also offered an average salary of $26,507 compared to $30,238 for males (4). Although the population of this study is specifically made up a scientific field, the gender bias is clear. Another valid source of concern is that the male and female faculty members were equally as biased towards the female students. The male faculty members did not only rank the female students lower. I found this to be particularly interesting because I believe that many women are quick to point fingers to the men as the source of gender inequality in the workplace. Maybe we as women need to take a step back and realize that we are just as guilty, even if we don't always realize it.

Professionals, non-professionals, children, adults, students – they can all be biased towards gender without realizing it. I know that I am guilty of it at times. Think about someone who might have just gotten off a flight and told you that they had a female pilot. If their pilot had been a male, would they have pointed out that they had a male pilot? More than likely not. The same goes for doctors. Your friend might tell you that a female surgeon is performing an operation on one of their family members when they probably would have just said doctor if it was a male. When Mary Barra took over as the CEO of General Motors at the end of last year, the headlines read, “General Motors names its first woman CEO” (6). Again, we point out the females but not the males.

The remaining question, though, is why? Why do we have this underlying notion drastically separating men and women? In my opinion, a lot of this has to do with ideals that are instilled in us at a young age. Whether it be intentional or not, girls
and boys are raised differently and those differences are a factor later on in life. Girls are raised to comply and boys are raised to actively go after what they want. The effect is rippling – one generation after another, the difference in how children are raised is clear.

The issue specifically came to my attention after I came across an article on some Gymboree onesies sold in 2011. Gymboree printed a line of “smart like dad” onesies for boys and “pretty like mommy” onesies for girls. Please pay special attention to the year that these were made. It is equally if not more important that what the onesies actually say. They were not printed 30 years ago. They were printed 3 years ago. We like to draw attention to the positives such as how far women have come this century and which companies have new CEOs that are women. But the reality is that we still have a long way to go.

Gymboree was not the only clothing company marketing gender-biased clothing in 2011. J.C. Penny printed a t-shirt for girls that said “I’m too pretty to do homework so my brother has to do it for me.” Forever 21 was guilty of a similar scheme later that year. The negative encouragement is overwhelming for young girls. Where are the onesies for girls saying “intelligent like mommy”? Where are the t-shirts for boys saying “I’m too handsome to do homework so my sister has to do it for me”? They don’t exist because boys don’t receive the same negative encouragement. They are instead taught to vocalize their ideas and assert their dominance.

Girls should be encouraged to be confident with their thoughts in the same way that boys are. Emphasizing beauty over brain is deliberately teaching girls that their
appearance should be their focus. Doreen Lorenzo, president of the product development company Quirky, addressed this issue in an interview with the New York Times. She elaborated on how “girls are taught to be cooperative more than boys. [She doesn't] think girls get the tools they need in school to get that self-assuredness. In high school, girls want to be part of the tribe, so they’re not stepping out of line. The boys are often the jocks, with more bravado. We still don’t encourage girls to speak up, to use their voice, to use their instinct, to not be afraid, and teach them how to combat the bullying. How do you trust your inner soul? We don’t address that at all in school. You have to believe in yourself, but I think many women don't. And you watch some men just take advantage of that” (2). She nails it. Girls and young women are not comfortable speaking up until they receive encouragement but often times, this is encouragement that never comes. I believe that if we give girls reassurance at a younger age, they will feel confident and not be caught waiting for it late on in life. Because right now they are not only receiving no encouragement to lead but also they are reaping the negative consequences if they actually do try to.

The repercussions girls face starting at a young age are counterintuitive with what we should be reinforcing to them. For example, a group of second graders might be outside on the recess field and find themselves wanting to play a game that has two teams. If a boy takes charge to divvy up the teams, he is seen as confident and in his natural, appropriate role. On the other hand, if a girl steps out to designate players to specific teams, she will suffer the reputation of the “bossy” girl. I can personally relate to this. I was fortunate to grow up in an environment where it was easier to emerge as
a leader because I was on so many female sports teams so there wasn’t that same threat of male dominance. But I do still remember times that I was called bossy at school and even by my girl teammates for stepping out as a leader. I know it hurt my feelings at the time, but now I can talk about it and bring attention to these gender issues that are still hindering the creativity and leadership of young girls today.

