IN-DEPTH STUDY GUIDE

LEAN IN

SHERYL SANDBERG

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PLOT OVERVIEW

Lean In is a 2013 nonfiction book written by Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg. Sandberg describes how and why gender inequality continues to operate in the modern workforce, and offers advice for women seeking to balance a career and family. Ultimately, Sandberg argues that full equality will only come about when women "lean in," pushing past their own fears and misgivings to demand equal opportunity and treatment.

Before launching into her argument, Sandberg sets the stage with an overview of women's status in both the United States and (to a lesser extent) the world at large. Despite considerable progress, Sandberg says, women remain largely excluded from the highest levels of government and industry. While this is in part the result of systemic barriers, Sandberg also feels that women unintentionally hold themselves back by absorbing sexist attitudes from the culture that surrounds them. Sandberg therefore claims that "reignit[ing] the revolution" requires "internalizing the revolution": letting go of biased and unhelpful beliefs (11).

In each chapter following the book's Introduction, Sandberg presents a sub-argument that feeds into this larger claim. Chapters 1 and 2 deal particularly explicitly with the nature of the "internal barriers" women face: reluctance to pursue positions of power, and self-doubt that exacerbates this passivity and tentativeness. All of this, Sandberg argues, reflects internalized gender norms, rather than reality; women are neither less ambitious than men nor less capable, but they grow up in a world that encourages them to be agreeable and pretty rather than successful and intelligent. As a result, they don't learn the assertiveness and confidence they need in order to thrive in demanding career paths.

In Chapter 3, however, Sandberg acknowledges that it is not enough for women simply to resolve to be more assertive: because of the way society perceives gender, women who behave "like men" may face negative consequences. Nevertheless, Sandberg argues that it is possible for women to strike a successful balance, particularly if they are willing to be flexible with their career plans (Chapter 4) and open about their thoughts and feelings (Chapter 6). Having a mentor can also help, though Sandberg cautions women against becoming overly dependent on the help of others (Chapter 5).

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In Chapters 7, 8, and 9, Sandberg moves on to discuss strategies for balancing work and family life. Sandberg suggests that many of the problems women face in this regard are, again, the result of internalized biases: women hear that achieving both personal and professional success is impossible and alter their expectations in response, ultimately setting themselves up for failure. However, since it is true that women bear the brunt of housework and child care, Sandberg recommends that women be proactive about seeking support from their partners, as well as be willing to compromise on their goals when life becomes too overwhelming.

Sandberg wraps her argument up by urging women to speak out about gender inequality when they encounter it, and to support the choices their fellow women make. Returning to a claim she made near the beginning of *Lean In*, Sandberg says that when women finally achieve parity in the most powerful levels of society, they will put in place new, female-friendly policies to help ensure that "this next wave [of feminism] can be the last wave" (172).

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CHAPTER SUMMARIES AND ANALYSES

Introduction-Chapter 1

Introduction Summary: "Internalizing the Revolution"

Sandberg opens with an anecdote about being pregnant with her first child while working at Google. She had a difficult pregnancy, which made walking all the way across a parking lot difficult. After her husband, Dave, told her that other companies had designated parking spots for expectant mothers, Sandberg confronted her employer about the issue and won, which potentially benefited many other pregnant women as well.

From here, Sandberg begins to outline the state of gender equality in the contemporary United States, noting that American women have made substantial progress since first entering the workforce, and that they have much to be "grateful" for in comparison to women living in many regions of the world (5). Nevertheless, she says, "The blunt truth is that men still run the world": men hold the overwhelming majority of senior positions in both government and private industry, and women of color are particularly underrepresented (5). Furthermore, the average woman continues to earn only about $.77 for every dollar a man earns. Sandberg says she has witnessed this inequality firsthand over the course of her career and therefore concludes that the "[feminist] revolution has stalled" (7).

To move beyond the impasse, Sandberg argues that women must be equally represented in positions of power. She acknowledges that there are major structural barriers keeping women out of these jobs—access to child care and sexual harassment among them—but says that women also limit themselves when they internalize and accommodate sexist ideas: "We hold ourselves back in ways both big and small, by lacking self-confidence, by not raising our hands, and by pulling back when we should be leaning in. We internalize the negative messages we get throughout our lives—the messages that say it's wrong to be outspoken, aggressive, more powerful than men" (8).

According to Sandberg, these kinds of "internal barriers" have traditionally received little feminist attention (8). *Lean In*, then, is her attempt to bring those challenges out into the open and to encourage women to be "ambitious in any

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pursuit," including in careers of all kinds and family life (10). For this reason, Sandberg feels that elements of her book will prove relevant to all women, regardless of occupation, class or race. Although she expects *Lean In* will attract criticism, she expresses hope that women can "reignite the revolution by internalizing the revolution" (11).

Chapter 1 Summary: "The Leadership Ambition Gap"

Sandberg recounts her family history. Her grandmother, Rosalind, was born to poor parents and needed to leave school at one point to help her family make a living. Eventually, however, she beat the odds, graduating from UC Berkeley, helping her husband run his business, and ensuring that all her children received a good education. In fact, Sandberg's mother undertook a doctoral degree, though she dropped out when she married and became pregnant. Nevertheless, Sandberg says, both her father and her mother stressed equal opportunity regardless of gender. When Sandberg herself entered college, then, she did not expect her career to be any different than the average man's.

This belief, however, turned out to be "naïve and idealistic" (14). Over the course of her career, Sandberg saw many female colleagues struggle to balance work and family life, often deciding to leave their jobs in the process. Perhaps discouraged by this, younger generations have tended to approach their careers even more cautiously. As a result, Sandberg says, many well-educated women have missed out on leadership positions in their fields.

Subtly-sexist social attitudes exacerbate this situation by discouraging girls and women from behaving in assertive ways that might otherwise further their careers: "Aggressive and hard-charging women violate unwritten rules about acceptable social conduct" (17). In addition, Sandberg notes, society still trains women to see marriage and children as their most significant achievements. These kinds of cultural influences begin to operate on girls at a very young age, via messaging that prioritizes women's appearance over their abilities—for instance, a T-shirt labeling the wearer "pretty like Mommy" (19). Sandberg herself remembers being called "bossy" many times as a young child, and admits that the label continues to embarrass her: "There is still some part of me that feels it was unseemly for a little girl to be thought of as so...domineering" (20). "Stereotype threat" also works to curb women's ambition; since images of unhappy, overworked professional women abound in popular culture, women may unconsciously pattern their own lives on those unhealthy models.

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Sandberg cites these and other examples as evidence that "our desire for leadership is largely a culturally created and reinforced trait" (19). Women, she says, are held back largely by fear: "Fear of not being liked. Fear of making the wrong choice. Fear of drawing negative attention. Fear of overreaching. Fear of being judged. Fear of failure. And the holy trinity of fear: the fear of being a bad mother/wife/daughter" (24). As a starting point, then, Sandberg quotes a poster at Facebook that reads, "What would you do if you weren't afraid?", challenging women to ask this question of themselves (25).

Introduction-Chapter 1 Analysis

Although it deals heavily in personal anecdotes, *Lean In* is at heart more of a persuasive tract than a memoir: Sandberg hopes to convince readers to support her central claims about gender equality, and she uses her own experiences as evidence in support of her conclusions. *Lean In*'s introduction, then, functions similarly to the opening paragraphs of an academic essay: Sandberg's goal in this first section of the book is to orient her readers to the broad outlines of her argument.

In part, that means providing readers with the historical and cultural context they need to understand *Lean In*. To that end, Sandberg begins with a description of the problem *Lean In* is meant to address, noting that women are still vastly outnumbered in most positions of political and economic leadership. Sandberg argues that this is not only unfair in and of itself, but that it is also a roadblock to gender equality in other areas of life; with more women in power, Sandberg suggests, there would be more incentive to tackle issues like sexual violence and the wage gap. Sandberg therefore characterizes *Lean In* as a kind of "feminist manifesto," in the sense that it aims to solve issues previously identified by first and (especially) second-wave feminists (9). Sandberg says, however, that where previous feminist works have tended to focus on the need for institutional change (e.g. changes to laws on discrimination, harassment, etc.), *Lean In* will focus on the need for personal change: the "internal barriers" each woman needs to overcome in order for women as a group to succeed.

The introduction, then, aligns Sandberg's arguments with the liberal feminist tradition that emphasizes the agency of women as individuals (as opposed to stressing the power of social structures and institutions). Liberal feminism is sometimes criticized for a perceived failure to address the needs of women

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further marginalized as a result of their class, race, and/or physical health: past a certain point, systemic obstacles arguably become so overwhelming that they essentially foreclose meaningful choice. Sandberg, however, anticipates this argument, saying that while elements of her book "will be most relevant to women fortunate enough to have choices about how much and when and where to work," other sections will speak to "situations that women face in every workplace, within every community, and in every home" (10). In some ways, the fact that the feminism Sandberg espouses is so personal might even expand its applicability: Sandberg wants to "internalize" feminism, making it a kind of self-improvement. This is an agenda any woman could theoretically adopt, although the potential for tension between women's choices as individuals and the obstacles they face as a group never entirely disappears from *Lean In*.

In the meantime, however, Sandberg uses Chapter 1 to begin fleshing out what she means when she talks about psychological barriers to success. Citing both formal studies and her own experiences, Sandberg argues that the relative scarcity of female leaders results, in part, from women's adherence to gender norms that depict authority and femininity as incompatible. It is not simply that women comply with these norms for fear of being seen as unlikeable, or undesirable, but rather that they often do so instinctively; messaging that links women's worth to their appearance and agreeableness is so pervasive that it influences women's habitual, unconscious behavior. In fact, even women who generally resist gender norms, like Sandberg herself, still struggle with guilt and anxiety for doing so. For Sandberg, then, the first step toward gender equality needs to be noticing the moments when fear dictates our actions: a willingness to push past that fear will underlie many of Sandberg's suggestions throughout *Lean In*.

Chapters 2-3

Chapter 2 Summary: “Sit at the Table”

Sandberg describes a meeting where every woman besides herself sat at the side of the room rather than at the conference table. This moment woke Sandberg to the ways women choose to remain observers rather than participants at work—a decision Sandberg attributes to low self-esteem. On that note, she describes a speech she heard in college on imposter syndrome, or "feel[ing] undeserving and guilty" about earned recognition (28). The speech resonated with the women in the room, which Sandberg sees as a sign of a deeper problem:

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> We [women] consistently underestimate ourselves. Multiple studies in multiple industries show that women often judge their own performance as worse than it actually is, while men judge their own performance as better than it actually is…Even worse, when women evaluate themselves in front of other people or in stereotypically male domains, their underestimations can become even more pronounced (29-30).

Unfortunately, society as a whole tends to underestimate women as well; Sandberg notes, for instance, that the media often attributes women's success to external factors rather than their own skills or characteristics.

