

FEBRUARY 2023



DEI NEWSLETTER

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gender roles

by: Stacy Mellema

Times have changed since I was born and raised in the 1970's, but gender stereotypes are still alive and well both in our day-to-day personal lives and the world around us.

As a woman in business, I have experienced these stereotypes throughout my career. As a society, we are molded by them, without even knowing it.

Here is my story.

My childhood was what I would consider stable, fun, and full of people who loved me. My parents both worked full-time jobs; my dad owned his own business, my mother worked in the banking industry from the time she turned 18. Fortunately, my grandparents lived directly behind our home and were my daycare from the time I was an infant. My grandfather was a police officer by day and volunteer fireman by night. My grandmother's career was raising children – four of her own – and then grandchildren. Some of my earliest memories as a kid were learning to iron my grandfather's hankies and make coffee for him so it would be hot and ready when he got home from work. My brother was not exempt from the teachings my grandma provided and often practiced his hand at "domestic skills" – washing dishes, ironing, and cleaning. There was fairness in the allocation of duties and equality in the assignments.

As a teen and then young adult, I cut grass, changed tires, checked the oil in my car as I was expected to do. I was taught these things alongside my brother. My parents worked as a team to accomplish the household chores – both inside and outside.

My dad was responsible for dinner on Tuesdays and Thursdays all year long. My mom rototilled the garden. Looking back, I realize my parents were molding my ideas of gender roles from a very young age.

I worked hard to earn my degree and started a great job after college with a regional public accounting firm in downtown Grand Rapids. I was ambitious, learned all I could and rapidly advanced. I was on my way up the ladder, even surpassing some of my male counterparts. So, imagine my surprise when I was asked early in my career by a manager when I would be resigning my position to have children? A few years later, I was asked when I would reduce my hours to make sure my "house was in order" while my husband navigated his career. Imagine my shock and dismay when asked more than a decade into my career, after working several 12-hour days in a row, who was feeding my children while I was at work? I would love to say these situations were in jest or even fictional, but unfortunately, they were not. They are my lived experiences as a woman in public accounting.

As the newest female shareholder to Hungerford Nichols, I continue to experience disbelief at some of the reactions. A few of my more traditional-valued family and friends have started conversations with "Congratulations, but....". But... who will take care of your kids? But... who will make dinner and clean your house? But... what about your husband and his career? One well-meaning woman commented, "I don't know why you'd want to work that hard as a woman." Is it surprising that these are the responses I received? Based on my upbringing, my answer is yes. Based on what we, as a society, see every day, maybe, maybe not.

On a daily basis, we see polarized examples of traditional gender roles. In our day-to-day living, we are subjected to so many examples of gender stereotypes. We see as many as 5,000 advertisements every day, sometimes 500 before breakfast. "Inequalities based on gender are so interwoven into the fabric and traditions of our society that they often seem invisible," says Women's Health Victoria in 2018. As unfortunate as it is, there remains truth in that statement today.

In 2021, it was estimated that 98% of cleaning product commercials still featured female actresses in the leading role. As recently as 2022, Match.com released a video portraying a heterosexual couple in their home showing the woman doing all sorts of tasks for the man, with simultaneous audio explaining her intentions. "I will make him his protein drink after the gym," the voiceover says. "I always make sure he has a fresh towel and socks after his shower. I put the football game on for him every evening. Find your "keeper" via Match." Thankfully, the ad was pulled shortly after it aired due to public scrutiny.

But one only has to look to pop culture to see the change in female personas in our programming. Characters like Meredith Grey, Miranda Bailey and Christina Yang of ER, Olivia Benson of Law & Order, Annalise Keating of How To Get Away With Murder, and, of course, Beth Dutton of Yellowstone have emerged as strong female leads that change the narrative of the traditional gender role. Working moms with stay-at-home partners and superheroes of varying gender and races are gracing our screens in incredible numbers.

