Ms Graham says that such change "won't just happen." It needs specific intervention within companies—intervention that is led from the top. Opportunities for flexible working are particularly helpful in keeping women in the workforce. KPMG, one of the Big Four accounting firms, is aiming to double the percentage of its partners who are women (currently 13%). It says flexible working is a key measure to help it achieve this goal. Three-quarters of all requests for flexible working over the past 12 months have been from women.

Mentoring is also helpful. The WDOB has initiated a programme in which the chairmen and CEOs of 25 FTSE100 companies have agreed to mentor women who have been identified from other companies among the group as having boardroom potential. "The sad thing," says Ms. Graham, "is that some companies could not find a woman to put forward for mentoring." Women are enthusiastic mentors of each other. Colleen Arnold, the general manager of IBM Europe, Middle East and Africa, mentors 27 people formally and more than 100 informally. "Mentoring," she says, "is penalty-free."

Chief executives are appointed by sub-committees of companies' boards, often advised by headhunters. More of them will be women when more members of the sub-committees are women and when fewer headhunters are old white men. As Catalyst's Ms. Lang puts it "There are so many women qualified to be on boards who are out there, under the radar screen." Heidrick & Struggles, a firm of headhunters, says that boards may need to look beyond the top-management structures from which non-executive directors are usually drawn if they are "to increase markedly the ratio of female to male directors."

Some think the task is particularly urgent. Chris Clarke, the America-based CEO of Boyden, a firm of headhunters, and a visiting professor at Henley Management College in England, argues that women are superior to men at multi-tasking, team-building and communicating, which have become the essential skiffs for running a 21st-century corporation. Maria Wisniewska, who headed a Polish bank, Bank Pekao, and is an international adviser to the Conference Board, says: "The links between the rational and emotional parts of the brain are greater in women than in men. If so, and if leadership is about making links between emotion and intelligence, then maybe women are better at it than men."

CHAPTER 18

Selling Women Short

LIZA FEATHERSTONE

"It's not easy to have a family and a career," says the woman in the commercial earnestly. "But my company makes it a lot easier. My company takes family very seriously." The woman, "Margaret," is shown at home, spending relaxed quality time with her husband and children.

Beginning in mid-2003, American TV viewers were bombarded with advertisements like this one from a surprising source: Wal-Mart. The commercials were light on details—Margaret, a district manager for the retail chain, never says what Wal-Mart does, exactly, to help her balance motherhood with her demanding job—but their tone was inspiringly upbeat. In a similar ad, a middle-aged black woman talks about her successful career as a Wal-Mart department manager, smilingly pronouncing it a company of great "opportunity" for women. The woman says she is so pleased with her Wal-Mart career that she urged her daughter to apply for a job with the company. Now, both mother and daughter are enthusiastic members of the "Wal-Mart family."

Had the nation's favorite retailer shed its famously conservative, music-censoring image and embraced a women's-rights agenda? Not yet. These ads were part of a concerted attempt by the company to stave off a public relations disaster personified by a woman who looks a little like the happy, nameless department manager in the commercial but whose experience working for Wal-Mart was exactly the opposite.

That woman was Betty Dukes, a 54-year-old Wal-Mart worker in Pittsburg, California. Like her TV counterpart, she is African American, and she came to Wal-Mart hoping to get ahead. First hired by the company in 1994 as a $5-per-hour part-time cashier, Dukes was an eager employee with a sincere admiration for the "visionary spirit" of the chain's founder, Sam Walton. A year later, with excellent performance reviews, she was given a merit pay raise and a full-time job. Two years later, after being promoted to the position of customer-service manager—an hourly, not salaried, position, despite the "manager" designation—she began encountering

harsh discrimination from her superiors: she was, she says, denied the training she needed in order to advance further; meanwhile, that training was given to male employees, many of whom were younger than Dukes and newer to the company.

When Dukes complained about this discrimination, managers got back at her by writing her up for minor offenses like returning late from breaks—offenses routinely committed by her white and male coworkers for which they were never punished, she says. When she kept complaining, she was denied a promotion and finally was demoted back to her cashier job. She went to the Wal-Mart district office to complain, but the company did nothing. Not only was the demotion humiliating, but the cashier job offered fewer hours and lower hourly pay, and being demoted disqualified Dukes from other promotions—a worker who has recently been disciplined can't be promoted. Even when she was once again eligible for promotion, four new management positions were filled by men. They hadn't been posted, which meant that other women besides Dukes were sidelined.