Sandberg explains that insecurity has affected her throughout her life, first in high school and then at Harvard, where she initially struggled to keep up. Even after settling in, however, she continued to feel out of place; she recounts a story about studying for a philosophy test with her roommate and her brother David, noting that while all three of them went on to earn As, David was the only one who correctly predicted he would in advance. As Sandberg says:

> These experiences taught me that I needed to make both an intellectual and an emotional adjustment. I learned over time that while it was hard to shake feelings of self-doubt, I could understand that there was a distortion. I would never possess my brother's effortless confidence, but I could challenge the notion that I was constantly headed for failure (33).

Something as simple as faking confidence, Sandberg suggests, can help women feel better about themselves.

This is important in part because professional success often hinges on seizing opportunities as they arise. Women, however, are less likely to apply for or accept positions they fear they're not entirely qualified for. Since even conscientious managers may not have the time to cajole hesitant employees, women as a group tend to lose out. Sandberg recounts, for instance, how she once declined to take any more questions following a speech, explaining that while the women in the audience all put their hands down, the men kept their hands up. For that reason, Sandberg urges women to constantly assert and challenge themselves, even as she encourages employers to actively recruit promising female candidates.

Chapter 3 Summary: “Success and Likeability”

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Sandberg cites a study in which people read case studies of two entrepreneurs. The histories were identical in everything but gender, but readers found "Heidi" more selfish and less easygoing than "Howard." This backs up a point Sandberg made in Chapter 1: that people often perceive powerful or successful women as less likeable than their male counterparts, solely because ambition and strength violate traditional female gender norms.

Sandberg suggests that most women know on an intuitive level that their coworkers will view them less favorably if they appear too eager for success. The result, Sandberg says, is that women use self-deprecation and modest goals to "put [themselves] down before others can" (41). In business school, for instance, Sandberg "instinctively knew" that her life would be more difficult if she revealed she'd won an award for academic excellence, despite the fact that her co-recipients (all men) talked about it openly (42).

All of this creates a no-win situation for women seeking professional advancement: "If a woman is competent, she does not seem nice enough. If a woman seems really nice, she is considered more nice than competent" (43). Furthermore, the belief that women are naturally kind and sensitive can increase their workload; tasks that are seen as "favors" when a man performs them may simply be expected of a woman. Gender norms may also negatively impact a woman's ability to negotiate her salary, since doing so comes across as demanding (by way of contrast, Sandberg notes that women negotiating on behalf of someone else—for instance, their company—are actually more successful than men).

Sandberg's solution is not for women to back down, but she does advise them to approach their careers with an eye toward how their actions are likely to be perceived; she suggests, for instance, that women seeking a raise preface their request with a general statement on the gender pay gap, because doing so "position[s] them as connected to a group and not just out for themselves" (47). Sandberg acknowledges that there is a danger in advising women to play to gender norms, but argues that the end results—more women in positions of power—will justify the means; ultimately, seeing more women in demanding and powerful roles will normalize female assertiveness. Since any highly-visible figure is likely to attract some criticism, however, Sandberg also quotes Arianna Huffington's advice on handling negative feedback: "We should let ourselves react

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emotionally and feel whatever anger or sadness being criticized evokes for us. And then we should quickly move on" (49-50).

Chapters 2-3 Analysis

Like the Introduction, Chapter 2 opens with an anecdote drawn from Sandberg's work history—in this case, her observations of a meeting she hosted. Sandberg will return to this basic format throughout the book, using a brief narrative to prefigure or symbolize the crux of the argument she'll be making in the chapter that follows. In part, this is a way of ensuring that her key points stick in her readers' minds; it is typically easier to remember a story than the findings of a study, so Sandberg describes professional women hanging back from a conference table to encapsulate the broader idea that women may harm their careers through self-doubt and passivity.

In light of Chapter 3, however, Sandberg's decision to incorporate so many personal anecdotes also seems like a strategic decision. Sandberg's core claim in this chapter is that working women are in the impossible position of needing to appear both exceptionally nice and exceptionally competent (the two would not necessarily conflict, but Sandberg argues that the feminine ideal of "niceness" essentially precludes being anything other than nice). The fact that we perceive women who are assertive or authoritative as less agreeable, however, puts Sandberg herself in a bind. We're generally more inclined to agree with arguments made by likeable people, so *Lean In* needs to come across as both informed and friendly in order to be effective. Confiding in her readers about personal experiences (for example, alluding to her pregnancy in the Introduction) helps Sandberg present herself as a pleasant, open person.

Chapters 2 and 3 also continue to expand on themes like the effects of gender norms in the workplace, and the need for individual women to "lean in" to combat those effects. Interestingly, while Sandberg believes that many traditionally "feminine" traits—cautiousness, and modesty among them—can hold women back in the workplace, she does not advocate simply conforming to male standards of behavior; in fact, she urges women at one point to work within stereotypes of female selflessness. This speaks, in part, to the pragmatism of Sandberg's arguments: ultimately, she is interested more in results (i.e. greater societal power for women) than methods (i.e. complying with gender roles as necessary). However, given what Sandberg says about women's tendency to respond to events emotionally, it is worth considering whether and to what extent Sandberg

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feels conventionally-feminine behavior is valuable. Perhaps Sandberg feels that there could be a place for those traits and behaviors even in the workplace, provided they could be disentangled from societal ideals of femininity.

Chapters 4-5

Chapter 4 Summary: “It's a Jungle Gym, Not a Ladder”

Citing a friend who took a job at Facebook that was technically a demotion, Sandberg argues that we need to revise our ideas about what constitutes a career path. Since it's increasingly common for employees to move from one company to another (or even from one field to another), it's unhelpful to think of careers as ladders to the top. Instead, Sandberg suggests using Pattie Sellers' metaphor of a jungle gym, which "offer[s] more creative exploration" and may be especially useful to women juggling additional challenges like discrimination and pregnancy (53).

Sandberg offers her own career as an example of the importance of flexibility. In school, Sandberg lacked not only a definite interest in technology, but also a definite interest in anything beyond "chang[ing] the world" (55). This non-specific "long-term dream," however, carried Sandberg to her first job as an assistant to Larry Summers at the World Bank (55). From there, she decided to go to business school, before eventually ending up back with Summers—this time at the Treasury Department. After seeing the tech industry begin to boom, Sandberg decided to gamble on moving to Silicon Valley, where she eventually accepted a job at Google despite the fact that other offers looked better on paper. Explaining her decision, Sandberg says that "Google was tiny and disorganized, but it was a rocket ship" (58).

Later on, Sandberg would make a similar decision to join Facebook as COO rather than a different company as CEO. She therefore advises women—who tend to be more risk-averse than men—to think about this kind of "potential for growth" when making career decisions (58). Nevertheless, Sandberg also suggests having a short-term, eighteen-month plan alongside broader ambitions and aspirations. Ideally, these short and long-term goals will complement one another; Sandberg

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notes, for instance, that while she generally likes to play it safe, she has set goals challenging herself to take risks in professional life, and it has paid off over time. She closes the chapter by again urging women to be proactive and inventive in creating their own opportunities, whether that means applying for a promotion or accepting a job that requires learning new skills.

Chapter 5 Summary: “Are You My Mentor?”

Sandberg notes that talk about mentors has become increasingly common in corporate culture. Unfortunately, she says, women tend to place too much emphasis on finding this kind of relationship: "Young women are told that if they can just find the right mentor, they will be pushed up the ladder and whisked away to the corner office to live happily ever after" (66).

Sandberg agrees that mentors and sponsors can be crucial to professional success, and acknowledges that men typically have an easier time finding them. She discourages women, however, from awkward attempts to force a relationship with the few women who do hold senior positions. Instead, she uses examples from her own life to illustrate how helpful interactions can arise naturally out of working relationships; she describes, for instance, how she later introduced a man who had worked for her at Google to his current business partners at Sequoia Capital. In addition, Sandberg reminds women that many successful mentoring relationships are two-way streets, with the protégé having skills or knowledge the mentor lacks. It's even possible to reap the benefits of mentorship without having any sort of formal relationship at all, though Sandberg advises her readers to keep even casual interactions professional: "Using a mentor's time to validate feelings may help psychologically, but it's better to focus on specific problems with real solutions. Most people in the position to mentor are quite adept at problem solving. Give them a problem to solve" (71).

Sandberg argues that senior men also need to work harder to mentor female employees, but suggests that there are some constraints on their ability to do so—most notably, the "perceived sexual context of male-female relationships" (72). Sandberg challenges us to reframe the way we think of mixed-gender relationships, but also highlights ways to work around the problem; while working at Goldman Sachs, for instance, Bob Steele adopted a "breakfast or lunch only

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policy" for all employees, ensuring "equal access" without the appearance of impropriety (73). Sandberg also speaks approvingly of formal mentorship programs, although she cautions that these are not a cure-all. In some cases, she says, it may even be more helpful to seek advice from a peer rather than a superior. To illustrate this final point, Sandberg recounts the story of a manager at McKinsey & Company who said Sandberg must have been sending "signals" to a client who tried to set her up with his son (75). Sandberg's coworkers urged her to explain the problem to her manager's boss, which ultimately had positive results.

Chapters 4-5 Analysis

Part of what makes *Lean In* effective as a persuasive text is Sandberg's ability to quickly sum up core ideas with a catchy image or phrase. We've seen, for instance, how Sandberg uses short anecdotes to set the agenda for each chapter. In Chapter 4, Sandberg achieves a similar effect by introducing the "jungle gym" as a symbol for career trajectory; though Sandberg didn't come up with the metaphor herself, it still captures her basic point about approaching career-building in a way that's creative and potentially non-linear. Relatedly, Sandberg often tweaks imagery associated with conventional femininity as a way of warning women against passivity at work. Clinging to the hope of finding a mentor might seem harmless at first glance, but Sandberg suggests it is similarly rooted in female helplessness.

On the face of it, however, Sandberg's advice about mentorship actually seems to contradict her overall point about the importance of assertiveness; young women, she suggests, are being so proactive about trying to secure a mentor that they're actually turning potential mentors off. Sandberg argues that this is because women's attempts to establish a relationship are often strained or overly direct, but her cautionary note likely also speaks to her vision of what constitutes feminism. Although Sandberg says that mentors and sponsors are important, her emphasis is first and foremost on self-reliance and independence; she speaks somewhat disparagingly, for instance, of "excessive hand-holding," suggesting that women would be better off resolving complex, emotional problems on their own time (71). It's significant, moreover, that Sandberg highlights so many examples of two-way mentorships—that is, mentorships where each person involved learns something from the other. Here and elsewhere, Sandberg's perspectives on feminism are shaped by corporate culture: mentorship is a

transactional relationship that involves exchanging something (knowledge, professional contacts and/or recommendations, for example).

All in all, then, Chapters 4 and 5 affirm Sandberg's stance as a liberal feminist: she thinks about equality mostly in terms of individuals, and their right to associate with one another in pursuit of their own interests. In the Introduction, of course, Sandberg suggests that this view of feminism can go hand in hand with one focused on changing broader societal structures: "My argument is that getting rid of these internal barriers is critical to gaining power. Others have argued that women can get to the top only when the institutional barriers are gone. This is the ultimate chicken-and-egg situation…Both sides are right" (8-9).