I put a lot of emphasis on what is taught to the younger generations, but it is also interesting to take a look at what they can teach us. If the tables are turned, they have more than a few admirable qualities that are easy to see. Their ability to shake off mistakes and imperfections is praiseworthy. Women tend to fixate on their mistakes and struggle to move on from them because they are so worried about the mistake. They wonder who noticed the mistake and they wonder what everyone thinks about them now. It cripples their progress. But when a child makes a mistake, they just go play in a different sand box.

Another valuable aspect of a child’s behavior is how their creativity does not waver. There is no dumb idea and there is no dumb way to share that idea. This lack of hesitation should be a learning tool for all of us. Women find themselves scared to even ask a question after a meeting let alone speak up with a suggestion. We need to leave this reluctance at home when we leave for work in the morning and be confident with what’s in our head, the same way that children are.
“The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.”
-Alice Walker

With every female that is willing to take the leap towards a leadership position at work, we are more able to redefine what it means to be a “businesswoman”. Women are hesitant a lot of time though because they do not know the appropriate way to go about doing this. Amy Schulman, the president of Pfizer Nutrition, says, “we give really mixed messages, and we don’t teach women exactly how to do that because it’s not very graceful when somebody’s trying to claim a room in a meeting. What we do have to do is teach strategies, because here’s the thing about unwritten languages: whoever owns the language wins the conversation. We need to teach women the difference between a native tongue and a language” (2). Women are already at somewhat of a disadvantage unless we choose to play golf and sit around smoking cigars with the guys from work. But that just might not be in our human nature or on our list of favorite things to do outside of the office. And for that reason, it is even more crucial that we gain respect in and learn the language of the office.

The respect we so desperately seek from men is not handed out like candy at the pediatrician’s office. It must be earned. Women tend to be more comfortable in one on one situations as opposed to bigger group settings because small, controlled scenarios are more personable. We are less willing to vocalize our thoughts because of
the uncertainty associated with it. This self-doubt is the core of why we are so unwilling to be confident leaders. Spreading our ideas to larger groups is the more effective way to be heard.

But maybe it is not always easy to be heard. Women who talk about their success are not attractive. I even feel embarrassed sometimes when I talk about an accomplishment. You will hear a man, on the other hand, bragging as soon as he gets one pick right in the first bracket of March Madness. Men feel proud and women feel exposed. Let’s flip that embarrassment and negative exposure around so that we can proudly accessorize our confidence. Fake it until you make it.

Rejection in the workplace is not personal and women struggle to distinguish these emotions. This feeling is not unfamiliar to me. The business school at the University of Tennessee requires all business majors, regardless of their specific concentration, to complete an integrated processes management class. The course is entirely simulation based and groups are randomly formed at the beginning of the semester. Groups then design a business and construct a strategy to compete against the virtual businesses that the other groups have created online. At the end of the semester the groups present their business plan, profits, and percent of the market share to venture capitalists in hopes of obtaining the highest offer from them.

I enjoyed this course because it gave me an opportunity to interact with a variety of students, not just accounting majors. I also got exposure to all aspects of the business instead of limiting my focus to its’ finances. Each student was responsible for a different part of the business. I’m still not entirely sure what I was thinking at the
time, but I stepped out of my comfort zone and took on the sales position in my group. This in itself was difficult to do considering my lack of expertise in the area, but I was challenged even further when I had to make decisions about our sales techniques and strategies that would affect the whole business. That was uncomfortable for me, especially with three confident, outspoken males in my group.

I found myself speaking up less than the guys and whether that was because I had less confidence or a fear of rejection, I'm not sure. It was honestly probably the combination of both. It hurt my feelings when they did not agree with my decisions and I had to learn that it had nothing to do with how much they liked me. But it was not easy to have that mindset. I realized that it just meant that they saw our business going in a different direction and had other ideas to get us there. At the end of the day, they were still my team members and my friends.

Men are fantastic examples when it relates to keeping business in the boardroom. I am envious of their ability to be brutally honest with each other and then grab a beer together a few hours later or play golf with one another that weekend. Men do not have a filter with each other and do not expect one in return. Women should embrace it if a man is willing to be honest with her because it levels out the playing field. Just remember to try not to take it to heart ladies.