Before working for Wal-Mart, Dukes didn't know the meaning of the term "sex discrimination." She had long assumed it referred to something sexual—"like Bill Clinton, or Anita Hill"—and as a woman of traditional morality, figured it had nothing to do with her. "As a single person, I don't think much about sex or sexual activity," she explains.[1] "I didn't want to go around hollering 'sex'!" Of her treatment at Wal-Mart, she says, "I knew it was unfair." Until she heard that other women were bringing a lawsuit against the company, however, she didn't know it was illegal. She suspects she's not alone in her lack of sophistication about this issue: "A lot of women are being sex-discriminated against every day and don't know it."

Dukes, who still works full-time for Wal-Mart, is now a greeter rather than a cashier, which is not a promotion. "Greeters," as every Wal-Mart shopper knows, are the cheerful, friendly people—usually seniors—who welcome you as you walk in the door and, as you leave, thank you for shopping at Wal-Mart. Dukes's wages are still so low that in addition to her full-time Wal-Mart job she has had to take a second job working as a part-time house cleaner and companion to an elderly woman in exchange for rent. Without that arrangement Dukes would be unable to get by, even though she has no dependents and spends most of her free time in her Baptist church, where she is an associate minister.

In late spring 2000, Dukes filed a claim against the company. She soon learned that her experiences were not unique; they were shared by women all over the country. The following year she became the lead plaintiff in *Dukes v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.*, a would-be class-action suit representing 1.6 million women who are past and present employees of the company. Filed in the U.S. District Court in San Francisco in June 2001, the suit charges Wal-Mart with discriminating against women in promotions, pay, and job assignments, in violation of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which protects workers from discrimination on the basis of sex, race, religion, or national origin. Plaintiffs' attorneys filed a motion for class certification on April 28, 2003. Wal-Mart's guilt or innocence was not at issue at that stage. The question was, would the judge find enough evidence of possible systematic discrimination for the case to proceed as a class action. On June 22, 2004, the answer was a re-

sounding yes: the judge certified the class, and *Dukes v. Wal-Mart* became the largest civil rights class-action suit in history. . . .

Rhonda Harper, a former vice president of marketing at Sam's Club, also gave provocative testimony about sexism in the corporate culture of Wal-Mart. Harper's salary was in the mid–200s, so hers was a more privileged perspective than that of most witnesses and plaintiffs, but one that offers great insight into the culture at the top and the attitudes of those who have the power to set the tone—and an example—for everyone else in the company. Harper was reluctant to testify because of an agreement she'd signed with the company, but the judge ruled that her obligation to obey a subpoena took precedence over her agreement with Wal-Mart. "The judge said I had to tell the truth, so here I am," she testified in her deposition.

Setting Wal-Mart in its context, Harper, who worked at headquarters, described Bentonville and the northwest Arkansas region as "a good ole boy environment. It is a culture that has been stable for many, many years. There hasn't been, as you would have in cosmopolitan areas, as much integration, diversity, differences expressed. Many of the people have lived there their entire lives." Many Wal-Mart officers "grew up together, went to school together, started out in the company together . . . which is one of the reasons why they're so successful, because it is a very close environment there."

Harper, who has an MBA from Emory University, is clearly sophisticated and well educated compared to many Wal-Mart executives, most of whom have not spent much time working in other companies or acquiring formal education. Harper and others have suggested that the company's rural, small-town northwest Arkansas roots may well contribute to the sexism in Wal-Mart's corporate culture. Yet the problem shouldn't be blamed on "the South," as many observers have been tempted to do. Gender disparities exist in Wal-Mart stores in every region. Besides, other southern companies have done relatively well in promoting women to the corporate level: according to Catalyst, an organization that tracks women's progress in the business world, 16.2 percent of the corporate officers in companies based in the South are women (the national average is 15.7 percent).

Rhonda Harper had tremendous promise, and Wal-Mart knew it. Before coming to Sam's Club she had worked in brand management at Kraft and in marketing at the American Red Cross, Nabisco, Vanity Fair Intimates, and other companies. Her name was known in the industry, and her award-winning work was widely recognized. She was recruited by Wal-Mart in 2000, and in March 2001, Wal-Mart's then CEO, Lee Scott, told her she was being groomed to become head of marketing for all of Wal-Mart within a few years.