Sandberg's discussion of mentorship is a good test case for whether readers find this argument plausible, particularly when she broaches the "tricky" topic of senior men mentoring female employees (72). On the one hand, Sandberg suggests that personal responsibility has a role to play in this area, arguing that "any male leader who is serious about moving toward a more equal world can make [mentoring women] a priority" (71). As Sandberg herself notes, however, the "perceived sexual context of male-female relationships" can make these relationships problematic (72). While Sandberg ultimately urges women to overcome their misgivings and seek out productive relationships with male employers, other feminists might object that the risks entailed by those relationships—in particular, the threat of sexual harassment, which Sandberg does not directly address here—make it impractical to pursue change on an individual, case-by-case basis.

Chapters 6-7

Chapter 6 Summary: “Seek and Speak Your Truth”

Listing some of the problems that can arise from a lack of communication (e.g. undeserved promotions), Sandberg claims that openness and honesty are essential to work environments. They're also difficult, however, because the hierarchical organization of most companies can discourage lower-level employees from speaking up. Women in these positions, meanwhile, face the additional hurdle of gender norms that prioritize being nice and easygoing.

With that in mind, Sandberg discusses how she personally learned to "combine appropriateness with authenticity, finding that sweet spot where opinions are not

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brutally honest but delicately honest" (78). She draws particular attention to Fred Kofman's idea that everyone involved in a discussion has his or her own "truth," and suggests starting statements with "I" rather than "you" to frame them as matters of perspective rather than as accusations (79). She also cautions against couching criticism in wordy or vague phrasing, as it can lead to confusion.

Sandberg then moves on to the flipside of speaking honestly: being receptive to others' opinions. This means not only acknowledging their feelings, but also actively seeking their feedback. She talks, for instance, about soliciting Tom Brokaw's opinion on an interview with him that she felt she had botched. Sandberg admits that asking for and receiving a critique can be painful, but assures her readers that it's crucial to personal development. At the same time, she suggests that it is equally important for superiors to check in with their subordinates, both to make sure that employees understand the instructions they're receiving and to hear those employees' own viewpoints.

To help encourage their coworkers and subordinates to speak up, Sandberg suggests that women be upfront about their own weaknesses and shortcomings. In addition, she says, humor can help soften feedback that might otherwise seem harsh. Finally, she encourages women not to feel ashamed if they let their feelings show at work, recounting a story about breaking down in tears in front of Mark Zuckerberg. The incident actually strengthened their relationship, and Sandberg reports that other women have had similarly positive experiences; being open about difficulties at home, for instance, can lead to more flexible accommodations at work. Ultimately, Sandberg hopes to see the "line between personal and professional" blur as workplaces move to prioritize "authenticity over perfection" (90, 91).

Chapter 7 Summary: “Don't Leave Before You Leave”

Sandberg suggests that the well-intentioned advice young women frequently receive on managing a career and family life can actually be counterproductive. Women hear so much about striking the right balance that they often begin their planning well in advance of actually having children; in fact, Sandberg begins the chapter with the story of a woman who didn't even have a partner when she started thinking about how to accommodate a family. The result is what Sandberg calls "leaving before you leave"—backing away from opportunities out of fear that the work might one day conflict with raising children. As a result, the woman misses out on months or even years of professional progress, so that when she

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does have a child, she may already be working at a job she finds unfulfilling. Since people are less likely to stick with work they dislike, the net result is that "women wind up leaving the workforce precisely because of things they did to *stay in* the workforce" (94).

Sandberg therefore advises women to postpone decisions about child care for as long as possible while "leaning in" even more in the meantime. Of course, there are also times when it's appropriate to compromise; Sandberg's first pregnancy, for instance, was too physically difficult for her to feel comfortable taking on a new job during her second. Because parenthood changes people in "fundamental ways," there is no one-size-fits-all solution, and Sandberg supports mothers (and fathers) who choose to devote themselves to childrearing full-time (98).

Nevertheless, Sandberg says, the fact that so many more women than men leave the workforce after having children reveals the influence of "social conventions, peer pressure, and familial expectations" on personal decision-making (100). Citing Princeton studies spanning multiple decades, Sandberg argues that women expect work and family to conflict in ways that men typically do not, largely because it is women who do the most child care. High-income and low-income women are particularly likely to leave their jobs after having children—the latter because they cannot afford child care, and the former because their husbands tend to work such long hours. Unfortunately, exiting the workforce for even a relatively brief period of time can have long-term negative consequences for women, since their salaries drop by around 30 percent after just two or three years.

Ultimately, Sandberg argues, society needs to do more to support working parents of both genders by adopting policies like paid parental leave. Until those policies become a reality, however, Sandberg advises women who would like to keep working to power through the difficult first few years of having children in the hope that their salaries and job hours will improve down the road.

Chapters 6-7 Analysis

As we have seen, *Lean In* places a great deal of emphasis on women asserting themselves and pursuing their own interests as individuals. One potential problem with this kind of individualism, however, is that people's ideas and actions may come into conflict with one another. Sandberg is presumably aware of this and offers a potential solution in Chapter 6: although she encourages women not to

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back down in voicing their own "truths," she also suggests that these truths are relative to each person: "Rarely is there one absolute truth, so people who believe that they speak *the* truth are very silencing of others" (79). Instead, Sandberg urges women (and men) to work to understand the validity of others' points of view, and to communicate with that validity in mind—for instance, by couching statements in terms of their own experience (e.g. "I feel like") rather than as cut-and-dry facts.

Arguably, then, communication is one area in which Sandberg feels the norms governing corporate culture require tweaking to reflect the more stereotypically-feminine values of empathy and patience. This idea culminates toward the end of Chapter 6, where Sandberg suggests that the conventional distinction between personal and professional life is eroding. This, she says, is a good thing for women, "who often feel obliged to suppress their emotions in the workplace in an attempt to come across as more stereotypically male" (91). Sandberg's argument recalls the feminist adage that "the personal is political": because so much of gender inequality (domestic violence, sexual double standards, the division of child care) takes place in the private sphere, many feminists argue that it does not make sense to think of rights only in terms of the public realm of laws and business. Sandberg likewise seems to view the public-versus-private distinction as one that places women at a disadvantage by failing to consider the "personal," gender-based struggles that may impede women in the workplace; it is telling, for instance, that these comments on breaking down the personal vs. professional divide immediately precede the Chapter 7 discussion of family planning.

Interestingly, however, Sandberg suggests that the main obstacle to balancing work and family life is not the demands of child care per se, but rather the societal attitudes surrounding working mothers. Although Sandberg will go on to discuss the need to share housework (including childrearing) more evenly between the genders, her focus in Chapter 7 is on women overcorrecting for the problem by holding themselves back early in their career. According to Sandberg, women so routinely hear about the difficulties working mothers face that the fear becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. This is similar to the idea of "stereotype threat" that Sandberg mentioned in Chapter 1, as well as a good example of how gender roles impact women's careers in both direct and indirect ways.

Chapters 8-9

Chapter 8 Summary: “Make Your Partner a Real Partner”

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Sandberg explains how her own medical issues forced her husband Dave to be the primary caregiver in the days immediately following their son's birth. This proved to be fortuitous, since Dave had no choice but to immediately learn many skills other fathers forgo. In the following months, however, Sandberg and her husband found themselves "fall[ing] into traditional, lopsided gender roles" as a result of the pressures of Dave's work and commuting schedule (106). This is fairly typical: Sandberg cites statistics suggesting that women do about 40 percent more childrearing and 30 percent more housework than their husbands, even when both partners are working full-time jobs.

Sandberg acknowledges that women may be more naturally "nurturing" than men, but argues that that alone does not justify this unequal division of labor (108). Just as we overcome instinctive drives in other areas of our lives, Sandberg suggests, we can learn to share the job of parenting. Unfortunately, there is currently little incentive for couples to work out alternative arrangements; in fact, many women "inadvertently discourage their husbands from doing their share by being too controlling or critical" (108). Public policy further exacerbates the situation by treating mothers as the "designated parent" (107).

As a result, women often end up leaving the workforce simply because they are overwhelmed. Sandberg therefore advises women first to think carefully about their choice of partner and then to actively recruit that partner's help. This can be difficult to do, however, since society tends to punish men who deviate from conventional gender roles. Few men, for instance, have the option of taking paternity leave, and those who do often worry that it may hurt their image at work: "We judge men primarily by their professional success and send them a clear message that personal achievements are insufficient for them to be valued or feel fulfilled" (114-15). As a result, fathers who do choose to stay at home full-time often find themselves without a network of social support.

For Sandberg, these pitfalls make it all the more necessary to start relationships off on the right foot: in Sandberg's words, "If a relationship begins in an unequal place, it is likely to get more unbalanced when and if children are added to the equation" (116). Striking the right balance ultimately benefits everyone involved: couples that split work evenly are happier, and they model what a healthy partnership looks like for their children. According to Sandberg, we are already seeing the benefits of the latter, since younger men are increasingly committed to spending time with their families. Still, she says, there is more work to be done:

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"As more women lean in to their careers, more men need to lean in to their families. We need to encourage men to be more ambitious in their homes" (120).

Chapter 9 Summary: "The Myth of Doing It All"

The idea of "having it all," according to Sandberg, is "perhaps the greatest trap ever set for women " (121). Since time and resources are finite, every person has to make difficult decisions about where to devote their energy. In fact, having options is itself a luxury, since many mothers have no choice but to work full-time for financial reasons.

For Sandberg, this makes it all the worse that we so often view working mothers with suspicion:

> Employed mothers and fathers both struggle with multiple responsibilities, but mothers also have to endure the rude questions and accusatory looks that remind us that we're shortchanging both our jobs and our children. As if we needed reminding. Like me, most of the women I know do a great job worrying that we don't measure up (122-23).

Rather than striving for perfection, then, working mothers should embrace opportunities to cut corners where they can; Sandberg recounts, for instance, how one female executive puts her children to bed in their school clothes to save time the next morning. She urges women to compromise at work as well, describing how one of her former employers noticed that employees who burned out had often never taken vacation time. In her own life, then, Sandberg cut back her twelve-hour workdays at Google to a more traditional schedule after having a child, even though she worried that doing so would cause her to "lose credibility, or even [her] entire job" (128).

Although Google turned out to be accommodating of this decision, Sandberg acknowledges that not all workplaces are and argues that more employers need to shift their focus from "face time" to "results" (130). Telecommuting is one possible solution, but the internet is also a double-edged sword, because it makes working longer hours than ever before possible. Ultimately, however, Sandberg suggests that telecommuting makes the need to set boundaries even more pressing. After starting her job at Facebook, for instance, Sandberg realized she simply couldn't juggle the late hours at work with her responsibilities as a mother: "I started forcing myself to leave the office at five thirty. Every competitive, type-

A fiber of my being was screaming at me to stay, but unless I had a critical meeting, I walked out that door" (133).