While it may seem a contradiction of sorts for both of these roles to exist in our world, it may also provide freedom – freedom to choose and redefine these roles for ourselves as women. For me, I choose to live in a space that combines both traditional and non-traditional roles. Yes, I'm a businesswoman working a tough schedule and have a lot of responsibilities. Yes, my husband does the grocery shopping and, if truth be told, most of the cooking. Yes, I dote on my family and am responsible for all the family traditions and most of the chaos. Yes, I schedule doctor visits, do the laundry and (occasionally) will iron a shirt to two. I move seamlessly between the two worlds on certain days as if there are no hurdles between the roles, no boundaries, no societal "rules". Other days, it's as though two universes collide, and the tasks associated with both roles seem overwhelming. But the joy for me is in the choice. I strive to live a life of example for women who think they can't play both roles. It can be done. It isn't always easy, but it is always worth it.

But the joy for me is in the choice. I strive to live a life of example for women who think they can't play both roles. It can be done. It isn't always easy, but it is always worth it.

smash the label

by: Hillary Miller

Castle Lager is a South African beer brand built around community and togetherness. The brand was deservedly praised when they launched their #SmashtheLabel campaign aimed toward confronting acts of prejudice and discrimination driven by differences. Part of this campaign was to sponsor a study in honor of one of the country's national holidays, titled the Day of Reconciliation. Held annually on December 16, the holiday celebrates the end of apartheid, with the intention of fostering reconciliation and national unity for the country. The apartheid was a racial segregation system that existed throughout South Africa.

The participants of this study (all strangers to each other) were asked to describe an individual pictured on a photo placed before them. No background information or story was provided, just the photo itself. Copy and paste the Vimeo link below to watch the study unfold. Examples of labels given include the following:

Young, well-dressed black woman. Gold Digger.

Young man with tattoos. Gangster.

Older white man with beard. Racist.

Little did they know, they would then meet those individuals pictured on those photos face to face and describe to them why they labeled them in this way and learn the truth about their professions and values.

"When we sit down and get to know each other over a beer, we see that there is much more to a person than their 'label.'" – Ogilvy South Africa

Young, well-dressed black woman. Gold Digger. Owns her own

Young man with tattoos. Gangster. Flight attendant.

Older white man with beard. Racist. Advocate.

A few observations and discussion points:

- Have you made negative judgements about someone before getting to know them?
- Are you more apt to make negative judgements about someone rather than positive ones?
- Are people 'hiding behind closed doors' more entitled/protected to share negative labels rather than if they were to speak to that person directly?
- How can you help these stereotypical labels from perpetuating?

See The People, Not the Labels.

Watch the study on Vimeo (2 minutes): <https://vimeo.com/308309275>

More on the Smash the Label Campaign: <https://www.ogilvy.co.za/our-work/castle-lager-smashthelabel>



February

Black History Month

February 18: Maha Shivratri

February 20: World Day of Social Justice

February 21: Mardi Gras

February 22: Ash Wednesday

March

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

Irish-American Heritage Month

Women's History Month

March 6: Purim & Makha Bucha Day

March 8: International Women's Day & Holi

March 13: Deaf History Month begins

March 13-19: Neurodiversity Celebration Week

March 15: Equal Pay Day

March 17: St. Patrick's Day

March 21: International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (United Nations)