In sharp contrast with many of the male executives at the company, Harper is articulate, her mind lively and critical. After a series of company-sponsored intelligence tests that was conducted by Personnel Decisions International (PDI), a Texas-based company, she was told she scored "in the top handful of [Wal-Mart] employees," including individuals at the highest levels—the CEO, for example—and was in the 99th percentile for people in any company holding a position similar to hers. After the PDI tests in late summer 2001, she says she was told by Dale

Thompson, the vice president of PDI, "You could be the one," meaning she could eventually become the CEO of Wal-Mart.

Despite Harper's obvious potential, she was never able to succeed at Wal-Mart. Eventually, after being repeatedly reprimanded and reminded of the importance of "fitting in better with the Wal-Mart culture," in late 2001 she had a meeting which she describes as "abrupt . . . I remember Tom Grimm [then president and CEO of Sam's Club] looking at me and saying, 'Rhonda, it's over.' . . . And I think that might have been the only thing he said." She was fired less than two months after the PDI consultant had said she might become the first female CEO of the company. (Since leaving Wal-Mart, she has moved to Marietta, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta, and started her own marketing company, which made a profit in its very first year.)

Under questioning by plaintiffs' lawyers, Harper described behavior she witnessed at Wal-Mart. "In some cases it struck me as insensitive to individuals," she testified, particularly individuals who were women. "I found that somewhat ironic in a culture that was predicated on 'Respect for the Individual.'" Many hourly workers echoed Harper's observation. A black woman from Ohio who feels she suffered race and sex discrimination at Wal-Mart (she is not a plaintiff) said, "They always going on about respect for the individual. Where's it at?"

Wal-Mart's in-house training is overseen by the Walton Institute, based in Bentonville. Harper testified that in one training session at the Walton Institute she heard a store manager explain why there were no female managers in his store. Owing to child-care problems and the long hours required of managers, "He didn't think they would be able to perform the responsibilities Wal-Mart demanded." He thought that "they didn't fundamentally want it." As a mother with an extremely successful career, Harper found it unlikely that most women would be unable or unwilling to work management jobs simply because of child-care responsibilities.

Other attitudes Harper described were more ludicrous: "It wouldn't be abnormal" for senior management to refer to women working in the stores as "little Janie-Qs" and "girls."[4] She noted that "Janie-Q" was a "pet name for consumers as well as associates." Despite her objections, use of the term continued. Harper added dryly, "I believe . . . there would be some in the organization who would classify it as a term of endearment."

In a photo in a January 2001 issue of *Wally World*, the company newsletter, distributed to Wal-Mart workers, Jim Haworth, then the executive vice president of operations for Sam's Club, was shown sitting in a chair in the shape of a leopard-skin-covered spike heel. The photo was taken at a December 2000 holiday party for store employees, a party Harper remembered well. On another occasion, Harper saw Haworth onstage surrounded by women, some of whom were Wal-Mart associates, who were dancing and singing. Women were lining up to have their picture taken with Haworth—a ritual that was, according to Harper, very much part of company culture: "It was done year after year." (Haworth was promoted in July 2001 to executive vice president of operations for all of Wal-Mart.)

Harper also bristled at some of the recreation she was expected to take part in as a Wal-Mart executive, activities that she felt reflected the macho culture of Wal-Mart. One event she participated in was a quail-hunting expedition at the Walton

family ranch in Texas, in February 2001. "Evidently that's the best time for quail she remarked during her deposition. "Who knew?" Harper was one of only thre women on the excursion, which was for about 30 of Wal-Mart's top officers.

The quail-hunting trip has been a cherished ritual in Wal-Mart culture since th company's founding. Sam Walton loved to hunt, and his family was accustomed t hosting Wal-Mart officers—many of whom hunted in northwest Arkansas—at th Texas ranch. "I thought it odd," Harper testified. "Actually, I thought it was a jok when they told me about it, quite frankly." During her fifteen months as a Wal-Mai officer, it was the company's only executive retreat. As she anticipated the excursior "What went through my mind was, a ninety-thousand-acre ranch in Texas, yo know, owned by the world's richest family, I'm thinking day spa." But just before the left, she realized her colleagues hadn't been kidding about the hunting. "They wer serious, they were talking about snake guards . . . guns and shooting and all sorts o fun stuff." At the last minute, she went out and bought some hunting gear, realizin that "this isn't a corporate retreat. We're really going to go out there and kill things.

