



# GLASS HALF BROKEN

Shattering the Barriers  
That Still Hold Women  
Back at Work

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## CHAPTER 2

# **SCARCE, SCRUTINIZED, AND STILL CLIMBING**

### Women in Leadership

Recall the voices of undergraduates from the previous chapter, who noticed a lack of women in the senior ranks of the fields and firms they were on the cusp of entering. “The legal field is still mostly male-dominated,” one aspiring law student noted. “There’s not many women at the partner level,” said another of the consulting firm she would soon be joining. “All the executives on the other side of the table,” observed another student after a job interview, “were men.” Recall too how students explained these disparities as the vestige of practices that no longer prevailed. These young women assumed with confidence that for their own careers, “the gender part doesn’t really matter anymore.”

They were partly right—gender matters far less than it once did. No longer limited to pink-collar support jobs, women have arrived at a place of greater opportunity and certainly far less *de jure* discrimination. But inequalities persist. While some women have broken through to the top ranks of leadership, the proportion remains far

lower than that of their participation in the labor force. Of the US workers employed in professional occupations, 52 percent were women as of 2017, yet the proportion of women executives and senior-level officials in the S&P 500 was just half that, at 26.5 percent.<sup>1</sup> Women are even more scarce at the highest heights of business; as of May 2020, 7.4 percent of companies in the *Fortune* 500 were led by a female CEO. And that proportion was an all-time high.<sup>2</sup> Historically, there are just eighty-seven women who have ever served as CEO of a *Fortune* 500 company.<sup>3</sup> In 2018, a *New York Times* article quickly went viral for pointing out that there were fewer women CEOs in the *Fortune* 500 than there were male CEOs named James.<sup>4</sup> Only two Black women have appeared on the list: Ursula Burns, CEO of Xerox from 2009 to 2017, and Mary Winston, who served as interim CEO of Bed Bath & Beyond for six months in 2019.<sup>5</sup> With the departure of PepsiCo's Indra Nooyi late in 2018, the business community kicked off 2019 with under 1 percent of *Fortune* 500 CEO seats held by women of color.<sup>6</sup>

The data are clear: Women start to vanish as the corporate hierarchy ascends. Many of those who get almost to the peak are unable to break through to CEO or similar roles, watching as white men continue to dominate the most high-status, lucrative projects or lines of business. To take just one real-world example, in PricewaterhouseCoopers's *Building on a Culture of Belonging: 2020 PwC Diversity & Inclusion Transparency Report*, the firm revealed that three-quarters of its largest audit accounts were led by white male partners. During that fiscal year, the firm had worked with 90 percent of the companies in the *Fortune* 500, but just 19 percent of those key engagements were led by women or nonwhite men.<sup>7</sup>

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To study the women who had managed to reach senior ranks, we conducted in-depth interviews with seventy-five executives across twenty-six countries, all of whom were partners, vice presidents, division heads, or C-suite leaders at multinational and other large companies at the time of our interviews. We asked all of them about the

influence of gender on their career paths and what conditions and strategies contributed to their success. Their experiences highlight the most obdurate obstacles women face—factors that even highly accomplished leaders continue to come up against—and also reveal the strengths and limitations of common strategies for overcoming them. The women we interviewed are survivors. They got the crucial breaks, the senior colleagues willing to go to bat for them, and the opportunities to lead high-profile projects. For every woman we spoke to there are unknown scores of others, equally skilled and ambitious, who never made it to the executive level. Understanding how these women leaders navigated uneven terrain can help us understand what needs to change for more of their peers to succeed.

## The Outlier Effect

The women we spoke to were keenly aware that their gender made them conspicuous, for better *and* worse. One, a chief operating officer in the energy industry, reflected: “I’ve always been in male-dominated environments at work and in businesses. I think one of the early lessons I got was that women are visible in such environments, and that goes both ways. It means that if you fail, and everyone does in some areas, it’s highly visible, and everyone knows it. On the other hand, if you succeed, it’s also highly visible.” A number of interviewees put this positive spin on minority status, including one CEO: “In one way, it’s a huge advantage to stand out. People don’t expect [a woman] when you walk into a meeting.” But even she acknowledged that it came at a cost: “You’re always a bit of a misfit in a social circle, and work is not just about getting a deal done; it’s also about the environment and the people that you work with.” One executive at a large insurance company found that being a woman of color compounded this challenge:

I’m a female non-European in a predominantly white-dominated environment. It made people just not sure how to relate to me.

