

# Don't change the Lady

Citation for published version (APA):

Gutermuth, D. (2022). Don't change the Lady: change perceptions that are shady! Assessing the influence of gender stereotypes in the evaluation of others and the self in work contexts. [Doctoral Thesis, Maastricht University]. ProefschriftMaken. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20220406dg>

**Document status and date:**

Published: 01/01/2022

**DOI:**

[10.26481/dis.20220406dg](https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20220406dg)

**Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

**Please check the document version of this publication:**

- A submitted manuscript is the version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher's website.
- The final author version and the galley proof are versions of the publication after peer review.
- The final published version features the final layout of the paper including the volume, issue and page numbers.

[Link to publication](#)

**General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

If the publication is distributed under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license above, please follow below link for the End User Agreement:

[www.umlib.nl/taverne-license](http://www.umlib.nl/taverne-license)

**Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at:

[repository@maastrichtuniversity.nl](mailto:repository@maastrichtuniversity.nl)

providing details and we will investigate your claim.

### Impact Paragraph

Despite enormous progress that has been made in the past decades towards gender equality in social-, and business settings, women remain underrepresented in positions of power. To tackle this gender inequality, an entire genre of self-help resources has emerged, providing women with a range of advice of what they could do to become successful in their careers. In this dissertation I examine three types of popular advice given to women with the aim of helping them in climbing organizational ladders – ‘*be like a man*’, ‘*be like a woman*’, and ‘*be an entrepreneur*’ – through an empirical lens. Taken together, the three empirical chapters of this dissertation highlight that gender stereotypes are persistent and that, despite the progress that has been made towards more equal workplaces for men and women, work-related decisions are still biased by gender stereotypic expectations. Additionally, my work underpins previous notions that fairer workplaces for men and women are likely not created by trying to change the behaviour of women (*don’t change the lady*) but through changing people’s gender stereotypes (*change perceptions that are shady*). While these insights have important theoretical implications for science, they are also relevant for policymakers interested in understanding and addressing gender biases in hiring situations (Chapter 2); women’s barriers to flourishing in their careers (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3); how evaluations of (un)ethical behaviour are shaped by gendered expectations (Chapter 3); and women’s lower representation in stereotypically masculine jobs and gender workplace segregation (Chapter 4).

The advice given to women to be ‘*like a man*’ in order to be successful in their career is addressed in Chapter 2. Here, I find that stereotypically masculine proactive behaviours such as eagerly approaching one’s goals, taking risks, and seizing opportunities is recognized and rewarded in men, but not in women. The advice to women to ‘*be like a woman*’ in order to be successful in their careers is addressed in Chapter 3. Here, I find that acting ethical in workplaces is not valued as much in women as it is in men. Surprisingly, however, the findings also suggest

that for unethical behaviour, women receive a benefit of the doubt. Finally, the advice to women to just become entrepreneurs and start their own business is addressed in Chapter 4. Findings show that women's lower interest in entrepreneurship may be explained by their perceived lack of fit between their self-stereotypes and the stereotypes generally thought to be required to become a successful entrepreneur. In sum, traditional gender stereotypes that construe women to be communal (e.g., being warm, kind, selfless, caring) and men to be agentic (e.g., being ambitious, independent, and dominant) and that many people like to believe as not playing any role in modern societies anymore, are persistent and are influencing workplace decisions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We as a society collectively reproduce, utilize, and thereby perpetuate gender stereotypes. This is why I believe that changing gender stereotypes and redefining what it means to be a man or a woman can also only happen as a collective process. To this collective process, everyone can contribute in their professional and their personal lives by critically examining their own beliefs and biases; by asking themselves in critical situations when we judge others if we would judge a person from the other gender differently; and by assessing what kind of cultural stories and narratives we reproduce and convey. Gender biases can influence all types of decisions ranging from big decisions such as who we hire or fire, to the seemingly smaller but just as important decisions such as which presents to gift to the (new-born) children in our families (e.g., not only girls like to play with dolls).

A big challenge in addressing our own gender biases is that we like to believe that we are rational beings, that we are completely aware of the factors influencing our decisions, and that - at least, for most people - it does not fit in our self-concepts that we may have internalized sexist or biased attitudes. A social world, in which a lot of people are in fear that 'one wrong joke' will get them instantly scrutinized and fired - albeit limited evidence for this - likely exacerbates the fear of openly talking about one's own biases. However, I strongly believe that

only if we have the courage to openly address our previous misconceptions and biases and encourage others to do the same change can happen. I will try to lead by example by ending this dissertation with the following story: Even after studying gender stereotypes and biases for the past five years, I still catch myself in these seconds of utterly confusion and shock, when a professor is announced as a keynote speaker at an event or conference, and a woman enters the stage.