Nevertheless, Sandberg says, most working mothers are likely to feel some form of inadequacy; she admits, for instance, that she worries sometimes about not providing her children with the same intensive, detail-oriented parenting that stay-at-home mothers do: "I dropped my son off at school on St. Patrick's Day. As he got out of the car wearing his favorite blue T-shirt, [a] mother pointed out, 'He's supposed to be wearing green today.' I simultaneously thought, *Oh, who the hell can remember that it's St. Patrick's Day?* and *I'm a bad mom*" (137). Sandberg therefore recommends that women learn "guilt management" as well as time-management: the key, she says, is for women to accept that perfection is impossible and that the decisions they make are the right ones for them (137).

Chapters 8-9 Analysis

The discussion in Chapter 8 regarding childrearing and housework arises naturally out of the previous chapter’s recommendations on family planning, expanding in particular on the idea that the divide between the personal and the professional is largely artificial. Sandberg's claim that choosing whether and whom to marry is the most important career decision a woman can make is startling at first glance, but makes sense in light of the on-the-ground conditions working wives and mothers face; because so many workplaces lack policies that would ease the burdens placed on women trying to balance their careers and family, choosing a partner who is able and willing to split housework evenly can be crucial to women's success. Although Sandberg makes it clear that she would like to see these policies change, she urges women to make savvy relationship decisions in the meantime.

Much more than previous chapters, however, Chapter 8 makes the case that feminism should be of interest to men, too, and not simply as a way of supporting women. Sandberg argues that while gender norms tend to hurt women in professional settings, they tend to hurt men in domestic ones. More specifically, the idea that men are less nurturing than women exposes fathers who want to take an active role in parenting to criticism and shame; former coworkers may see a stay-at-home father as less masculine, while other stay-at-home parents (who are overwhelmingly female) may view full-time fathers with suspicion. In fact, Sandberg argues that women often help perpetuate these ideas by micromanaging their partners' interactions with children: "I have seen so many

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women inadvertently discourage their husbands from doing their share by being too controlling or critical. Social scientists call this 'maternal gatekeeping,' which is a fancy term for 'Ohmigod, that's not the way you do it! Just move aside and let me!'" (108).

This critique is in keeping with the importance Sandberg places on individual choice, but feminists who are more interested in systemic sexism might object that she is flattening out the broader dynamics at play—for instance, the fact that society tends to reward men who display conventionally "masculine" traits like ambition, while simultaneously devaluing traditionally "feminine" caretaking activities. Men, in other words, arguably have less incentive to step outside their gender roles than women do, which is likely why Sandberg argues that we need to change the way we think about child care and housework; if these domestic tasks were as prestigious as working outside the home, men might be more inclined to share in them.

Chapter 9, meanwhile, marks a different kind of shift in tone, as Sandberg goes from encouraging women to "lean in" to warning them of the dangers of trying to do too much. In part, this sets the stage for *Lean In*'s closing chapters: having laid out most of her argument, Sandberg here devotes a chapter to the limitations of it. In another sense, however, Chapter 9 builds off of everything Sandberg has previously said, because the pressure on women to "have it all" is itself a kind of gender norm. By reminding women that it is not only acceptable but necessary to set limits on their personal and professional lives, Sandberg is advising them to subvert another gender norm: the expectation that women be perfect.

Chapters 10-11

Chapter 10 Summary: "Let's Start Talking About It"

Sandberg notes that successful women often resist talking about gender, because they want to be judged solely on their accomplishments. Unfortunately, Sandberg says, "The world has a way of reminding women that they are women, and girls that they are girls" (140). Like many women, Sandberg hesitated for many years to call herself a feminist, in part because of the negative connotations of the word, and in part because Sandberg and her peers "truly, if naively, believed that the world did not need feminists anymore" (142). Sandberg describes how, on entering the workforce, she felt that she could tackle any lingering inequality

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singlehandedly: "I figured if sexism still existed, I would just prove it wrong. I would do my job and do it well" (142).

Since then, however, Sandberg has come to see this approach as a mistake. In practice, "proving sexism wrong" often means conforming to traditionally-masculine patterns of behavior, even when those behaviors might make some women uncomfortable. Furthermore, professional women's efforts to blend in tend to sweep issues of systemic system further under the rug:

> I started seeing female friends and colleagues drop out of the workforce. Some left by choice. Others left out of frustration, pushed out the door by companies that did not allow flexibility and welcomed home by partners who weren't doing their share of the housework and child rearing…even though the thought still scared me, I decided it was time to stop putting my head down and to start speaking out (144).

Sandberg explains that when she first began to give talks on the challenges faced by women in the workplace, many people cautioned that doing so would pigeonhole her. Now, however, she says she is comfortable with the issue being "her thing," in part because she can see the effect her words have; she recounts, for instance, how an instructor at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine began making a conscientious effort to call on male and female students equally in response to one of Sandberg's talks (146). Sandberg therefore argues that ending sexism in the workplace requires open communication, and warns against interpreting laws on discrimination so strictly that gender itself becomes a taboo topic. In addition, Sandberg recommends that women give their employers the "benefit of the doubt"; a suspicious attitude is likely to hamper conversation and foreclose the possibility of reaching a solution on issues relating to things like scheduling and salary (154).

Sandberg concludes by acknowledging that talking about sexism openly can be frightening and (for less-privileged women) dangerous. Nevertheless, she urges her readers to join her in speaking up about inequality. Citing changes made at Harvard Business School to help boost female performance, Sandberg argues that "creating a more equal environment will not just be better performance for our organizations, but quite likely greater happiness for all" (158).

Chapter 11 Summary: “Working Together Toward Equality”

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Sandberg suggests that both men and women currently lack "real choice" when it comes to decisions about career and family (160). With that in mind, she calls on both genders to work together to encourage girls and women to strive for excellence. Women in particular, Sandberg says, need to work harder to support one another; pointing to feminist criticism of Marissa Mayer's short pregnancy leave, Sandberg asks women to respect other, similarly personal decisions.

From here, Sandberg moves on to a broader consideration of dissension within the ranks of feminism, arguing that disagreements should not become more important than "shared goals," and that debate should always be "constructive" (162). Sandberg suggests that conflict between women is often a holdover from "the days of tokenism," when only a limited number of women could succeed (163). Now, however, "It makes no sense for women to feel that we are competing against one another," and the effects of doing so can be harmful; because women are often perceived as unbiased by virtue of their gender, their own sexist words and actions tend to go unchallenged (163). In particular, Sandberg calls for an end to the "mommy wars" between stay-at-home and working mothers. Noting that mothers almost always fear that they are shorting some aspect of their lives, Sandberg encourages women to set aside whatever guilt they feel in an effort to genuinely appreciate the contributions other women are making to society.

Ultimately, Sandberg says that the goal of feminism should be to "work toward a world where [gendered] social norms no longer exist" (169). She realizes, however, that many women struggle simply to earn enough to support their families, and reiterates her belief that women in positions of power will be able to institute policies that benefit all women.

Sandberg explains how her own mother has "lean[ed] in her entire life," returning to school after Sandberg began college, working as a teacher, and ultimately founding a non-profit—all in the face of inequality (170). Although that inequality has lessened over the years, Sandberg says that both she and her mother hope to see it disappear altogether in the coming years: "The hard work of generations before us means that equality is within our reach. We can close the leadership gap *now*." (171). In conclusion, Sandberg says that she hopes both her son and her daughter will live lives where they can "lean in—all the way" (172).

Chapters 10-11 Analysis

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Chapters 10 and 11 constitute *Lean In*'s conclusion: a place for Sandberg to recap what she has said and bring the book to a satisfying stopping point. This kind of summary is particularly important in a text like *Lean In*, which contains many chapter-length sub-arguments that need to coalesce into a cohesive case for women "leaning in." With that in mind, Sandberg uses this section to tie together several of her earlier points. In Chapter 10, for instance, Sandberg brings back a key idea from Chapter 6: that open communication is vitally important in the workplace. Now, however, she connects it to arguments she's previously made about the way gender roles function to make the case for speaking honestly about gender:

> The simple act of talking openly about behavioral patterns makes the subconscious conscious. For example, Google has an unusual system where engineers nominate themselves for promotions, and the company found that men nominated themselves more quickly than women. The Google management team shared this data openly with the female employees, and women's self-nomination rates rose significantly, reaching roughly the same rates as men's (148).

Sandberg also reintroduces several ideas from the Introduction as she wraps up her arguments. In the last few pages of the book, for instance, she returns to the accomplishments of first- and second-wave feminism as she urges her readers to lean in. This is rhetorically effective for several reasons. First, by connecting her arguments to larger historical forces, Sandberg reminds us of why those arguments matter. She also adds urgency and pathos to her argument by placing it within the context of a struggle for equal rights in particular. Finally, she provides a sense of closure by bringing the book full circle: the problem Sandberg laid out in the introduction—the state of feminism and women's rights in contemporary America—returns, but now Sandberg places it alongside what she sees as the solution.

More than just pulling different strands of her argument together, however, Sandberg also uses these chapters to flesh out some of the tensions and problems that have been implicit in other parts of the book. In Chapter 10, for instance, Sandberg says, "The subject [of gender in the workplace] itself presents a paradox, forcing us to acknowledge differences while trying to achieve the goal of being treated the same" (148). Her remarks here bring to the forefront one of the major disputes within feminism: whether gender equality means eliminating gender differences or whether it means ensuring that gender differences do not

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result in discrimination. By and large, Sandberg and other liberal feminists support the former; Sandberg, for instance, argues that in a truly equal world, women would and should hold half the positions of power—in other words, men and women would be distributed evenly across all sectors of society. Sandberg does suggest, however, that there are limits to treating both genders "the same"; at the very least, addressing gender inequality requires temporarily singling out the needs of women in particular. However, given what Sandberg says elsewhere about the physical challenges she faced during pregnancy, ensuring gender equality may also mean providing women with accommodations when gender differences do prove inescapable.

Chapter 11 builds off of this discussion of assimilation and difference in an even more explicit way, talking in depth about some of the divisions that have historically plagued feminism. Sandberg focuses in particular on the "mommy wars, which pit mothers who work outside the home against mothers who work inside the home" (166). Sandberg argues that these disagreements weaken the feminist movement and should be placed on the back burner, saying that we should instead “validate" one another's different choices while working toward shared goals (168). Arguably, of course, Sandberg's emphasis on personal choices itself sets an agenda for what those shared goals will be. "Validating" Marissa Mayer's short maternity leave, for instance, corresponds to Sandberg's individualistic brand of feminism; the trade-off is that Mayer's high-profile decision could set a precedent other women feel compelled to follow, potentially harming women as a group. Sandberg, however, offers a possible way around this problem when she reiterates her belief that women who hold powerful positions will use their influence on behalf of women who currently lack choices. This is a speculative claim that not all feminists would agree with, but Sandberg says that she's "willing to take that bet" (171).