Julie Donovan, a *Dukes* witness, in an affidavit described a similarly macho cul ture at Wal-Mart headquarters. In 1996, when Donovan worked in the head office a a senior buyer, Ray Hobbs, a senior vice president, told Donovan that he was sur prised that she, a woman, was in such a high position at Wal-Mart, and that it woul be better if she were home raising children. During a performance evaluation dur ing which they discussed her next move with the company, he "assured" her she shouldn't worry about trying to advance her career with Wal-Mart because "you aren't a part of the boy's club, and you should raise a family and stay in the kitchen." Hobbs also told her she did not play well with the "boys" at the company, and that because she didn't hunt or fish, she probably wouldn't advance any further. Infor mally—not through any written complaint or official use of the Open Door policy— she complained to her supervisor about the way she was being treated. He admonished her to "have a thick skin." Donovan also testified that in order to gain her male colleagues' respect, she had to focus conversations on hunting or sports.

"To be effective as an officer you need to be able to become part of the infor mal network," Rhonda Harper stated in her deposition, but this was difficult at Wal-Mart. "I didn't go fishing with them. I wondered if I had been able to do some of those things if I might have assimilated more quickly into the organization."

In 1995, Robert Reich, the Clinton administration's labor secretary, in the report of the Labor Department's Glass Ceiling Commission, *A Solid Investment Making Full Use of the Nation's Capital*, mentioned the lack of access to "informal networks of communication" as a major barrier to women's advancement in corporate America. As examples of this, he cited casual conversations conducted during hunting trips, golf games, and "other pursuits not usually undertaken by women and people of color." The camaraderie established through these kinds of activities "can give white males a commanding advantage." Even in the advertising industry, where women and gay men are plentiful, shooting weekends are not unknown. As recently as June 2001—the month Dukes filed her suit—the *New York Times*, in an article exploring barriers to women in corporate America, reported that women's exclusion from casual social and business relationships remained a problem and

"the importance of male-bonding events, like golf, can't be overestimated" in solidifying males' advantages in the corporate world.[5] Golf remains controversial, as the fury over the Augusta Golf Club's sexist policies showed; part of the reason women's groups were so agitated by the Augusta Golf Club's exclusion of women is that golf is still a popular bonding activity for businesspeople.

Rhonda Harper testified that once, when she was traveling with a male officer, some store managers asked what it was like being his secretary. This was probably a misunderstanding and not a heinous act of sexism, but it indicates that a female Wal-Mart executive was highly unusual and, more disturbingly, for some in the company still unimaginable. On other business trips, Harper recalled, "I would be the only [woman] on the corporate jet. . . .The pilots would say, you know, 'Welcome gentlemen,' . . . I again don't know if you would classify that as sexist or not, but clearly there I was—I was sitting there." No one ever corrected the pilots or said, "We're not all gentlemen here." Harper recalls, "I would sometimes just go, 'And hello, ladies,' and there would be laughter, you know."

She described a sales conference, attended by thousands of store managers, with a football theme: "It was a very, in my opinion, traditionally male theme." She brought that up with her colleagues at headquarters, not because she thought it was sexist but because all that male bonding seemed like a distraction from focusing on the relationship with customers—the overwhelming majority of whom are women.

Of the particularly distasteful incidents at Wal-Mart—the "high heel thing"; Haworth's posing for pictures with a bevy of women; the airplane moment; the secretary comment; the references to Janie-Qs (all of which Harper discussed with her fellow officers)—Harper said she believed these incidents were "inappropriate or at the very least unusual," judging by her experience working for several other large corporations. It was "behavior that I would not anticipate existing in a corporate environment . . . I had never seen it before." She thought it was a real possibility that her Wal-Mart colleagues didn't know this kind of thing was inappropriate. "It is my nature to be very candid and direct," she testified. "I felt the need to bring [these concerns] forward because many of the folks who were at the officer level at Wal-Mart had never worked anywhere else."