Not taking a critique to heart is easier said than done. Critiques can even lead to tears. This topic particularly piques my interest because I tend to be an emotional person at the worst times. I cry when I am frustrated, not when I am sad. So when I am passionate about something and get worked up about it, I can find myself in tears.
unintentionally. And as I move forward in my professional career, I would not want anything of that nature to set me back.

In an effort to prepare for the future, I have read different theories on crying in the workplace. These have helped me mold my own opinion. The first article I read about this was in the New York Times. Lisa Price, the president of the beauty product line Carol's Daughter, spoke about crying being one of the bigger mistakes she has seen women in business make (2). It is especially not a good idea, according to her, because you never know how the person on the other end will perceive it (2). And, no matter how they perceive it, it is not something that person will forget (2). Crying unfortunately enforces the stereotype “that women are weak, and they're not as tough as men. The other thing that can happen is that if your boss is a woman, you might think you can cry in front of her because she's a woman, and assume that she's going to understand” (2). I saw where Price was coming from and was convinced. I set off to work a few months later with that in mind: no crying at all, no matter what.

This was the first non-volleyball related work experience I had ever had. So entering the corporate work force at 20 years old made me feel all but wise compared to my co-workers. I had no experiences to go off of, but after reading the article I was certain that I should never be caught with a tear in my eye, especially being female, an intern, and the single non-21 year old employee in the Atlanta office. That was until one morning during the last few weeks of my internship when my senior manager suddenly broke down beside me. My senior manager. The only other female on my audit team. Everything I looked up to in my future at Deloitte. My 24-year-old idol.
She was crying next to me. I had placed her on the highest of pedestals. And in that exact moment even though I felt completely hopeless in not knowing what to do to help her, I felt somewhat relieved to see my role model as a real person with real emotions.

The four other men on our audit team quickly realized what was going on and my senior manager politely excused herself to the ladies room. I followed her in to offer any comfort I could provide. Once she gathered herself, we went back out to the office. What happened next was uplifting to say the least. The guys on the team had put together a plan for how to split up her tasks for the day. They assured her that everything would be handled if she wanted to go home. They didn’t know the specifics but they didn’t have to. They were sympathetic.

I went from believing one extreme to witnessing the other: assuming it was out of line to cry at work, to seeing the female senior manager at my first job cry right in front of me. Now, I have had time to sit back and envision what I hope can be true in corporate America someday. We are all people and people are not perfect. Emotions inevitably make or break a person’s success in the workplace and sometimes we have personal problems that warrant small breakdowns at work. I am not saying I support a circular office meeting with a tissue box in the center. But I do believe that non-work related tears are okay because there is a fine line between crying about work and crying at work. It is unrealistic to assume that emotions will never get be a factor. Sometimes life happens. Family members need help. Children get sick. Ultimately, women need to choose their tears wisely because not all of us will be in as positive
situations as my senior manager when we do cry, but I hope one day that men and women can freely acknowledge real emotions at work.
“Women are the world’s most underused resource.”  
-Hillary Rodham Clinton

Beyoncé Knowles: one of Forbes top 100 most powerful women in the world, one of Time Magazines top 100 most influential people in the world, and arguably one of the most influential women of the decade. She got her start in 1990 in the girls group known as Girls Tyme. Now the iconic bombshell has received seventeen Grammy awards, released five studio albums, and sold over 118 million records, not including her work with Destiny's child. The buildup of her music video “Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)” was even cause for Kanye West’s interruption of the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards reception speech of Taylor Swift for the best female music video of the year. But all of the hype surrounding this artist is for good reason. Her message is empowering to females all over the world.

Her most recent album released in December of 2013 had a rippling effect on the feminist movement. The fact that the visual album is self-titled “Beyoncé” is without doubt a noteworthy maneuver. It reveals a distinguished sense of confidence for a female in a male-dominated industry. One of the tracks on her self-titled album, Pretty Hurts”, tackles an issue at the heart of gender inequality. I discussed earlier how these ideals are cancerous to young girls and women:

“Mama said, ‘You're a pretty girl.  
What’s in your head, it doesn’t matter  
Brush your hair, fix your teeth.”
What you wear is all that matters.”

The inspiration to base self worth on beauty as opposed to intellect is disheartening. Beyoncé heard it as a girl, and does not want girls today hearing the same misleading encouragement. Her message is so powerful because music is a unique way to reach out. She reaches out to a massive audience because music does not have to be read; it can be interpreted by all sizes and ages worldwide.