People become very cautious in how they deal with me. And it takes a much longer time to build their trust or build relationships because I'm alien to them. I'm too foreign; I'm nonmale, and I'm non-European. It took a very long time to build any rapport or working relationship.

Women in powerful roles stand out not only because they are rare but also because leadership archetypes align with men and masculinity. Decades of research have demonstrated this, and our interviewees felt it firsthand, as one finance executive observed: "There's a kind of a masculine norm. This doesn't have to be a vicious or a negative norm, but it's a norm that says you are different, you're abnormal." Simply put, traditional beliefs about women—that they are communally oriented, emotionally sensitive, and attuned to others' needs—contrast with the attributes thought to characterize leadership, such as authoritative, independence, and rationality.<sup>8</sup> Even though gender roles have evolved over time, the archetypal leader remains male. Asking a group of professionals to draw an "effective leader" yields sketches of men and captions about "his" qualities, as one management professor found while leading workshops in multiple companies.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, women in positions of authority shake up our expectations—of women and of leaders—so much that we may even assume, consciously or not, that our women colleagues don't *want* to wield power. One CFO of a biotechnology company continued to observe her colleagues defaulting to junior male candidates for promotion, long after she herself was an executive: "I've asked men, when they're promoting someone, 'Did you consider these women?' and they would just automatically have the assumption 'Well, she's probably not interested.'"

Being evaluated against the masculine norm was typical for the women we spoke to and meant a higher bar to clear. A senior vice president at an entertainment company described the resulting tax on her ambitions: "I have really had to work my way into the boys' club, so to speak. Just for women in Asia, working in my capacity amongst men is

really rare.” A marketing executive said she “felt like I was entering an all-boys’ club and [being] summarily dismissed at the start. I think I had to work really hard to build up credibility.” For women in client-centered fields such as consulting, struggling to build rapport with male clients was a common experience. Some went so far as to forego working with certain industries or companies to avoid cultures where “the barriers are too high,” as a female partner at a consulting firm put it.<sup>10</sup>

One phenomenon came up again and again in our interviews: When women approached the uppermost ranks at their companies, skepticism about their suitability for leadership suddenly came to the fore. Their performance wasn’t typically in question, but their fit for leadership was. One banking executive pointed out that men may be willing to work with women but less happy to have them as true peers: “In your thirties, they’re hoping you’re going to get married, have children, and never come back. In your forties, they start taking you as real head-to-head competition.” Sometimes the messages undermining women’s ambitions were explicit; one woman was told that she would never become CEO because she was “the wrong fit” for the top job. (She was later appointed CEO.)<sup>11</sup> Other times it’s subtler, as this sales executive described:

In the first fifteen years of my career, I never thought of myself as a woman leader. I was just a business executive or a business manager, just like any other male colleague of mine. And I never ever thought of myself as a woman leader. But I have started feeling that in the last two years. I don’t know if the reason is because when you reach senior positions, you somehow begin to feel that you are not moving as fast as others. I particularly feel, do I make certain men insecure when they are around me? Do I make a boss feel insecure about me? These kinds of thoughts never used to occur to me, but they’ve started occurring to me in the last two years.

The women in our study who hit the proverbial glass ceiling are not unique. In 2018, the Australian Parliament offered an exemplary

case of a high-achieving female leader's stalled momentum when Julie Bishop stood for election to lead the Liberal Party, the first woman ever to do so. Although Bishop had been the party's deputy head for more than a decade and had higher public approval ratings than her two male opponents, she lost with less than 13 percent support from fellow lawmakers.<sup>12</sup> Despite Bishop's widely lauded track record as foreign minister and popularity with voters, the top job, where she would have wielded real power over the party, was off limits. In a private sector example, former Pinterest chief operating officer Françoise Brougher sued the company in 2020, alleging that she was excluded from decision-making, was compensated less than male colleagues, and was fired after voicing her discontent with gender discrimination. Brougher, a sought-after tech executive with stints at Square and Google, was stunned to encounter these obstacles after being personally recruited to the company by its CEO just two years earlier. "Here is a glass ceiling I never hit into until my 50s that I suddenly did, very violently," Brougher told the *New York Times*. "You don't see it all. And then you hit it."<sup>13</sup>

