



# The 8 Blind Spots Between Men and Women at Work

Barbara Annis & John Gray, Ph.D.

“I’m tired of feeling left out  
and having my ideas ignored.”

“Nowadays, I have to be so careful  
in what I say and do.”

“Asking questions doesn’t mean  
I’m not a team player!”

“Being the best person for the job  
means little here.”

Have you ever felt this way, or heard these or similar comments  
expressed by coworkers and friends?

Maybe these scenarios describe you or someone you know:

Teresa graduated top of her class in mechanical engineering and worked her way up to a decent-paying, managerial position with one of the top three computer companies. Teresa loves collaborating with her team and has a style of leadership that gets results by building alliances and developing those relationships.

Being the only woman on her team of twenty and lead by an executive team and board comprised entirely of men, Teresa is trying though failing to fit in and have her voice heard. Although she was accustomed to being “the only woman,” in her college years, it wasn’t as competitive as this. She feels she doesn’t stand a chance for advancement. Tired of being undervalued and overlooked, Teresa is searching for a company and culture that recognizes and values her contribution.

Shaun is a ‘get-it-done’ person and feels he’s at his best when he’s given the time to focus on an issue, find the best solution, and take action. His performance reviews have always been stellar, but the new reporting structure has suddenly altered the familiarity and comfortableness of Shaun’s world. He’s once before reported to a woman team leader, and that didn’t go so well.

Shaun already had short patience for team meetings and debating decisions, and now there are even more meetings and less time to do his own work. At the last staff meeting, he thinks he said something that wasn't taken so well by his new boss but he's not exactly sure what it was he said or how it was interpreted. He feels he was misunderstood. Shaun is looking to transfer to a different department and is now looking outside the company for the first time since joining. He feels as if he's hit a wall and can't see his way through or around it.

Teresa and Shaun are real people, and they're not alone. There are many others just like them who are stuck, or failing, or quitting—not because they're incapable, but because they haven't figured out how to work effectively with the other gender.

We all want to work more successfully with each other, but we're unsure how. We don't understand why the women or men we work with communicate, solve problems, make decisions, and deal with stress the way they do. Women and men may see the same things, but they do so through a completely different set of lenses, very often thinking and talking past each other—and often not knowing it.

In our numeric pursuit of gender equality under the banner of “We're all the same,” we've painted ourselves into a corner. The notion that women and men are no different from each other, can and should think and act the same, have the same goals, and set out to achieve their goals

in the same fashion has blinded us to the reality that we are different—and meant to be different! This is precisely why we're experiencing such slow progress in gender diversity and inclusiveness and not the breakthrough we expected by now.

In trying to fix women to act less as themselves and more like men, and chastising men for behaving as themselves, we've only succeeded in perpetuating the cycle of miscommunication and misunderstanding between the sexes. We're not being confidently authentic with each other and even less so with ourselves.

## Recognizing Our Blind Spots

When driving a car, our side and rear view mirrors don't often reveal everything we need to see. We find we have blind spots and have to turn our head so as to not hit something. We don't resist the fact that we have blind spots or deny that they exist; we accept their presence and make every effort to improve our vision. We do it to be less of a hazard to others and to ourselves.

Quite similar are the obstructions that prevent men and women from seeing the other gender in the clearest possible light—misperceptions we call Gender Blind Spots.

Men and women often have difficulty reading the other gender's intentions and understanding their behavior. We're often challenged when communicating our ideas or needs. We repeatedly

don't know how to listen or what to listen for. We're trying our best to work together effectively and find greater happiness in our personal lives but we're coming up short in many ways.

We're unsure how to best work with the women and men in the offices and cubes alongside ours, or in the conference rooms, or on our teams, or at lunch, or with the person in the corner office. We feel we have to be careful in what we say and, at times, we don't even know what to say. Our challenge at work isn't in our ability to do our job; it's in our inability to authentically engage with the other gender.

Considering the implications in our personal lives, at our workplace, and for society as a whole, it's time for a shift in our thinking. We need to step up to a new level of conversation and begin to include each other and participate with each other more successfully. We need a better understanding of why men and women think and act as they do. We need to see the strength in the complement of those differences. We need to be more gender-intelligent.

*“ Our challenge at work isn't in our ability to do our job; it's in our inability to authentically engage with the other gender.*

# Growing Our Gender Intelligence

Gender Intelligence is an understanding of and appreciation for the natural characteristics that distinguish men and women—beyond the physical and cultural—to include attitudinal and behavioral differences. It’s an awareness that “gender” is a function of both nature and nurture—first informed by nature, then shaped by family, culture, and society.

Only by first understanding the nature of our differences can we gain insight into how to nurture and make the most of those differences, and how to find success and fulfillment within ourselves and in our relationships with others.

Women in the workplace often feel undervalued or unappreciated, that men often misread their intentions, misinterpret their actions, and fail to recognize their strengths. It’s not that men don’t want to understand, they simply don’t know how to read and react to women’s thoughts and actions. The same holds true for women. They often misinterpret men’s intentions and behaviors because they don’t understand what compels men to think and act as they do.