March 22: Ramadan begins

March 25: International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery

March 31: International Transgender Day of Visibility

April

Arab-American Awareness Month

Autism Awareness Month

Diversity Month

April 2: Palm Sunday & World Autism Awareness Day

April 5: Passover begins

April 7: World Health Day & Good Friday

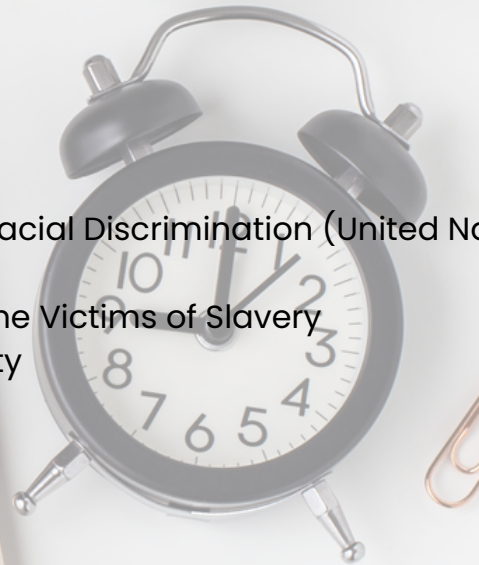
April 9: Easter

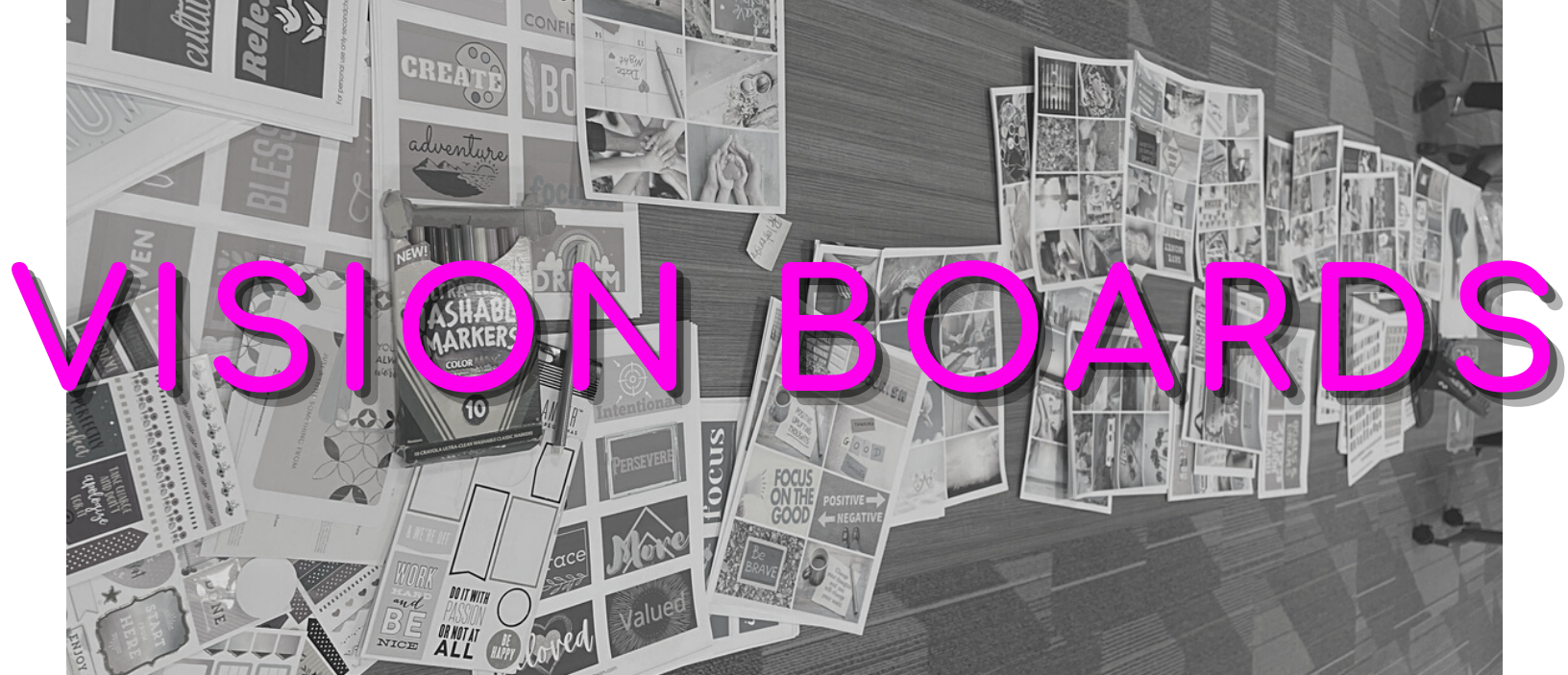
April 14: Vaisakhi

April 15: Deaf History Month ends

April 21-22: Eid al Fitr

April 21: Ramadan ends





Our women's affinity group kicked off the year with intentionality. We brought in Barb Camp, a life coach and mother to Adriane Schrauben to help guide our group on selecting a "word of the year" and creating a vision board to help us on our dream/goal journey.