Complaining about these incidents didn't help Harper make friends at Wal-Mart; neither did what many perceived as her haughty attitude. She just didn't fit in. Harper describes Wal-Mart headquarters as a cliquish atmosphere: "Either you're Wal-Mart, or you're everything else in the world." She attributes her problems at the company to the fact that she was an "outsider" who didn't conform to "the norm in the culture." The plaintiffs' lawyers asked Harper repeatedly whether her difficulties with Wal-Mart culture had to do with her gender; was she "different" because she was a woman? Harper was very careful not to exaggerate, not to blame her difficulties at the company solely on gender, and brought up examples of men who were also outsiders and had trouble fitting into Wal-Mart's insular culture. Eventually, however, she said, "I believe it has to do with who I am as a human being and one of my characteristics is that I am a woman." Her former boss, Celia Swanson, the Sam's Club executive vice president for membership, marketing, and administration—at that time the only woman among Wal-Mart's senior officers—

put it more bluntly, testifying in her deposition that Harper hadn't learned "how work around and manage the male ego."

The atmosphere Rhonda Harper describes thrives in a much cruder form Wal-Mart's middle-management level and in the stores. Many managers show a appalling lack of respect for women, which sends a clear message about their pla in the company. Melissa Howard, a store manager in Decatur, Indiana, testified th at the annual meeting in Fayetteville, male managers would go out to strip clubs t gether and that it was "an accepted part of the culture." Once, when a group of di trict and store managers were making a 16-hour drive from Decatur to Bentonvil for a meeting (typical of Wal-Mart's tightfistedness, the company wouldn't sprin for plane tickets for this 700-mile journey), the men stopped the car to take a brea in a strip club. Howard didn't want to go in, but it was nighttime and she didn't thin it would be safe to sit in the parking lot alone. At one point, one of the strippers ap proached Howard, and Kevin Washburn, a district manager, offered the dancer $5 to go "out back" and have a "threesome" with himself and a shocked Howard. O the way home from Bentonville, the men stopped at two more strip clubs whil Howard and the one other female manager sat in the back and repeatedly asked t be taken back to the motel.

Howard's district manager sometimes held lunch meetings at Hooters restau rants. Howard, the only female store manager in her district, was "forced to liste to lots of discussion among the male managers about the waitresses' breasts an butts and which sexual experiences they would like to have with them. While it wa humiliating to be there, I was reluctant to complain."

Hooters is an Atlanta-based nationwide sports bar and restaurant chain i which the customers, 70 percent of whom are male, are waited on by attractive an scantily clad "Hooters Girls" who wear color-coordinated sporty outfits displayin porn-star cleavage and shorts that are as brief as shorts can be without being un derwear. The company's website features aphorisms such as "Men have differen faces so you can tell them apart," and boasts that since the company's founding, "the Hooters concept has undergone very little change . . . understandable given the tremendous success the Hooters concept has enjoyed." The Hooters "concept" is women with big breasts, wearing very little clothing, serving men.

Actually, the company argues that its "concept" is *feminist*. The company waxes eloquent on Hooters Girls' "right to use their natural female sex appeal to earn a living. . . .To Hooters, the women's rights movement is important because it guarantees women have the right to choose their own careers, be it a Supreme Court justice or Hooters Girl."

Hooters is quite right that women have a right to use their sexuality to earn a living. But it is preposterous for any other company to hold business meetings at the restaurant chain, and it is easy to imagine the mortification of a female manager attempting to be taken seriously by—or simply to fit in with—her male colleagues as they ogle Hooters Girls, watch sports on TV, and bask comfortably in a made-for-males environment.

Probably many companies employ middle-management goofballs who don't realize that this sort of thing isn't acceptable. But Wal-Mart's vice president for

human resources should. When *Dukes* lawyers took Coleman Peterson's deposition and asked him what he thought of the practices Melissa Howard described, he was quick to insist that get-togethers at strip clubs on company time were not "something Wal-Mart culture would support and believe is okay." Asked about business meetings at Hooters, however, Peterson, the chief human resources officer of the world's largest workforce, reserved judgment. "It is conceivable in some small town that Hooters is kind of like the restaurant *du jour*, okay," he testified, "and that it is viewed as one of the most elegant and really one of the best places to meet and eat." In other words, it is perfectly okay to subject female employees to Hooters if it is the best restaurant in town. Joe Sellers later scoffed at this notion: "I don't even know if they serve food."