Basing one’s happiness and worth on appearance is a dangerous trend. Telling women that what they think does not matter, is a devastating form of negative reinforcement. Beyoncé is admirably using her influence to begin the trend of empowering women. And she is not alone on this uphill journey. The notable Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is accompanying Beyoncé on this trek. Her feminist speech is intersected into Beyoncé’s song “Flawless”. It reads as follows:

“We teach girls to shrink themselves,  
To make themselves smaller.  
We say to girls,  
You can have ambition, but not too much.  
You should aim to be successful,  
But not too successful,  
Otherwise you will threaten the Man.  
Because I am female, I am expected to aspire to marriage.  
I am expected to make my life choices always keeping in mind,  
That marriage is the most important.  
Now marriage can be a source of joy and love and mutual support.  
But why do we teach girls to aspire to marriage,  
And we don’t teach boys the same?  
We raise girls to see each other as competitors not for jobs or accomplishments,  
Which I think can be a good thing,  
But for the attention of men.  
We teach girls that they cannot be sexual beings in the way that boys are.  
Feminist: a person that believes in the social, political, economic equality of the sexes.”
Adichie addresses ambition and how it is counterintuitive to encourage then limit the amount of it. There should be no maximum extent of a woman’s ambition. Part of the reason women hold themselves back later on in life and in their opportunities is because they do not have that willingness to take risks at a young age. The willingness is suppressed by the expectation that men are “supposed to” play the dominant role. She talks about how women are expected to make life decisions with marriage in mind but boys are not. Boys are raised to have a career and girls are raised to have a husband.

Adichie inserts her own definition of feminism at the end of her speech in Beyoncé’s song. According to her, feminism is gender equality – socially, politically, and economically. A French philosopher coined the term “feminist” in the 1800s but its movement did not gain a strong backing in the United States until the early 1900s. The original advocates of the movement in the US were women fighting for their basic rights such as voting, the right to own property, and equal contracts in the workplace. Now it is over a century later and women are still not earning the same amount as men.

Out of full-time wage and salary men and women in 2012, the average woman made 81 cents for every dollar that men made. The Bureau of Labor Statistics first compared these figures in 1979 when it was calculated that women made 62 percent of the amount that men made (8). The 62 to 81 percent increase is remarkable, but not a standard that women should be willing to settle for.

Somewhere along the way, the true goal of feminism has been lost in the negative taboo afflicting its title. The meaning of “feminist” transformed from women
who wanted to vote to “weirdoes” who hate men and did not believe in marriage. Now society usually frowns upon women who define themselves as feminists. Because of this, women are afraid to call themselves a feminist. Merriam-Webster defines feminism as “the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities” (9). If more women saw this definition and if society allowed for it to have its true meaning, I believe that a lot more people would be willing to identify themselves as feminists.
“What would you do if you weren’t afraid?”
–Sheryl Sandberg

Women are inevitably asked how they will manage work when they get pregnant. But no one asks than men how they are going to do it when their wives get pregnant. This negativity is a portion of the core of why women limit themselves. They do not have confidence, are afraid to be vocal, and prioritize marriage with a family over their career because they are under the impression that they cannot have both. The ability for women to be successful mothers and have successful professional careers is far too underestimated.

The impact that men can have on helping this is also far too underestimated. Women need encouragement from all angles. We need to feel encouragement from the men working with us and from our significant others back at home. As soon as men start supporting the idea of having women in power, it will be more of the norm and less of the exception. One of the most momentous steps in this direction was Obama’s nomination of Janet Yellen as the chair of the Federal Reserve. Her term began on February 1, 2014 making her the first female to ever hold the position. She replaced Ben Bernanke who had been the chairman since 2006. His eight-year term has been impressive considering how he “helped pull the U.S. economy out of the worst financial crisis and recession since the 1930s. Yellen, 67, would likely continue steering Fed policy in the same direction as Bernanke. A close ally of the chairman, she has been a
key architect of the Fed’s efforts under Bernanke to keep interest rates near record lows to support the economy” (10). Her experience and knowledge will be essential during this crucial time for the economy.