## Under the Microscope

Like Brougher, the women we interviewed typically didn't anticipate late-career barriers. For many who started out in the 1980s and 1990s, especially in industries with a significant proportion of women, gender seemed incidental until suddenly it was paramount. A vice president at a large media conglomerate explained:

There were lots of "web girls" and "women in new media" organizations, and I never wanted to be a part of it. I was so busy. I thought, "I don't have the time for this. I don't even understand what they're on about. Just get to work. Work hard and you'll be fine." And it's interesting that, up to a certain level in your career, that's true. But not when you're really trying to break through

the final layer—which is kind of where I’m at now—especially in this day and age where [organizations] are increasingly complicated. I ran into it first at [my previous company], which is big telecom and male-dominated. They had very little patience or tolerance for diversity on the management team. I think their blueprints for senior managers are male-dominated. They’re really having to wrap their heads around how women fit in.

The resistance women faced was just that: a drag on their velocity, slowing down their advancement. One finance executive estimated that it slowed her trajectory by a decade:

I am absolutely certain that if I had been a man, both in the way I would have behaved and in the way I would have been perceived, I would have definitely had a more rapid career. I can’t say that I’m unhappy with the result of it but I think I would have liked to reach the level I am today in my forties rather than in my late fifties, and I definitely think that gender played a role.

As part of our research, we also spoke to a smaller sample of men in senior roles. They rarely spoke about a need to manage perceptions within their companies as part of their career development, while women described spending considerable energy and effort to do so. Women recounted stories such as that of a longtime energy executive who took great pains to help her male colleagues feel comfortable in her presence and empathize with their feelings of uncertainty about how to relate to her. She and others expressed a need to strike a delicate balance between not alienating men and pushing back against gender bias when it felt career-threatening. The relationship management and image management that ambitious women perform is often described with the metaphor of the tightrope, but it might be more accurately characterized as an invisible weight. For the women in our study, managing how others perceive and react to their gender added a cognitive and practical burden onto already demanding job



responsibilities. To take just one example, we looked at the data from men and women within a single industry, consulting, for an apples-to-apples comparison and found that while developing a “personal brand” was seen as key for everyone, what that actually meant was more complex and more onerous for women. Everyone had to specialize, pursue visibility, and hone a long-term vision to craft an effective personal brand, but on top of all that women had to focus on finding an appropriate leadership style and practice communicating assertively. Women in the industry also cited the need to actively seek out developmental feedback in order to understand where they needed to grow and improve, whereas men simply spoke of the need to work on their shortcomings.<sup>14</sup> This difference echoes research finding that women are less likely than men to receive practical feedback, instead getting vague praise that doesn’t provide actionable recommendations or even distorted feedback that obviates or minimizes constructive criticism.<sup>15</sup>

The more senior a woman is, the more likely she is to be the only woman in the room, facing an increasing need to manage perceptions and shore up credibility as she moves up the ranks. A banking executive in our study explained: “I have seen that when women reach higher levels, more than complimenting her on her ability, people tend to say, ‘Oh, she’s been close to this person, that person,’ whether there is a relationship or not.” Persistent stereotypes about women’s innate capabilities fuel some of these doubts, as was noted by an energy industry vice president who recalled multiple colleagues who felt “they’d never come across a woman who’s good at math.” (Indeed, a 2017 study found that a belief that women are worse than men at math does make employers less likely to hire women, even when the performance of individual women is just as strong as that of male candidates.<sup>16</sup>) In one 2018 study, women who were often the only female employee in their work environment were especially likely to say their judgment was questioned, that they had to provide extra evidence of their competence, or that they were mistaken for someone in a much lower-level role.<sup>17</sup> One of our interviewees, an executive at a multinational food

company, echoed these findings: “I find it much more difficult to be taken seriously. I had to become much more prepared than I feel a male colleague has to. I have to be much surer of what I’m saying to be taken seriously or to be credible.” And another woman in a very different industry, banking, made the same assessment: “I’ve been in quite male-dominated environments where women have certainly had to work harder and smarter than their peers to break through to the top ranks.” And women of color tend to experience an even higher “burden of proof” and yet another layer of scrutiny as they navigate their careers.<sup>18</sup>

Having to undergo stricter scrutiny than male colleagues and co-workers came up again and again in our interviews. One top executive at a global consulting firm explained that “as a woman, and as a Black woman, I had to work five times more to be noticed.” An officer at a large insurance company said, “Gender mattered a lot. It didn’t mean that I missed out on opportunities; it just meant that I felt I had to work a whole lot harder than anyone else.” This higher bar meant not only that women had to work harder for recognition but also that their missteps were viewed in a harsher light. “There is no tolerance for a female to have an off day,” said one vice president at a packaging company. “You’ll be labeled as emotional or someone that can’t handle [her job].” A banking executive described an unforgiving double standard: “I do think that women get criticized much more for behaviors than men. If a woman loses it, she’s seen as emotional. Whereas if men lose it, that is seen as just par for the course; he’s just being strong, or whatever. And I think women therefore have to be incredibly careful about their behavior at all times.”