Barb shared a quote, "We don't get what we want in life, we get what we picture." By taking the time to think about what we want to focus on this year, we are able to keep those goals in front of us every day. When the vision is clear, the results will appear.



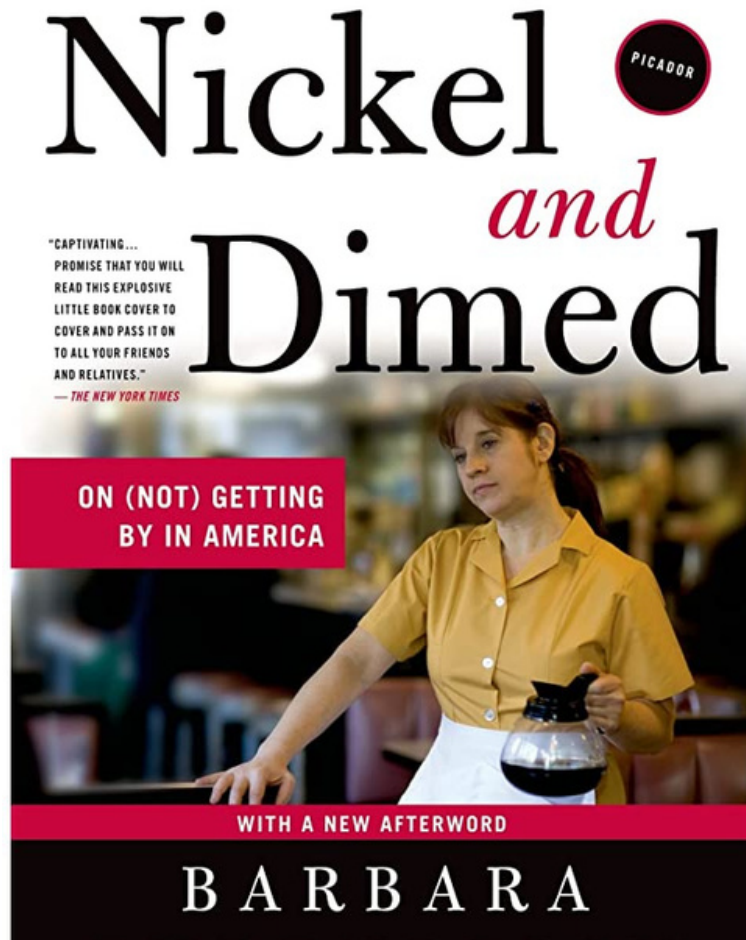
We have a schedule of events throughout the year that are thoughtful, engaging, and fun. Check your email for the HN Meeting and Event calendar.

Our next event is on February 22 as we will read and discuss the book, "Fair Play."