It has admittedly been a while since my first economics course in college but the lecture about Ben Bernanke and the Federal Reserve is one that will remain locked in my memory forever. I specifically remember the day because my professor told us that Bernanke was the most powerful person in the world. My professor’s case was that the United States is the most powerful country in the world. The Federal Reserve controls the rates and therefore all of the money in the United States. Money makes the world go around. Therefore, according to the transitive property, Bernanke was the most powerful man in the world at that time.

Now Yellen holds this position. There are different definitions of power and people have different interpretations of what constitutes a powerful person. But from an economic standpoint, the most powerful person in the world is now a woman and I can’t say I dislike the sound of that. What is most important, though, is who put her there. A man. And not just a man. The president of the free world. He placed his confidence in her and set an example that the country should match that confidence in her.

If the nation can follow Obama’s confidence in women, then the next step is getting help from the men at home. Relationships and marriage are teamwork. Traditional gender roles will only become truth if couples allow it. If women get the right help at home, they will feel ready to go back to their jobs after having a child.
Sheryl Sandberg has been an inspiration to undoubtedly many women across the world and me. Forbes named her the 6th most powerful woman in the world this past year. Her best-selling novel *Lean In* has been a buzz since it hit the shelves in 2013. In it, she discusses her work-life balance and how she could not be more appreciative of the support and help from her husband (12). Sandberg also points out how “public policy reinforces this gender bias. The U.S. Census Bureau considers mothers the ‘designated parent,’ even when both parents are present in the home. When mothers care for their children, its ‘parenting,’ but when fathers care for their children, the government deems it a ‘child care arrangement’” (12). Women need men to be willing to change this and step up as a parent figure. The work-life balance is difficult for women when we are expected to fail. Having allies at home is essential. Let’s get these men on board!
CONCLUSION

Women will take strides at home and in the workplace when the topic of gender inequality is no longer the white elephant in the room. It seems like a paradox that we draw so much attention so successful females when all we really want is to be equal. But we will not be on the same level as men unless we talk about it. It’s ironic to think about. But we will not have to make a big deal when a female becomes a CEO of a top company when it is a normal occurrence. So in my opinion, the more women talk about it, the better.

I discussed my respect for Sandberg and her novel earlier and lucky for me, she is not the only inspiring female talking about herself. For the past eight years Mindy Kaling has been a triple threat. She has done everything from acting in the hit TV series The Office and popular movie This is the End, to producing her own creative self-based sitcom The Mindy Series and writing her book Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me? (and Other Concerns). And yet with her thriving success, she is still asked where her confidence comes from to which her response is all too indicative of how many women feel. She says, “I think people are well meaning, but it’s pretty insulting. Because what it means to me is, ‘You, Mindy Kaling, have all the trappings of a very marginalized person. You’re not skinny, you’re not white, you’re a woman. Why on earth would you feel like you’re worth anything?” (11). Kaling’s race adds another aspect to the puzzle and I admire how she is able to take opinions as feedback instead
of fact. All women can use that as a model for their lives and careers. Listen to what other say, learn from it if you choose to, and move on with your life.

I was fortunate enough to speak with Amy Miles, the CEO of Regal, this past fall. She originally joined Regal in 1999 as the VP of finance but became the CFO after only 9 months. The entire industry was going through a restructuring and Regal even filed for bankruptcy at one point. Miles said she learned more during these bad times than ever. She was promoted to CEO in 2009 and now Regal is the largest theater company with 575 theaters and 7500 screens in 42 states and $3 billion in revenue. When I asked her about her leadership perspective, she said it was her integrity that helped her the most because she was able to deliver all news with ownership. Her comment on being one of the top female CEOs was unique. She told me that she just didn’t spend much time thinking about it because it is not easy thinking about being the only woman in a boardroom. She spent her time on establishing relationships everywhere she went instead.

Finally, I spoke with Miles about her role as a mother and the relationship she has with her children. She admitted to me that it was not easy but that she made a commitment to being a mother and made sure she fit it into her life. Her confidence was exquisite. Confident women should not be a rarity. Women must not get caught undermining their own self-value. Women bring new ideas to the table and have the capability to lead effectively like men. So many women have already started the trend to talk about this strength and this is my little contribution. Small voice; big voice...it
doesn’t matter. Every positive voice that speaks up is a step in the right direction for women in the workplace.
WORKS CITED