This need for vigilance is not mere anecdote; studies have found that women who exhibit emotions such as anger in the workplace are indeed seen as less competent than men who do the same.<sup>19</sup> Black women experience an extra burden, as the executive above felt. Researchers have found that Black female leaders are judged more harshly for organizational failures than white men, Black men, or white women.<sup>20</sup> For women of color especially, a reputation for competence

is both harder to attain and more easily lost. Even women at the top of their game feel the threat and protect themselves accordingly. Recent research on executive compensation found that female CEOs negotiate for higher severance pay in their contracts than men do, suggesting that women stepping into high-profile leadership roles realize they could be “more dispensable than their male counterparts.”<sup>21</sup>

## **Nevertheless, She Persists**

To their credit, many companies notice and attempt to remedy gender disparity in promotion and advancement. But too often such efforts spend scant time on the kinds of biases our interviewees spoke of in favor of creating family accommodations. At the same time, their organizational cultures stigmatize flexible hours and other “family friendly” policies such that they actually undermine the careers of women who take advantage of them.<sup>22</sup> Our interviewees were senior executives who had largely solved or resolved the challenges of balancing their work and family roles but still struggled to fully actualize their career aims. A number of them found that as they ascended in the hierarchy, they gained more autonomy and flexibility, making it in fact easier for them to manage competing demands as they took on more responsibility at work. Unfortunately, a focus on work-family conflict as the most important and most explanatory driver of women’s underrepresentation in leadership obscures and distracts from other obstacles, including biased attitudes and behaviors, meaning less effort is spent on mitigating discrimination even when it is a more pressing factor.<sup>23</sup> One CEO in the transportation industry saw exactly this phenomenon play out many times:

You saw a huge number of people who were leaving who were really talented, and the reasons they gave as they walked out the door were not the reasons that they actually left. The reasons

they gave you as they walked out the door were “too many hours, too tough a job, can’t have a family and do this, work-life balance.” And then you get right down to it—it’s really that they’re feeling underrecognized. It takes women longer to get the same achievement level as men, and they get tired of not being heard and not being listened to.

If company policies to accommodate parenting were not the primary reason that the women we spoke to had been able to stay on a leadership track, what factors—both individual and organizational—had been instrumental in their success? The women we interviewed were often the only remaining members of their cohorts; one, a senior vice president at a real estate investment group, crunched the numbers as she described her journey:

When I was at [an investment bank], in my class there would have been twenty analysts starting out; it dropped down to about fifteen people by the time you got to the associate class, and then by the time you reached the VP level, there were maybe ten of us left from the initial class. You generally get 50 percent attrition—by which time I was the only female. When we started off, the class was closer to 40 percent female. By the time you get to the VP level, it’s literally 10 percent. And the numbers get worse at the managing director level.

How had the women we spoke to maintained an upward trajectory as peers walked out the door or found themselves stalled at lower levels? Part of the answer clearly lay in their ability and willingness to respond to the contradictory demands that stem from the norms about gender and leadership discussed above. Making one’s ambitions known could come at a cost, as a finance executive told us: “When women say ‘I want a raise’ or ‘I want this,’ they’re sometimes treated as though they’re being pushy, whereas it’s expected or anticipated that men will say ‘I deserve this.’” At the same time, when the default assumption

is that women are “probably not interested” in stepping into higher-level roles, as the biotech CFO quoted above found that her colleagues believed, not being explicit about one’s aspirations could easily mean never moving up. After this chapter is a profile of Ana Paula Pessoa, a high-flying media executive, tech investor, and corporate director who may not have achieved any of these powerful roles if she hadn’t spoken up about her desire to take on new opportunities, even if they meant relocating to a new city—something one manager initially presumed she wouldn’t be open to doing.