by: Heather Halligan



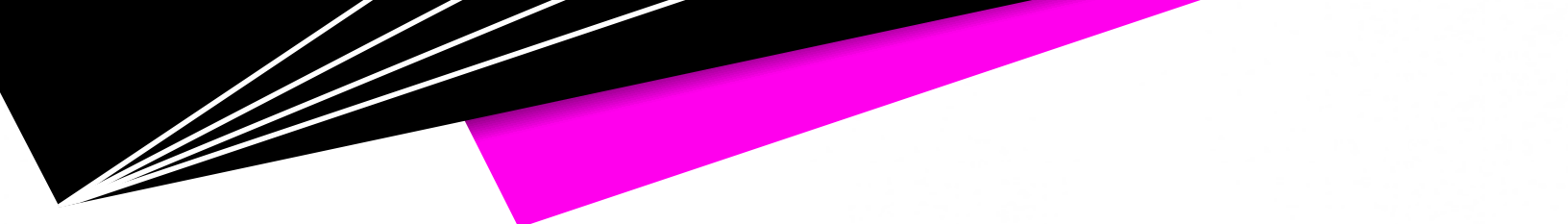
Women's Affinity Group



book review

by: Steve Triezenberg

In her book, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, Barbara Ehrenreich seeks to discover the true challenges those who work minimum-wage jobs face in getting by in America. Barbara is a regular contributor to *The Atlantic* and *Harper's* and has certainly developed her storytelling skills during her career. In seeking to understand how low-wage earners accomplish day-to-day life, she sheds her upper-class, professional life for a six-month stint in low-wage jobs. We first read about her working as a waitress in the Florida Keys, then secondly, she moves to Maine to work in housekeeping, and finally moves to Minnesota to work at Walmart. In each of these jobs she vividly illustrates the unique challenges faced when one is working such a job, when compared to the need to find a place to live, food for dinner, and appropriate transportation.



It is noteworthy that this book was written around the year 1999, so it is a bit dated, but since that time the number of families living below the poverty line (currently \$25,704 for a family of four) in the U.S. has increased from approximately 6.4 million families in 2000 to 7.8 million in 2020. So, the spirit of Barbara's experiment remains valid. Some trends have improved, though others certainly have not. While there are dozens of details that were very insightful from her story, here are several that resonated from my reading:

- Many condos, apartments, and trailers required at least one month's rent as security deposit to live there. Every job in Barbara's story delayed the worker's first paycheck at least two-weeks (and in some cases, until the worker quit the job). Therefore, many such workers have a tremendously difficult time securing reasonable housing.
- A footnote in the book describes a 2000 study illustrating how America's workers should pay no more than 30% of their income for shelter. The study also indicated America's poor spends over 59% on shelter, which is not sustainable. Additionally, the study reported there were approximately 36 affordable rental units per 100 unit seekers. In light of recent inflation, housing prices, and low construction since 2008, what might be the current ratio?
- Barbara had to work two jobs and generally 14 hours per day in order to afford a half single wide trailer that was reasonably close to her job. As she accounted for her wages and spending, over half went for rent, and the majority of the rest was spent on food. In her last job in Minneapolis, the cost of living was so high that she had to live in a loud motel with no refrigerator. If one has no refrigerator, there is a low ability to eat healthy and prepare meals. Therefore, she had to live on fast food and sugary cereal.
- During her job in housekeeping, there were regular occasions where the homeowners were in the home while she cleaned. These stories illustrated how these particular homeowners were degrading, condescending, and did not view the housekeepers as equal humans. Additionally, some of Barbara's co-cleaners had ongoing physical ailments but could not take days off or maintain costly health insurance to achieve proper healing.

The book was a page-turner, but certainly not in an uplifting way. Barbara's goal was to communicate how common these jobs are, how her co-workers (mainly women) are amazing people that are full of grace and gumption, and how our nation's working poor are often overlooked. In the spirit of DEI Equality, some takeaways may include:

- The waitress, housekeeping, and retail worker jobs have existed for decades, and they will continue to exist, along with other low-wage jobs. As we encounter those in these positions, may we remember that each has a story, ambition, and at least as much dignity as ourselves. Be a generous tipper at a restaurant; and not just at Chop House but also Applebee's. Leave extra cash on the pillow in the hotel.
- Support companies, restaurants, and stores that have proven reputations for worker equity.
- Volunteer time and contribute generously to our West Michigan organizations that assist in job training, clothing assistance, and housing. Several examples are United Way, Mel Trotter, Family Promise, and North Kent Connect.
- Listen a bit more intently for updates and opportunities to serve the ALICE (Asset Limited; Income Constrained; Employed) population.

May we do our best to see others with grace and equality in our communities.