In Peterson's defense, Hooters does serve food. Indeed, one of its mottoes is "You can sell the sizzle, but you have to deliver the steak." Mike McNeil, a Hooters spokesman, did not think a Hooters restaurant would be an outlandish spot for an informal business meeting, although it has no conference or banquet rooms. But even McNeil seemed amused when told about Peterson's assertion that Hooters was sometimes the "most elegant and best place" around. "I was not aware of that [testimony]," he said, "but bless him whoever said that. We appreciate that. It's kinda like, in the eye of the beholder." Pausing to consider the possibilities, the flack said, "Wal-Mart is in a lot of small towns. So if you were in some place like Muskegon, Michigan, or Dothan, Alabama, that statement might actually be true."

The "knuckleheads" Melissa Howard worked with are hardly unique. At least the strippers she encountered weren't on store property. Angela Horton, a team leader in a Sam's Club in Onalaska, Wisconsin, testified that a company-sanctioned "Spirit Committee" hired a stripper to perform at her store's mandatory morning employee meeting, to celebrate a male store manager's birthday. The women who complained about this were called "a bunch of whiners."

In the stores, as at headquarters, "informal networks" pose obstacles to women's advancement. As an assistant manager in Indiana, Howard was often left to run the store by herself while the general manager went off and socialized with male employees—playing pool, going out to lunch, drinking together, and going to the race track. Other women have complained that managers play golf with male employees and don't befriend women or ask them to lunch. (Wal-Mart's anti-fraternization rules do prohibit managers from socializing with workers they supervise, but many workers say that this rule is often violated, to the advantage of men.) Numerous women have testified that an "old boy network" of friendships among men in the stores helps men to be promoted more quickly than women. . . .

One of Wal-Mart's own internal reports showed that stereotypes about women are pervasive in the company and have been a huge barrier for women seeking promotions. Many women at Wal-Mart have been told explicitly that they are not being promoted because they are women and that "women don't belong in management." When Tamara Zambrun applied for a job as a team lead (the hourly position that is frequently considered a feeder for salaried management) in Mountain Home, Idaho, her store manager, Skip Davis, said to her, "Being a female, what makes you more qualified for this job than a male employee?" Davis told her that

her male coworkers might have trouble being supervised by a woman. "For over hour," Zambrun testified in her class-member statement, "Mr. Davis required me justify why he should give the promotion to a female instead of a male." Then promoted a man instead.

Women describe an atmosphere of "hostility toward women in managemen When Nancy Hom's director of operations called the Club he would ask to speak a manager, even if she answered the phone. When Hom reminded him that she w a manager, rather than apologizing or admitting his mistake he'd ask her to ha "one of the guys" return his call. A male assistant manager told her that the regi was operated as "a good old boys club" and that he "wasn't complaining." Ma managers hung out together and excluded female managers.

Working in a Cullman, Alabama, store in the early 1990s, Tammy Hall heard male store manager tell a male assistant manager that women should be "at hon with a bun in the oven" or "barefoot and pregnant." Many managers also belie that women who *are* pregnant or have children shouldn't be in management. Th jewelry department head in Ohio says her manager, not wanting to promote he constantly cited her family obligations. "It was always something. He said, 'I don think you should go into management because you have small children.' I was lik 'don't make any decisions for me.'" Similarly, when Earwood was the personn manager (an hourly position) in Urbana, Ohio, her store manager, Jim Phelps, aske her to add a curious stipulation to the support manager's job description. Since th support manager had to work evenings and weekends, he said, "It can't be anybod who has kids." Earwood, a single mother who had worked as a Wal-Mart suppor manager when her daughter was three years old, took offense.

Melissa Howard, the Bluffton, Indiana, store manager who had had to attend business meetings in the dignified environs of Hooters, was running a new Super center set to make a profit in its first year. In May, however, Kevin Washburn, the district manager who had invited Howard to step out for a threesome with an exotic dancer, was replaced by John Waters, who now asked her to step down and accept a demotion. The reason? A woman shouldn't be running a Wal-Mart store; Howard needed to be at home raising her daughter. Waters seemed to want to send a discouraging message to other women at the store, Howard observed in her class-member statement.

> He instructed me to step down "voluntarily" and to tell my employees at the morning meeting that having this new Supercenter was too stressful for a single parent and that I just needed to take a break. In other words, it was not enough for Mr. Waters to just get rid of me. I believe that he also wanted me to send a strong signal to other women that the job was not right for any mother. He told me to step down voluntarily, or he would have me out within four to six weeks—he would make my life "hell." I had no choice but to step down.