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CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Sheryl Sandberg

Although *Lean In* does not have characters in the same sense a work of fiction would, Sandberg does make conscious decisions about how to characterize the real-life people that populate her book. This is true even of Sandberg herself: by narrating the way she does, Sandberg shapes the way readers are likely to view her. Sandberg's self-presentation becomes particularly significant in light of her discussion of the double-bind powerful women face: if they are too "nice," they are perceived as incompetent, but if they are too competent, they are perceived as unlikeable. Since women (including Sandberg's readers) are not immune to stereotyping, *Lean In* needs to walk a very fine line between authoritative and personable.

Sandberg relies on a handful of strategies in order achieve this effect. Although she makes no secret of her professional successes, Sandberg doesn't list her credentials at the outset of the book. Instead, she intersperses relevant anecdotes from her career throughout *Lean In* in order to back up her broader points—a technique that recalls her advice on linking individual claims, arguments and discussions to the interests of a community. She also positions herself within the relatable (and traditionally feminine) context of family by frequently alluding to her parents, husband, and children. Finally, she uses a conversational, self-deprecating, and occasionally humorous tone to speak to her readers on a personal and friendly level; she pokes fun, for instance, at her job as a 1980s aerobics instructor, complete with "a silver leotard, leg warmers, and a shiny headband, all of which went perfectly with [her] big hair" (33). Taken together, these techniques paint a picture of Sandberg as good-natured, idealistic, and determined—all of which make her an effective messenger for the book's central ideas.

Dave Goldberg

Sandberg's second husband, Dave Goldberg, features prominently in *Lean In*, where he often serves as an example of the kind of man Sandberg hopes to see more of in the future. Though just as committed to his career as Sandberg is to hers (at the time she wrote *Lean In,* Goldberg was the CEO of SurveyMonkey), Dave is also what Sandberg refers to as a "real partner"—a husband who supports his wife's career by sharing equally in household chores, compromising

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on his own plans when necessary, and refusing to feel threatened by his wife's success. Sandberg does not necessarily advise all men to follow in the exact same path as her husband—in fact, she expects to see more men devote themselves full-time to parenting as gender roles break down—but she does present their marriage as a model of the sort of egalitarian partnership that's possible when men repudiate traditional norms of masculinity. All in all, Dave comes across as a reliable, sensitive, and intelligent partner.

Mark Zuckerberg

Mark Zuckerberg is famous as the founder and CEO of Facebook, but in *Lean In*, he appears simply as "Mark"—Sandberg's friend and boss. Just as Sandberg presents her husband as the ideal partner, Mark appears as a kind of ideal employer, particularly for women. Mark takes a personal and compassionate interest in Sandberg's life, allowing her to tweak her schedule to accommodate the needs of her family and even offering her a hug when she breaks down crying in front of him. This sets him apart from employers who demand that their employees maintain a rigid separation between life at home and life at work—something that can be particularly difficult for women to do.

Adele Einhorn (Sandberg's Mother)

Sandberg's mother appears throughout *Lean In* as a source of inspiration and an example of all that it is possible to accomplish even in the face of sexism. Although Adele Einhorn's life outwardly conforms much more to gender norms than her daughter's—she dropped out of her PhD program in order to become a full-time mother—she has nevertheless achieved a great deal, first doing volunteer work on behalf of Jews in the Soviet Union, then returning to school and working as a teacher, and finally founding a non-profit organization. Furthermore, Sandberg credits her mother for much of her own success, explaining that she pushed all of her children to excel and divided housework more evenly with her husband than the average 1970s housewife. Sandberg in turn traces Adele's character to the way her own mother raised her, tying her portrayal of Adele to a broader argument about the importance of female role models.

Larry Summers

Sandberg credits many individuals with teaching and guiding her over the years, but Summers ultimately emerges as one of the most important of these mentors.

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Summers taught at Harvard while Sandberg was an undergraduate, and acted as her senior thesis advisor—"something very few Harvard professors volunteer to do for undergraduates" (67). Summers would go on to hire Sandberg twice: once out of college, to work at the World Bank, and once shortly after she finished business school, to work at the Treasury Department. Sandberg therefore uses Summers as an example of the positive impact male mentors can have on female employees; seeing Sandberg's potential, Summers repeatedly reached out to help and share his expertise with her.

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THEMES

Gender Inequality and the Effects of Gender Norms in the Workplace

Sandberg is not shy about labeling herself or *Lean In* as feminist in approach, and her stated goal in writing the book is to combat gender inequality. That said, sexism is a complex and widespread phenomenon, and Sandberg does not attempt to address it in all its forms. Instead, she opts to focus largely on one particular problem—the relative absence of women in leadership positions—in the hopes that solving that imbalance will have a ripple effect on the rest of society. She further narrows her focus by spending less time on the structural or economic factors that keep women out of power (e.g., the wage gap) and more time on the social and psychological ones—most notably, stereotypes about gender and gender roles that affect both how women are perceived and how they perceive themselves. The latter, in particular, are the "internal barriers" to success that Sandberg hopes her book can help address (8).

Over the course of *Lean In*, Sandberg identifies several gender norms that conspire to hold women in the workforce back—for instance, the expectation that women be passive and agreeable, or the association between femininity and nurturing behavior. The majority of these stereotypes arise from a broader notion of "separate spheres"—an ideology that took root in Western society over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, assigning each gender to a "sphere" of life and allocating character traits accordingly. Men, for instance, must be rational, individualistic, and tough-minded to succeed in the public world, whereas women must be sensitive, empathic, and selfless to care for their families. As Sandberg demonstrates throughout *Lean In*, these gender norms create a no-win situation for women in the modern workplace; a woman who conforms to the feminine ideal is, by definition, unlikely to succeed in a competitive environment, but a woman who adopts more "masculine" behaviors is seen as suspect. Men, meanwhile, face a parallel double bind in domestic settings, where they may come across either as incompetent (too "masculine") or as unmanly (too "feminine"). Ultimately, then, Sandberg's goal is not simply to achieve gender parity in leadership positions, but also to "work toward a world where [gendered] social norms no longer exist," and each person is fully free to pursue his or her own "passion, talents, and interests" (169).

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Of course, the extent to which it is possible to eliminate gender norms is itself debatable. Although Sandberg seems to view these roles largely as a byproduct of culture (a position known as "gender constructionism"), she does concede that there may be innate gender differences ("gender essentialism"):

> I also acknowledge that there are biological differences between men and women. I have breast-fed two children and noted, at times with great disappointment, that this was simply not something my husband was equipped to do. Are there characteristics inherent in sex differences that make women more nurturing and men more assertive? Quite possibly (18-19).

In general, however, Sandberg suggests that these differences can and should be minimized; she continues the above passage, for instance, by saying, "Still, in today's world, where we no longer have to hunt in the wild for our food, our desire for leadership is largely a culturally created and reinforced trait. How individuals view what they can and should accomplish is in large part formed by our societal expectations" (19). It is worth noting, however, that some schools of feminism do not share this view: "difference" feminists, for example, might argue that the goal of feminism should not be to eliminate gender norms, but to recast conventionally feminine norms in a more positive light.

The Power of Individual Women to Create Change

Different schools of feminist thought take different approaches toward achieving gender equality, and may even define equality itself in different terms. For the most part, Sandberg's arguments align with those of liberal feminism, which approaches gender equality from the perspective of individuals operating more or less independently of one another: the goal is to eliminate societal restraints on women's behavior so that they can make choices and act as freely as men can. For Sandberg, this includes eliminating internalized messages about how women are supposed to behave—for instance, the idea that they should strive to be accommodating and likeable rather than assertive and accomplished. The emphasis, however, is on each individual woman's ability to dictate the terms of her own life—or, as Sandberg puts it, "to dream big, forge a path through the obstacles, and achieve [her] full potential" (171). And as this passage implies, Sandberg also suggests that a lot of the responsibility for creating change rests on women acting as individuals; her central contention in the book is that if each woman "leans in" more to her chosen career—negotiating for pay raises and promotions, and accepting challenging positions—collective change will follow.

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Not all feminists agree that this individualistic approach to change is the right one, and Sandberg herself does temper her claims at various points in the book. For one thing, she acknowledges that many women currently lack meaningful choice because of economic factors: for many mothers, for instance, working outside the home is "not a choice, but a necessity" (122). In addition, she warns against completely divorcing personal choices from their context, since "We are all influenced by social conventions, peer pressure, and familial expectations" (100). Sandberg even hints at times that the individualistic ethos common to many workplaces should perhaps give way to something a bit more empathic and community-oriented; she speaks positively, for instance, of a Harvard Business School study that both boosted women's performance and "laid out a new, communal definition of leadership" (157). Finally, Sandberg hints at some of the tensions surrounding personal choice when she notes, "One of the conflicts inherent in having choice is that we all make different ones. There is always an opportunity cost, and I don't know any woman who feels comfortable with all her decisions. As a result, we inadvertently hold that discomfort against those who remind us of the path not taken" (166-67). Although Sandberg depicts the "cost" here as a personal one unique to each woman (rather than as, for example, a cost paid by women as a group), this passage does point to some of the limitations of thinking about feminism purely in terms of individual choice.

The Relationship between Our Personal and Professional Lives

As a result of traditional gender roles, the work-life balance has tended to be more of a problem for women than for men. Where it is seen as acceptable (or even admirable) for a working husband and father to spend little time with his family, a mother who works outside the home is liable to be labeled selfish or irresponsible. Furthermore, the longstanding belief that women should be the primary caregivers means that domestic work tends to default to them, even in relatively "progressive" relationships; Sandberg cites statistics that working mothers tend to do 40 percent more child care and 30 percent more housework than their male partners, and shares how, after the birth of her first child, she and her husband began to fall into this same pattern. As a result, women simply can't neatly separate their roles as wives and mothers from their roles as workers.

Not surprisingly, then, the relationship between our personal and professional lives is a central concern in *Lean In*. In addition to describing the particular difficulties women face in this respect, Sandberg recommends specific policy

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changes that would promote a healthier work-life balance: paid parental leave, telecommuting, and affordable child care among them. More broadly, however, Sandberg also suggests that there needs to be a shift in workplace attitudes toward employees' personal lives; she praises Facebook, for instance, for allowing her to bring her children with her to nighttime meetings, saying, "my children were in heaven, entranced by pizza, endless candy, and the huge pile of Legos that the engineers kindly share with young visitors" (138). Sandberg, then, ultimately seeks to challenge the core assumption that work and life exist in opposition to one another and therefore must conflict, suggesting that we would likely be happier if we approached work with "authenticity" and emotion: "Instead of putting on some kind of fake 'all-work persona,' I think we benefit from expressing our truth, talking about personal situations, and acknowledging that professional decisions are often emotionally driven" (89). What's more, the book itself puts these ideas into action, blending formal argumentation with anecdotes from Sandberg's personal life (it's telling that the first sentence in *Lean In* is, "I got pregnant with my first child in the summer of 2004") (3).