Women get to leadership by threading the thinnest of needles—being direct enough about their ambitions to counter assumptions that they don’t want or can’t handle top jobs, but without being branded as overly aggressive or unpleasant. In environments where the masculine norm shapes expectations, women labored to articulate, clarify, and stress their aspirations to leadership. A retired agribusiness leader summed up the balancing act:

You don’t want people making assumptions for you, as in “Oh, she never said she would be interested in being CEO. Maybe that’s not her gig. She wants to be middle-level management, or she likes sales or blah blah blah.” Don’t let them make assumptions for you, but do it in a way that’s not in your face, as in “I want your job, I want to be the CEO. I’m going to be the CEO.” Instead, say it in a way such as, “I would like to have the opportunity to continue to progress in this company, and my ultimate goal would be, I’d love to be the CEO or I’d love to be one of the members of the executive team.”

Managing this tradeoff between competence and likeability exacts a mental tax, as women strive to be seen as capable (“I’d love to be the CEO”) without alienating (by being too “in your face” about that goal) the peers and superiors whose endorsement they need to advance. As we sifted through the data from our interviews, an underlying factor that enabled women to take on this work day after day

became apparent: They had quite consciously and deliberately cultivated a sense of resilience. “Part of the challenge is that in an environment where there are very few [women leaders], you look up and you see one, maybe two, and you almost self-doubt,” one consulting executive said, explaining the need for nurturing her leadership ambitions. Women in our study often reframed the experience of being in the minority, as a CFO described: “I have worked very much in environments that were geared more towards men than towards women, and I think it has influenced me to become a stronger person, because you have to have the will to succeed and really want to succeed in that environment.” Similarly, a finance executive turned hostility into motivation:

There was one man who just had it out against me at the firm. There was a promotion that I wanted, that I thought I deserved, and I was told at the end of the year that the reason I didn’t get it was because of this particular person—they thought that he would quit if I was promoted. I didn’t even know how to respond. It was so infuriating. There was no logic. I just thought, you’re going to make a suboptimal decision because of one person in the organization? I questioned if I wanted to keep working there. But I thought, I am going to prove him wrong, and ultimately, I did. And that guy ended up reporting to me. He quit about three months into reporting to me, but I treated him as fairly as anyone else.

Deciding to ignore or mentally minimize bias or other obstacles was a common tactic. As a human resource executive put it, “I dismiss it. I don’t really give it any space.” Another woman, at a food-services company, described a singular focus that helped her quell anxieties as she strived to advance: “I never stopped to consider—maybe I should back off or not, or maybe I’ll wait for somebody to ask me. I just thought, I want to do this, and I went and did it.” A thick skin proved to be as useful as any business acumen. Women executives told

us many stories of having the proverbial last laugh, including one recounted by the president of a chemical company. She recalled being an invited guest at a meeting of local businesspeople early on in her career:

I looked in, and I realized there's not one woman in here. I [thought I] must be in the wrong place. But I saw my name and figured no, I'm in the right place. I sat down, said hello to the people that were at the same table; I didn't know anybody. I started talking to the people at my table, and there was a gentleman who literally ignored me. About ten years later [at a similar event], I saw him. "Hi, Mr. So-and-so," I said. "It's been a long time, but don't you remember the first time we met?" I told him the story and he said, "Did I really do that?" Yes, you did.

In the face of being ignored, diminished, or discounted, an inner drive was sustaining: "You have to believe that you can contribute and should be there. There is no reason why you shouldn't. I've always just worked on the assumption that I can, and therefore I will, even though I will sometimes be only grudgingly acknowledged or be labeled as difficult," one woman said. The leaders in our study were anchored in a sense of purpose that inspired them to get tough when they needed to. One CEO acknowledged that women couldn't count on being heard: "[I had] a realization that in some of the debates and arguments around the table, unless I really pushed my way forward and challenged and engaged, I would probably be sitting there quietly for a very long time." This determination to push past and navigate around barriers is even more critical for women of color, who face the additional disadvantage of being in the racial minority in the vast majority of professional settings. Several of our colleagues undertook a study of Black women who had achieved C-suite or other leadership roles and found that a key contributor to their success was agility in steering through and transforming the many obstacles they experienced over the course of their careers, often through making unconventional

industry or function switches and exiting organizations where they couldn't grow.<sup>24</sup>