Another obstacle to women's advancement at Wal-Mart is the persistent segregation of departments. More than 90 percent of workers selling clothing at Wal-Mart are women, whereas less than 33 percent of those selling hardware or sporting

goods are women. The gendered nature of different areas of the store is amusingly underscored by terminology like "hardlines" and "softlines." "Softlines" are clothing; "hardlines" are hardware, electronics, and other manly objects. Employees see the male-dominated departments as better stepping stones for promotion, but it's not clear that they are good stepping stones for women. According to Brad Seligman, they still don't have enough data to know. "Male" departments may just look like better routes to promotion because they have more men in them, and men are more likely than women to be promoted at Wal-Mart.

Aside from the stepping-stone issue, however, the departmental segregation often prevents women from getting experience that is often required for advancement. Dukes had been told that more floor experience was a prerequisite for promotion, but when she sought to gain additional experience she was denied the opportunity to work in "male" departments like hardware, despite having worked in hardware stores before she came to Wal-Mart. "I can mix a can of paint," she told reporters just after filing the suit in June 2001. "I want the chance to do it."[6] She shakes her head, still exasperated. "You don't have to have a man in those areas, by no means!"

And, as many plaintiffs have pointed out, segregation has a demoralizing, discouraging effect on women, sending the message that they are second-rate. Cleo Page was told by her manager that she needed to manage a bigger department before she could qualify for management training, and she hoped to manage the sporting goods department. But the manager discouraged her from applying, saying that "a man would feel more comfortable" buying sporting goods from a man. "She made it known in a store meeting not to apply if you are not a guy," says Page. "She didn't want a woman in there." That's when "I felt like I was just not going to make it."

Segregation of departments lets women know that they are not valued as much as men, and creates an environment that discourages them from seeking further promotions. In such a climate, says Dukes, "You are not going to run up to your district manager telling him you want to be promoted. You just don't have that zest and confidence." Sheila Hall asked repeatedly for a job in the hardware department of the Conway, Arkansas, store, and she finally got it when she pointed out that she'd already have it if she had "a penis between her legs"—yet as the only woman in the department she was taunted constantly by her coworkers and supervisors, who insisted that hardware was a "man's job." She eventually quit, feeling that in this environment she would never be promoted.

Editors' Note: *Notes for this reading can be found in the original source.*

CHAPTER 19

Learning Silence

PEGGY ORENSTEIN

Weston, California, sits at the far reaches of the San Francisco Bay Area. The drive from the city takes one through a series of bedroom communities, carefully planned idylls in which, as the miles roll by, the tax brackets leap upward, the politics swing right, and the people fade to white. But Weston is different: once an oddly matched blend of country folk and chemical plant workers, this is an old town, the kind of place where people still gather curbside under the bunting-swathed lampposts of Maple Street to watch the Fourth of July parade. Many of the businesses in Weston's center—doughnut shops, ladies' clothing stores, a few hard drinkers' bars, and picked-over antiquaries—haven't changed hands in over thirty years. There are a few fern bars and one café serving espresso here, but if people want high tone, they go to the city.

Not that Weston has remained suspended in time. The ramshackle houses downtown may still be populated by the families of mechanics, plant workers, and, in shoddy apartment complexes, a small community of working poor, but the hills that ring the town's edge have been gobbled up by tract homes where young professionals have hunkered down—a safe distance from urban ills—to raise their children. There's even a clean, modern supermarket by the freeway, built expressly for the new suburbanites, with a multiplex cinema across the street for their occasional evenings out.

The only place where Weston's two populations converge regularly is at Weston Middle School, a crumbling Spanish-style edifice just up the street from the post office, city hall, and, more important to the student body, a McDonald's. This is the town's sole middle school, and as such, it serves nearly nine hundred students a year from this disparate population. The bumper stickers on the cars dropping off the children reflect the mix: Toyota vans advertising the local NPR affiliate pull up behind rusty pickups that proclaim: "My wife said if I buy another gun she'll divorce me; God, I'll miss her!" There is also a staunch Christian population here—Mormons, Seventh-Day Adventists, and other, less austere sects whose cars remind other residents that "Jesus Loves You!"