The Importance of Role Models

Although only one chapter in *Lean In* deals specifically with role models (Chapter 5, on mentorship), the topic surfaces repeatedly. It's an undercurrent, for instance, in many of Sandberg's discussions of family dynamics; because children tend to learn through imitation, Sandberg argues that boys and girls need to see their mothers working outside the home, and their fathers working within the home. In fact, Sandberg repeatedly traces the effects of positive parental role models across multiple generations, suggesting that gender equality can build on itself over time. Here, for instance, is her account of her husband Dave's family background:

> Sadly, Dave's father, Mel, passed away before I had a chance to meet him, but he clearly was a man way ahead of his time. Mel's mother worked side by side with her husband running the family's small grocery store, so Mel grew up accepting women as equals, which was unusual in those days. As a single man, he became interested in the women's movement and read Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. He was the one who introduced his wife (and Dave's mother), Paula, to this feminist wake-up call in the 1960s (119).

Role models outside the family are also important, in part because they may set off a similar kind of chain reaction. Sandberg notes, for instance, that initial

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hostility toward a female manager at Goldman Sachs started to die down once more women became managers, thus normalizing the idea of female leadership. Sandberg even suggests that media portrayals of women (including fictional ones) can provide inspiration to girls and women:

> It may not be as dramatic or funny to make a movie about a woman who loves both her job and her family, but that would be a better reflection of reality. We need more portrayals of women as competent professionals and happy mothers—or even happy professionals and competent mothers. The current negative images may make us laugh, but they also make women unnecessarily fearful by presenting life's challenges as insurmountable (24).

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SYMBOLS AND MOTIFS

Leaning In

As the book's title suggests, the idea of "leaning in" is central to Sandberg's arguments. At the most basic level, it's a metaphor for the kind of assertiveness and ambition Sandberg wants working women to practice. "Leaning" toward someone or something suggests engagement, interest, and confidence; it's the opposite of flinching or backing off, which Sandberg argues that women are too prone to do whether they're negotiating a raise or preparing for a family. As the book progresses, however, Sandberg begins to use the phrase in more unexpected ways, arguing, for instance, that men need to "lean in to their families" and expressing hope that her children will "lean in—all the way" when they "find where their true passions lie" (120, 172). "Leaning in," then, is ultimately a motif that Sandberg uses to develop themes surrounding personal choice and growth; it does not necessarily require ambition in the traditional sense, but it does require that people become the best possible version of themselves.

The Jungle Gym

The jungle gym metaphor is one that Sandberg borrows from Pattie Sellers, but she also expands on it as a symbol for career success. The core idea is that advancement at work isn't necessarily a straight line; people may switch employers (or even lines of work), accept temporary "demotions" in exchange for other opportunities, or take time off to raise a family. Similarly, climbing to the top of a jungle gym isn't the same as climbing up a ladder, and may involve moving downwards or side to side. The jungle gym metaphor is therefore a reminder that there are many paths to professional success, which, Sandberg argues, is good news for women, who may face unique challenges and setbacks at work.

The Marathon

Lean In makes use of multiple metaphors for having a career, allowing Sandberg to explore different aspects of professional life. The symbol of the marathon is one that she draws on while explaining how male and female experiences of their careers differ over time. Like running a marathon, pursuing a career requires

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determination, hard work, and endurance; however, support from onlookers can help boost runners' (i.e. professionals') motivation to finish. With that in mind, Sandberg asks us to imagine a marathon where spectators cheer on and encourage male participants while constantly reminding female participants that racing is difficult and unnecessary:

> 'You know you don't have to do this!' the crowd shouts. Or 'Good start—but you probably won't want to finish.' The farther the marathoners run, the louder the cries grow for the men: 'Keep going! You've got this!' But the women hear more and more doubts about their efforts. External voices, and often their own internal voice, repeatedly question their decision to keep running. The voices can even grow hostile. As the women struggle to endure the rigors of the race, spectators shout, 'Why are you running when your children need you at home?' (100).

All of this, Sandberg says, is analogous to the way in which society pressures women (especially mothers) to drop out of the workforce.

The Table

Like "leaning in," "sitting at the table" is a metaphor Sandberg uses to encourage women to make the most of their careers. First and foremost, it suggests being present and attentive—an active participant in whatever professional opportunities arise. It also calls to mind several expressions that evoke the kind of creativity and negotiation that are important in the workplace: "bringing something to the table," the "bargaining table," etc. Just as she does with the leaning in metaphor, however, Sandberg ultimately broadens the symbol of the table to include the domestic sphere, arguing that "We need more men to sit at the table…the kitchen table" (120).

Family

Sandberg frequently refers to her family history, and also includes numerous anecdotes from her experiences as a wife and mother. In part, this is a way of appealing to readers on an emotional level, as well as a reminder of the ways in which our personal and professional lives intersect. However, Sandberg also uses the motif of family to illustrate the importance of role models; she credits her own ambition, for instance, in part to the precedent set by her mother and grandmother's successes, and cites research suggesting that children often

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reproduce their parents' gender roles when they grow up and establish families of their own.

Posters

The motivational posters hanging on the walls at Facebook crop up several times in *Lean In*, typically as a way for Sandberg to underscore a key point; in fact, the subtitle to Chapter 1 ("What would you do if you weren't afraid?") is a direct quote from Sandberg's personal "favorite" (25). As a motif, the posters therefore parallel Sandberg's own rhetorical strategy of using short, pithy phrases to summarize her most important arguments.

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IMPORTANT QUOTES

1. "To this day, I'm embarrassed that I didn't realize that pregnant women needed reserved parking until I experienced my own aching feet. As one of Google's most senior women, didn't I have a special responsibility to think of this? But like Sergey, it had never occurred to me. The other pregnant women must have suffered in silence, not wanting to ask for special treatment. Or maybe they lacked the confidence or seniority to demand that the problem be fixed. Having one pregnant woman at the top—even one who looked like a whale—made the difference." (Introduction, Page 3)

   The argument Sandberg makes in Lean In *hinges to a large extent on the idea that gender equality can be secured from the top downwards—that is, that putting more women in positions of power will benefit women in all walks of life. Not surprisingly, then, Sandberg begins her book with an anecdote that supports this idea; as Sandberg describes it, the problem isn't so much that those at the top are unwilling to institute change as it is that they aren't aware of the need for it. This, Sandberg says, proves that representation matters, since women are more likely to be attuned to the problems other women face. The above excerpt is also a good example of Sandberg's tendency to use personal stories to back up her claims, blurring the line between the personal and the professional.*

2. "The blunt truth is that men still run the world. Of the 195 independent countries in the world, only 17 are led by women. Women hold just 20 percent of seats in parliaments globally. In the United States, where we pride ourselves on liberty and justice for all, the gender division of leadership roles is not much better. Women became 50 percent of the college graduates in the United States in the early 1980s. Since then, women have slowly and steadily advanced, earning more and more of the college degrees, taking more of the entry-level jobs, and entering more fields previously dominated by men. Despite these gains, the percentage of women at the top of corporate America has barely budged over the past decade. A meager twenty-one of the Fortune 500 CEOs are women. Women hold about 14 percent of executive officer positions, 17 percent of board seats, and constitute 18 percent of our elected congressional officials. The gap is even worse for women of color, who hold just 4 percent of top

corporate jobs, 3 percent of board seats, and 5 percent of congressional seats. While women continue to outpace men in educational achievement, we have ceased making real progress at the top of any industry. This means that when it comes to making the decisions that most affect our world, women's voices are not heard equally." (Introduction, Pages 5-6)

Although Lean In *discusses gender inequality in the workplace from multiple angles, most of Sandberg's claims ultimately relate back to the "leadership gap" outlined in this passage; as Sandberg notes, the current balance of power is not what one might expect of a truly equal society, particularly given that women's educational achievements make them, if anything, overqualified for top jobs. Throughout the rest of the book, then, Sandberg will demonstrate how gender norms that discourage women from being ambitious, daring, and assertive help to explain gender inequality in politics and private industry.*

3. "A truly equal world would be one where women ran half our countries and companies and men ran half our homes. I believe that this would be a better world. The laws of economics and many studies of diversity tell us that if we tapped the entire pool of human resources and talent, our collective performance would improve." (Introduction, Page 7)

   While most feminists would agree on the importance of gender equality, not all would agree on what exactly gender equality means; some, for instance, would argue that a fifty-fifty division of social roles doesn't matter as long as all roles are equally respected, while others would argue that dismantling hierarchies based on class and race are central to securing gender inequality. Sandberg's definition of equality corresponds to her largely liberal feminist stance: in the absence of gender norms, women could and should occupy about half of society's traditional seats of power. In other words, Sandberg wants to ensure that women have equal status within society as it currently exists, but does not think major structural changes to society are necessary. Her argument about "collective performance" speaks to this, since her point is that the full inclusion of women would improve on American society's current strengths.

4. "My grandmother Rosalind Einhorn was born exactly fifty-two years before I was, on August 28, 1917. Like many poor Jewish families in the boroughs of New York City, hers lived in a small, crowded apartment close to their

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relatives. Her parents, aunts, and uncles addressed her male cousins by their given names, but she and her sister were referred to only as 'Girlie.'" (Chapter 1, Page 12)

Sandberg's family appears repeatedly in Lean In*, with figures like her mother and grandmother often serving as role models: despite the double drawback of being born poor and a girl, for instance, Rosalind Einhorn grew up to become a resourceful and independent woman who played a key role in developing her husband's business. The passage also functions as a reminder of how far women have come since the early 20th century. It is striking, for instance, that Rosalind's relatives referred to her and her sister interchangeably, as if neither had an identity of her own. Since* Lean In *celebrates the right of each individual woman to make her own choices, Sandberg likely finds this reduction of all women to their gender ("Girlie") particularly troubling.*

5. "From a very early age, boys are encouraged to take charge and offer their opinions. Teachers interact more with boys, call on them more frequently, and ask them more questions. Boys are also more likely to call out answers, and when they do, teachers usually listen to them. When girls call out, teachers often scold them for breaking the rules and remind them to raise their hands if they want to speak." (Chapter 1, Page 20)

   One key claim Sandberg makes in Lean In *is that girls and women grow up internalizing messages about "appropriate" female behavior. In many instances, like the one Sandberg describes in the passage above, society penalizes women for possessing traits it views as acceptable or even commendable in men; since these traits also tend to be those that help people succeed in professional life, the end result is that women never learn the skills they need to advance in their careers. This excerpt also underscores another point Sandberg returns to again and again in* Lean In*: that sexism often operates in subtle or unconscious ways. It's unlikely that most of the teachers in the study Sandberg cites intended to reinforce gender stereotypes, but it's possible to act in sexist ways without being aware of it.*

6. "And it's not just women who are tough on themselves. Colleagues and the media are also quick to credit external factors for a woman's achievements. When Facebook filed to go public, *The New York Times* ran an article that

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kindly reminded me—and everyone else—that I had 'been lucky' and 'had powerful mentors along the way.' Journalists and bloggers rose up to highlight the double standard, pointing out that *The New York Times* rarely ascribed men's success to having been lucky. But the *Times* didn't say anything that I had not already told myself a thousand times. At every stage of my career, I have attributed my success to luck, hard work, and help from others." (Chapter 2, Page 30)

Sandberg uses this anecdote to illustrate (and lend a personal touch to) the studies and statistics she cites on women's lack of self-confidence; as the above story illustrates, this self-doubt does not develop in a vacuum, but is instead an internalization of societal norms and expectations. It is also interesting to note that the tendency to underestimate women often manifests as a tendency to attribute their success to external factors—specifically, help from other people. Although Sandberg does not explicitly say so, it seems likely that this practice stems in part from the idea that women are more community-oriented and less individualistic, which Sandberg goes on to discuss later in the book.

