Understanding the gender gap
The importance of mentoring

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Women have graduated in equal number with men for over 15 years.

Top leadership positions remain a male bastion (even in the Western world).

What is holding women back?

Internal barriers: women traits/choices?

External barriers: organizational/cultural?

The narrowing of the gap has stalled.
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**Stereotypes**
Shared, oversimplified and inaccurate beliefs held by a group of people about another group of people, not updated frequently

- “Think manager, think male”
  - “Ideal leaders are”: decisive, assertive, independent
  - *Women*: expected to be nice, care-taking, unselfish

- *Backlash*: non-conforming to stereotypes: “bitch”, “difficult”, “bossy”

- *Stereotype threat*: tendency to conform to others’ expectations

**Unconscious biases**
Automatic associative processes, difficult to stop and override

- Barriers for women arising from cultural assumptions, organizational structure and practices that inadvertently benefit men while putting women at a disadvantage
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Where do stereotypes and biases come from?

**GIRLS**
nurturing, caring, pretty

**BOYS**
building, action, competition
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Where do stereotypes and biases come from?

Women in the media

• The media perpetuates detrimental gender roles and stereotypes
• We internalize messages
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External barriers to equal opportunities

• **Ingrained beliefs and traditions:** eg. “women are less ambitious”

• **Persistence of stereotypical gender roles:** eg. “men are better managers”

• **Deeply disproportionate caring and housework burden:**
  good professional ≠ good mothers

• **Failure of meritocracy due to unconscious biases:**
  association of leadership with masculinity, selection criteria often not linked with job performance, hiring people that “fit in” (eg. look like themselves)
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External barriers to equal opportunities

• **Workplace culture**: 24/7 availability, facetime in the office ≠ performance

• Lack of role models, mentors, sponsors

• Gender diversity is not widely believed to be a priority

• **Working women** are 60% more likely than men to have a partner who works full-time

- Designed for industrial revolution not for knowledge economy
- Reflect traditional Western male values
- Bread earning/home maker stereotypes do not apply any more.
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Internal barriers to equal opportunities

- **Raised to please and nurture**: “be liked or be respected dilemma”

- **Confidence gap**: women undervalue their strengths; often fall into the impostor syndrome

- **Reluctance to self-promote**: eg. claim achievements, ask for promotions and raises (risk of backlashes due to un-stereotypical conduct). Women apply to a new position if they feel they are 100% ready, men just need to feel 40% ready

- **Downtone their ideas** (eg. framing statements as questions)

- **Good at taking blame for things gone bad or crediting fate or other people for success**
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Internal barriers to equal opportunities

• **Perfectionists**: meticulousness acts as action inhibitor
• **Bad at taking negative feedback**: girls are not scolded as frequently as boys
• **Tendency to feel adverse circumstances are personal**
• **Tendency to ruminate about failures**
• **Bad at understanding, coping and navigating organizational politics**
• **Reluctance to move outside our comfort zone**
• **Reluctance to engage in networking**

I have made all these mistakes, at times, I still do.
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Women’s strengths

- Better listeners
- Direct and honest communication skills
- More empathetic
- Good at conflict resolution
- Great motivators
- Born multi-taskers
- Collaborative, team builders, team workers
- Tend to invest in themselves/knowledge seekers
Developing awareness of gender stereotypes and unconscious biases is crucial to counter their effects.

Cultural changes are slow. Elimination of external barriers will take time.

Dismantling internal barriers can be under our own control (identifying internal and external mentors, sharing experiences, creating support groups, even without organizational support).

Specific strengths and weaknesses can be addressed.
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The importance of mentoring

How to set a mentoring program

• Mentoring may be spontaneous or organization-sponsored ("OSM")

• No one-size fits all: objectives should be clearly set

• Mentor and mentee selection is a challenge (In OSM, mentors should volunteer, mentees should apply)

• In formal programs, mentors should be trained

• In OSM, wide communication and participation of leadership is crucial
Confidence is as important as competence to achieve success.

Leaders are self-made.

In a knowledge economy, beyond a certain threshold, emotional intelligence is key to success.

Lifelong learning attitude is crucial.

Self-awareness development is a must.

Constructive assessment of the environment is important (home, family, workplace).
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Final remarks

• Weaknesses can be overcome, strengths can be enhanced

• “Sisterhoods” can be very helpful for mentoring and sponsoring

• Men should not be considered part of the problem. They should be invited to the discussion table to be part of the solution

• Leaders should stop asking what is wrong with women that they are not making it to the top, and start asking what is wrong with the organizations if they can’t retain and promote educated women
Thank you!

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