## **Before Every Successful Woman**

As we continued to explore what women said about resilience, we saw that it wasn't only an intrinsic quality but also a product of the interplay between women and their environments. Resilience could either be cultivated or quashed, and the context mattered. As a senior vice president at an energy concern explained, "I found that I had to stand my ground, but it was hard to do when you're the most junior person in the room, and you're the only woman in the room." One late-career executive serving on the boards of several companies explained, "You have to find avenues that support that resilience" both at work and in one's personal relationships. And a finance executive made an impassioned case for prioritizing the right environment. More than just culture fit, a context where women can succeed is one where their confidence is fostered, she explained:

Don't let yourself be surrounded by people who diminish your self-esteem. I left my first banking job for that reason. Life is short, and your self-confidence is the most important resource you've got; you have to nurture and protect it. If you find yourself in such a position, get out. If you can't change it and you don't see signs of improvement, take the risk and move on. It can be difficult and scary to leave a job today, in an environment where jobs are not as plentiful as they might have once been, but you must find opportunities where you're going to be nurtured. You want to be in an environment where people help you succeed, not places where they're going to tear you down.

The presence of female role models emerged as a crucial feature of resilience-building environments. Seeing even one woman in leadership



in their company or industry could foster optimism. A visible woman leader who was respected and valued within the organization reassured that high performance would be rewarded. “I worked with a female boss, and she was very efficient; she was known in our bank as one of the very efficient managers. She had risen in her career very young in life, so she was a role model for me,” the head of operations at a large bank told us. “I looked forward to emulating that kind of growth in my career, by just being as efficient and effective as her.” Meanwhile, an energy executive emphasized the impact that seeing women succeeding at the top of her field had on her:

During the five years I was at [my previous company], we had a female CEO. So that was an extraordinarily important period for me. That was an excellent, excellent experience for me, because I had a female CEO and also a board that was very supportive of her. I saw how important it was not just to have females in leadership roles but to have male leaders who completely support women in leadership roles.

Seeing women in supervisory and senior positions had made our interviewees aware of their own leadership potential, both directly and indirectly. A vice president at a multinational oil and gas company told us about the transformative influence of a female boss who believed in her potential: “One of my most inspiring managers was female. I remember her saying, ‘You are so capable that someday I’ll be reporting to you, or you’ll go way past me.’ And she was extremely capable herself and quite the high flyer. For her to say that, and have that very clear vote of confidence in me, was hugely inspiring.” For another executive, having a female sponsor provided access to important networks:

She didn’t mentor you by telling you what to do. She mentored you by always giving you maximum exposure. For example, she had approached the chairman and said, “Are you okay if

[interviewee] comes to the board meeting and takes the minutes?” It was not just about giving you the skills, but it was about giving you the exposure to dealing with people at different levels in the organization and not feeling at all threatened by that.

Whether or not role models had been personal mentors or direct supervisors, their presence had made it possible for women to project themselves into leadership roles and, importantly, to believe that their company was a place where women could reach top positions. Just as important, we found, were men who chose to create opportunities for high-performing women and recognized their contributions, as recounted by one executive:

One of my first jobs at [my current company] was with the CIO here, who basically gave me my assignment, told me I was the best-qualified person he could possibly hope to find, and that he was going to get out of my way and let me make it happen. He was there for me when I needed him, but he basically said, “I know you can do it,” and he stepped aside.

While female leaders had often been critical as role models, most of the women we studied had primarily reported to men; without male mentors and supporters, their careers would have foundered. Men’s predominance in supervisory roles is a key feature of the context women experience, and male managers profoundly shape the extent to which their workplaces enable or undermine women’s development. In Chapter 4, we will more deeply explore the role of men in addressing the underrepresentation of women in leadership, but our conversations with women executives already make clear that men can exert an enormous positive influence on women’s advancement. Considering the fact that men still hold the majority of managerial and decision-making positions, companies need men to fully engage in the project of removing obstacles to women’s advancement if they are ultimately to see their leadership ranks become more gender-balanced.

Yet, the very atypicality of our sample—female senior executives, many in male-dominated industries such as finance, energy, and mining—implies a lack of systemic commitment. The “survivors” we studied reached the top of the hierarchy through their own willingness to take on the work that comes with minority status but also through the men, and some women, in positions of power who opened doors that might otherwise have remained locked. In our final chapter we will turn toward the role of organizations in crafting less haphazard, more systematic leadership ladders. But first, we will look to the highest level of corporate power—the boardroom—and how women are agitating and strategizing for seats at that table.