7. "But I also know that in order to continue to grow and challenge myself, I have to believe in my own abilities. I still face situations that I fear are beyond my capabilities. I still have days when I feel like a fraud. And I still sometimes find myself spoken over and discounted while men sitting next to me are not. But now I know how to take a deep breath and keep my hand up. I have learned to sit at the table." (Chapter 2, Page 38)

   Throughout Lean In*, Sandberg is upfront about the fact that she still struggles with many ingrained sexist ideas. In this passage, for instance, she admits that she has not entirely gotten over her self-doubt, and it's not clear that she ever will. Ultimately, however, Sandberg suggests that this doesn't matter: regardless of what women have learned to think or feel about themselves, they can consciously push past those ideas in order to achieve their goals. This excerpt is also a good example of the way Sandberg uses catchy phrases and images to sum up her argument; here, she brings back the symbol of the table from the beginning of the chapter to ensure that her message sticks in readers' minds.*

8. "In addition, there are huge benefits to communal effort in and of itself. By definition, all organizations consist of people working together. Focusing on

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the team leads to better results for the simple reason that well-functioning groups are stronger than individuals. Teams that work together well outperform those that don't. And success feels better when it's shared with others. So perhaps one positive result of having more women at the top is that our leaders will have been trained to care more about the well-being of others." (Chapter 3, Page 48)

The above passage follows Sandberg's discussion of how women can sidestep perceived selfishness by linking their arguments and concerns to those of a group. Although Sandberg recognizes that there may be drawbacks to playing to stereotypes in this way, she ultimately suggests that the benefits outweigh the dangers. Here, for instance, Sandberg argues that her advice could usher in a more empathic generation of leaders, hinting that our understanding of work needs to move in a more communal direction regardless.

9. "As Lori describes it, ladders are limiting—people can move up or down, on or off. Jungle gyms offer more creative exploration. There's only one way to get to the top of a ladder, but there are many ways to get to the top of a jungle gym. The jungle gym model benefits everyone, but especially women who might be starting careers, switching careers, getting blocked by external barriers, or reentering the workforce after taking time off. The ability to forge a unique path with occasional dips, detours, and even dead ends presents a better chance for fulfillment. Plus, a jungle gym provides great views for many people, not just those at the top. On a ladder, most climbers are stuck staring at the butt of the person above." (Chapter 4, Page 53)

   The jungle gym as a metaphor for professional progress is one of the most prominent symbols in Lean In*. Because it allows for "more creative exploration," Sandberg argues in this passage that the jungle gym is a potentially useful analogy for women, who may face challenges and setbacks at work that men do not. Sandberg also uses the symbol of the jungle gym to temper the individualism of her overall message, suggesting that the analogy recasts the workplace into an environment where everyone can win, including those who don't make it all the way to the top: "A jungle gym provides great views for many people."*

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10. “I try to set more personal goals for learning new skills in the next eighteen months. It's often painful, but I ask myself, 'How can I improve?' If I am afraid to do something, it is usually because I am not good at it or perhaps am too scared even to try. After working at Google for more than four years, managing well over half of the company's revenues, I was embarrassed to admit that I had never negotiated a business deal. Not one. So I gathered my courage and came clean to my boss, Omid Kordestani, then head of sales and business development. Omid was willing to give me a chance to run a small deal team.” (Chapter 4, Page 59)

    One reason Sandberg may wish to blur the professional/personal divide is that, for her, professional and personal development are intertwined: the skill Sandberg discusses in this passage has obvious workplace applications, but she talks about it as a "personal goal" that's part of an overall plan for self-improvement. Relatedly, passages like this one, which emphasize the importance of growth as an individual, echo Sandberg's advice about seeking out work environments with "potential for growth" (58). As Sandberg describes them, both personal and professional life should be constantly evolving toward something better.

11. “Women are also more reluctant to apply for promotions even when deserved, often believing that good job performance will naturally lead to rewards. Carol Frohlinger and Deborah Kolb, founders of Negotiating Women, Inc., describe this as the 'Tiara Syndrome,' where women 'expect that if they keep doing their job well someone will notice them and place a tiara on their head.' In a perfect meritocracy, tiaras would be doled out to the deserving, but I have yet to see one floating around an office. Hard work and results *should* be recognized by others, but when they aren't, advocating for oneself becomes necessary. As discussed earlier, this must be done with great care. But it must be done…Do not wait for power to be offered. Like that tiara, it might never materialize. And anyway, who wears a tiara on a jungle gym?” (Chapter 4, Page 63)

    In the above passage, Sandberg associates passivity and hesitation with stereotypically "feminine" imagery (in this case, a tiara) in order to make a point: waiting around for recognition is just as inappropriate in a competitive workplace as wearing a tiara would be on a rough-and-tumble jungle gym. Arguably, this advice contradicts a claim Sandberg makes just a few pages later when she says that women who "excel" will naturally attract

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mentors without seeking them out (68). Perhaps, however, this tension simply illustrates Sandberg's warning that "advocating for oneself…must be done with great care"; for professional women, there is a very fine line between self-assertion and behavior that is likely to come across as pushy or selfish.

12. "In part, we've brought this on ourselves. For the past decade, talk of mentorship and sponsorship has been topic number one at any women's career seminar. It is the focus of blogs, newspaper articles, and research reports. Many of these young women are responding to the often repeated advice that if they want to scale the corporate ladder, they need to find mentors (people who will advise them) as well as sponsors (people who will use their influence to advocate for them)." (Chapter 5, Page 65)

    Although Sandberg stresses the importance of mentorship throughout Lean In*, she also hints that the conversation surrounding mentorship can have sexist overtones. Sandberg goes on to claim that women often interpret the mentor relationship as one where they are "dependent" on a more powerful teacher, so the fact that mentorship is particularly central to women's career seminars is significant; perhaps this is another instance of unconscious assumptions about gender roles shaping the way women experience their professional lives (66).*

13. "Junior women and senior men often avoid engaging in mentoring or sponsoring relationships out of fear of what others might think. A study published by the Center for Work-Life Policy and the *Harvard Business Review* reported that 64 percent of men at the level of vice president and above are hesitant to have a one-on-one meeting with a more junior woman. For their part, half of the junior women avoided close contact with senior men. This evasiveness must end. Personal connections lead to assignments and promotions, so it needs to be okay for men and women to spend informal time together the same way men can…And everyone involved has to make sure to behave professionally so women—and men—feel safe in all settings." (Chapter 5, Page 72)

    One structural obstacle to women's professional advancement is the preexisting gender gap in senior positions. The extent of the problem, Sandberg implies, requires an equally far-reaching solution: a shift in the way society as a whole thinks about relationships between men and women.

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Sandberg argues that some of the necessary changes can take place on an individual level; she urges men in positions of power, for instance, to be proactive about hiring and promoting women. Nevertheless, the above passage makes it clear that there are no easy answers to such a complex problem; it's debatable, for instance, whether the junior women Sandberg mentions are under any obligation to act less "evasively" given the threat of sexual harassment.

14. “Secretary Rubin was also aware of the dangers of blindly following leaders, or in his case, being blindly followed. Before becoming Treasury secretary, Rubin served as co-chairman of the board of Goldman Sachs. At the end of his first week as co-chairman, he noticed that Goldman was heavily invested in gold. He asked someone why the firm had taken such a big position. The startled employee answered, 'That was you, sir.' 'Me?' Rubin replied. Apparently, the day before he had been taking his initial tour of the trading floor and commented, 'Gold looks interesting.' This got repeated as 'Rubin likes gold,' and someone spent millions of dollars to please the new boss.” (Chapter 6, Page 82)

    Although Sandberg states emphatically that honesty is essential to communication, she also notes that openness can be elusive in hierarchical workplace environments. Earlier in Chapter 6, Sandberg cites studies suggesting that this is a result of lower-level employees' fear of being penalized for their honesty, but this passage suggests that other factors may be at play as well: when someone is in a position of authority, what he says may carry more power, which can actually change the (perceived) meaning of his words. Ultimately, Sandberg will argue that this kind of misunderstanding is a "two-way street," which echoes her belief that everyone has his or her own truth; a person with power over others, for instance, has a responsibility to think about her subordinates' perspectives and the way her own words are likely to be interpreted (85). Nevertheless, episodes like this one suggest that there may be limits to the usefulness of thinking about communication in terms of personal truths, at least in situations where there are large power disparities.

15. “It has been an evolution, but I am now a true believer in bringing our whole selves to work. I no longer think people have a professional self for Mondays through Fridays and a real self for the rest of the time. That type of separation probably never existed, and in today's era of individual

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expression, where people constantly update their Facebook status and tweet their every move, it makes even less sense. Instead of putting on some kind of fake 'all-work persona,' I think we benefit from expressing our truth, talking about personal situations, and acknowledging that professional decisions are often emotionally driven." (Chapter 6, Page 89)

One recurring theme in Lean In *is the artificiality of the traditional separation of work from life. Sandberg argues that this division is particularly difficult for women to maintain, not only because they bear the brunt of housework and child care, but also because (unlike most boys and men) they generally grow up encouraged to express their emotions. In this passage, however, Sandberg makes a more general argument in favor of rethinking the work-life divide, noting that it is simply impractical in a world with social media. Furthermore, Sandberg suggests, people will be happier when workplaces recognize them in their totality, as "whole selves" complete with emotions and idiosyncrasies.*

16. "But when it comes to integrating career and family, planning too far in advance can close doors rather than open them. I have seen this happen over and over. Women rarely make one big decision to leave the workforce. Instead, they make a lot of small decisions along the way, making accommodations and sacrifices that they believe will be required to have a family. Of all the ways women hold themselves back, perhaps the most pervasive is that they leave before they leave." (Chapter 7, Page 93)

Sandberg's main argument in Chapter 7 is that women tend to leave the workforce not so much because of the difficulties involved in balancing work and family, but instead because they unnecessarily limit themselves in an effort to keep their jobs. According to Sandberg, this is in turn the result of overexposure to stereotypes about working women: women hear so much about the impossibility of being both a professional and a working wife/mother that they overcompensate in the years leading up to starting a family. In other words, women's tendency to "leave before they leave" is yet another example of the negative influence gender norms have on women in the workforce. Sandberg's warnings about "planning too far in advance," meanwhile, recall her earlier arguments about the jungle gym, and the importance of flexibility and risk-taking.

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17. “Although pundits and politicians, usually male, often claim that motherhood is the most important and difficult work of all, women who take time out of the workforce pay a big career penalty…Average annual earnings decline by 30 percent after two to three years, which is the average amount of time that professional women off-ramp from the workforce. If society truly valued the work of caring for children, companies and institutions would find ways to reduce these steep penalties and help parents combine career and family responsibilities. All too often rigid work schedules, lack of paid family leave, and expensive or undependable child care derail women's best efforts. Governmental and company policies such as paid personal time off, affordable high-quality child care, and flexible work practices would serve families, and society, well.” (Chapter 7, Pages 101-02)

    Although Sandberg urges women who can to "keep a foot on the gas pedal" in the period leading up to motherhood, she also argues that broader societal changes could make balancing work and family easier for all women (103). In this passage, for instance, she argues that women would benefit from policies like flexible scheduling and paid leave. More implicitly, Sandberg also suggests that the way society thinks about motherhood needs to change; instead of simply paying lip-service to motherhood's importance, Sandberg suggests that we should talk about motherhood as actual "work." This is another way in which Sandberg seeks to blur the boundaries between the personal and the professional, as well as an instance in which she seems to be defending the value of stereotypically-feminine values and tasks.

18. “There may be an evolutionary basis for one parent knowing better what to put in a child's lunch. Women who breast-feed are arguably baby's first lunch box. But even if mothers are more naturally inclined toward nurturing, fathers can match that skill with knowledge and effort. If women want to succeed more at work and if men want to succeed more at home, these expectations have to be challenged.” (Chapter 8, Page 108)

    Throughout much of Lean In*, Sandberg seems to endorse the idea that gender is socially constructed, drawing on both research and personal experience to explore the ways in which we internalize gender norms. In this passage, however, Sandberg acknowledges that women and men may have different innate tendencies, but suggests that that does not affect her*

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overall point, since biological tendencies can be overcome. This speaks, in part, to how strongly Sandberg feels about the need to eliminate traditional gender roles. It's also a good example of a rhetorical strategy Sandberg frequently uses in Lean In*: anticipating and rebutting a potential objection to her arguments.*

19. "Fathers who want to drop out of the workforce entirely and devote themselves to child care can face extremely negative social pressure…My friend Peter Noone spent several years as a stay-at-home father and found that while people claimed to respect his choice, he did not feel welcomed into the social circles in his neighborhood. As a man at the playground or in the not-so-tactfully-named 'Mommy and Me' classes, strangers viewed him with a certain amount of distrust." (Chapter 8, Page 114)

    Although Lean In *centers largely on the need to free women from archaic gender roles, it also mentions some of the ways in which these gender roles can limit men. Here, for instance, Sandberg argues that societal views of masculinity discourage otherwise caring fathers from playing an active role in their children's development. This is a pragmatic point for her to make, since one of her goals in* Lean In *is to persuade more men to take part in the fight against gender inequality; according to Sandberg, men should care about feminism because they themselves have a stake in it.*

20. "True partnership in our homes does more than just benefit couples today; it also sets the stage for the next generation. The workplace has evolved more than the home in part because we enter it as adults, so each generation experiences a new dynamic. But the homes we create tend to be more rooted in our childhoods. My generation grew up watching our mothers do the child care and housework while our fathers earned the wages. It's too easy for us to get stuck in these patterns." (Chapter 8, Pages 118-19)

    Sandberg sprinkles anecdotes from her family history throughout Lean In*, in part to make the book more engaging and personal. However, Sandberg's contentions in this passage suggest that she is also offering these stories as evidence of the role that upbringing plays in determining children's attitudes toward work, family, and gender; implicitly, Sandberg suggests that she might not be where she is if she hadn't had both the male and female role models that she did.*

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21. “I deeply understand the fear of appearing to be putting our families above our careers. Mothers don't want to be perceived as less dedicated to their jobs than men or women without family responsibilities. We overwork to overcompensate. Even in workplaces that offer reduced or flextime arrangements, people fear that reducing their hours will jeopardize their career prospects. And this is not just a perception problem. Employees who make use of flexible work policies are often penalized and seen as less committed than their peers. And those penalties can be greater for mothers in professional jobs.” (Chapter 9, Page 129)

    In Chapter 9, Sandberg modifies her general advice to women to "lean in" by cautioning that it is sometimes appropriate to back off: since no one can actually "have it all," the idea that there are no limits on what women can accomplish personally and professionally just places undue pressure on them to be perfect. As Sandberg notes in this passage, however, compromising can present its own set of challenges, since workplaces may demand their employees' total attention. Furthermore, women are at a double disadvantage, since employers with biased views on gender may already suspect women of being less committed to their work than their male counterparts. Ultimately, then, this is another passage that hints at the need for a broad shift in societal views and attitudes.

22. “Staying quiet and fitting in may have been all the first generations of women who entered corporate America could do; in some cases, it might still be the safest path. But this strategy is not paying off for women as a group. Instead, we need to speak out, identifying the barriers that are holding women back, and find solutions.” (Chapter 10, Pages 146-47)

    The above passage touches on several of the tensions present throughout Lean In*. For Sandberg, the goal of feminism is ultimately to eliminate gender norms and make gender a non-issue. Ironically, however, this means that we must pay even more attention to gender in the short term; because inequalities and prejudices so often operate silently and unconsciously, correcting them requires speaking out about them. More implicitly, the passage also deals with the question of whether it is more important to support individual women's choices or choices that benefit women as a group. Sandberg is generally a firm believer in personal choice, and much of* Lean In *is premised on the idea that women's decisions as*

individuals go hand in hand with women's progress as a group. In this passage, however, Sandberg suggests that what is "right" for an individual woman may not pay off for women in general.

23. “For decades, we have focused on giving women the choice to work inside or outside the home. We have celebrated the fact that women have the right to make this decision, and rightly so. But we have to ask ourselves if we have become so focused on supporting personal choices that we're failing to encourage women to aspire to leadership. It is time to cheer on girls and women who want to sit at the table, seek challenges, and lean in to their careers. Today, despite all of the gains we have made, neither men nor women have real choice.” (Chapter 11, Page 158)

    By and large, Lean In *defends women's right to make "personal choices" regardless of what other people think. As Sandberg herself says, though, there is a "conflict" embedded within the idea of choice: "we all make different ones," and we may not agree with the choices other people make (166). The above passage captures this tension, because while Sandberg wants to support women's choices as individuals, she also strongly feels that those choices are often the result of societal conditioning, and that they may be harming women as a group. Ultimately, Sandberg suggests that we should err on the side of "validating" one another's decisions, but the question of whether there are limits on or drawback to this kind of personal freedom are never totally resolved in the text (168).*

24. “I know that for many women, getting to the top of their organization is far from their primary focus. My intention is not to exclude them or ignore their valid concerns. I believe that if more women lean in, we can change the power structure of our world and expand opportunities for all. More female leadership will lead to fairer treatment for *all* women. Shared experience forms the basis of empathy and, in turn, can spark the institutional changes we need…Research already suggests that companies with more women in leadership roles have better work-life policies, smaller gender gaps in executive compensation, and more women in midlevel management." (Chapter 11, Page 171)

    As Sandberg draws to a close, she reiterates her belief that increasing the number of women in positions of power will ultimately benefit all women, citing studies that suggest that female leaders do tend to be more

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accommodating of their female employees. Nevertheless, some schools of feminist thought might question Sandberg's assumption that all women have "shared experiences [that] form the basis of empathy"; arguably, the experiences of working-class women or women of color have as much or more to do with class and race than they do with gender. The extent to which readers accept Sandberg's basic argument, then, will depend to a large degree on whether they feel that women should set aside their differences and focus on their similarities, as Sandberg advises in this chapter.

25. "If we push hard now, this next wave can be the last wave. In the future, there will be no female leaders. There will just be leaders." (Chapter 11, Page 172)

    Sandberg's words here refer back to a Gloria Steinem quote from Chapter 10: "Whoever has power takes the noun—and the norm—while the less powerful get an adjective" (140). According to Sandberg, women resist talking about gender in part because they want to be judged primarily for their achievements (the "noun" specifying their career) rather than for their gender; qualifying a word like "leader" with the adjective "female" seems to diminish their accomplishments. Although sympathetic to this impulse, Sandberg says it is necessary to take gender into account in the short term. Ultimately, however, the goal is to create a world where accomplishments are never "modified" by gender and (perhaps) where gender does not even need to be discussed.

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ESSAY TOPICS

1. In the Introduction, Sandberg describes *Lean In* as "sort of a feminist manifesto" (9). What does it mean to describe the book in this way? Why do you think she qualifies it ("sort of")?

2. Two of the main goals Sandberg outlines in *Lean In* are eliminating gender norms, and securing equal representation for women in positions of power. What is the relationship between these goals, according to Sandberg, and what might a world without gender norms look like?

3. Sandberg frequently uses short, catchy slogans to make a point ("lean in," "sit at the table," etc.). How does this technique relate to her views on communication?

4. *Lean In* is essentially a book-length persuasive essay. What kinds of rhetorical strategies does Sandberg use to ensure that her arguments feel cohesive and logical from one chapter to the next?

5. In Chapter 6, Sandberg says that, "Humor can be an amazing tool for delivering an honest message in a good-natured way" (86). How does Sandberg use humor in *Lean In*, and how does that shape our understanding of both her personality and her message?

6. Although Sandberg herself is by far the most prominent figure in *Lean In*, certain people—her husband, Dave, and Larry Summers, for example—tend to recur in her anecdotes. Discuss the role that one of these more minor figures plays in *Lean In*.

7. Sandberg uses images like the jungle gym and the marathon throughout *Lean In* to explore different aspects of women's professional lives. Skim back through the book and identify two or three more symbols Sandberg makes use of. Why do you think she chooses the symbols she does? Is there anything that links them together?

8. In Chapter 9, Sandberg says, "If I had to embrace a definition of success, it would be that success is making the best choices we can…and accepting them" (139). How does this view of success relate to Sandberg's desire to

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"internalize the revolution"? Are there any downsides to viewing success in these personalized terms?

9. Sandberg argues several times that elements of *Lean In* are potentially relevant to women working in lower-income or blue-collar jobs. Identify and explain two or three messages that could apply to women regardless of socioeconomic class.

10. In Chapter 9, Sandberg says that, "The very concept of having it all flies in the face of the basic laws of economics and common sense" (121). Are there other places in the book where Sandberg grounds her ideas about feminism in her background in business and economics? What effect does that have?

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