Gender Intelligence enables women and men to understand each other’s way of thinking and acting. It exposes and eliminates our blind spots. It lifts us to a new level of conversation and encourages us to include and work with each other more confidently, more comfortably, and more willingly.

## So What Are Our Gender Blind Spots?

Our new book, *Work with Me*, reveals, for the first time, survey results of over 100,000 quantitative and qualitative statements from men and women across the globe, captured through a powerful, custom-designed diagnostic survey instrument that depicts the candid attitudes of men and women at work.

Emerging from our data are Eight Gender Blind Spots—the leading false assumptions and mistaken opinions that men and women have of each other and, in many ways, believe of themselves!

## Do Men Need to Change?

Women are not as content as men are in today's workplace. From the boardroom to the conference room to the call center, women often feel they're being treated and valued differently than men. They often feel excluded from formal meetings and informal events—missed opportunities for advancement. During meetings, they often feel their ideas are ignored or dismissed.

Men, on the other hand, are generally comfortable with the rules of engagement in the workplace. His blind spot is in not being aware of how his behavior can have bearing and impact on the women on his team or his peers, while her blind spot is in assuming his actions are intentional.

## Do Men Appreciate Women?

How we wish to be appreciated is often reflected in the way we express our appreciation. That is, we tend to give as we would hope to receive. For this reason, it's important to understand how men feel appreciated to understand why they don't often correctly express their appreciation to women.

Men's blind spot is in assuming that women want to be shown the same appreciation for the same reasons men do. Our data suggests otherwise. Recognition for results alone tends to work great for most men, but not necessarily for many women.

## Are Women Being Excluded?

Women often state that their voices are not heard in meetings and their questions or ideas overlooked or disregarded unless restated by a male colleague. What also makes women feel excluded includes non-collaborative meetings, quick decision-making, informal men-only networks, and mentoring and sponsoring programs with men primarily supporting and promoting other men.

Men want to find ways to work with women and are often adamant that their intention is not to exclude. They simply default to ways that feel natural and comfortable for themselves. When mentoring, they identify with other men, and avoid mentoring women for fear of misperceptions.

# Do Men Have to Walk on Eggshells With Women?

Examples of situations in which men say they feel the most uncomfortable with women and take extra care not to offend or provoke an emotional reaction include:

- Bringing up topics during meetings that may raise too many questions or delay decisions.
- Giving feedback during performance reviews.
- Careless language including sexual innuendos, off-color jokes, and profanity.
- Changing rules of civility such as opening doors, lifting luggage, or buying lunch.

Women don't believe that men need to walk on eggshells around them. They wish men didn't feel that way, and are often surprised that it occurs to the degree with which it does.

*“How we wish to be appreciated is often reflected in the way we express our appreciation. That is, we tend to give as we would hope to receive.”*

## Do Women Ask Too Many Questions?

Men often say that women ask too many questions during meetings, questions that tend to slow down progress on action items and delay decision-making.

Women generally acknowledge that they do ask more questions than men, but that their questions are their best contribution, intended to stimulate an exchange of ideas, discover what's important, and arrive at a best possible outcome.

There are many reasons why women ask more questions, reasons that go beyond a need for information. Women often ask questions to build consensus, show concern for others, offer feedback, or ask for support—all outside men's frame of reference.

## Do Men Listen?

Women most often admit that their number one issue is that men don't listen. The most common ways that indicate to a woman that a man is not listening is when he ignores what she's saying, interrupts her in mid-sentence with a solution, presumes to know what she's feeling (or should be feeling), or becomes easily distracted while she's talking.

Men are usually surprised when they hear this. The greater insight is that men do listen, but not always in ways that communicate to a woman that she's being heard.

## Are Women Too Emotional?

Yes, women are emotional, and tend to express feelings more often and more openly than men do, and not just frustration, anger, sadness, but joy and passion as well, something men often misread.

The reality is that men are often just as emotional as women but tend to suppress their feelings through instinct and cultural influence. When under moderate stress, women will tend to share while men seek solitude. Only when under high stress will men share their feelings with others, and then only with people closest to them. And in the most stressful situations, men can burst out or lose control of their emotions.

## Are Men Insensitive?

Could it be that men don't know what they don't know? That men can't be sensitive to what they're not sensing to begin with?

Women often read and react to people and environments differently than men do, and tend to bring more memory and empathy to virtually every relation and situation. Men are generally not as attentive. That doesn't necessarily mean they aren't observant or don't necessarily care. Men simply tend to take in less, and focus only on those things directly related to an objective.

The insight for men is to show more sensitivity, but for many men, that's easier said than done. When under stress, men tend to become singularly focused, ignoring most everything else and try to resolve the issue. The insight for women is to be more aware so not take offense at something men unwittingly do, or repeat doing out of inattentiveness.

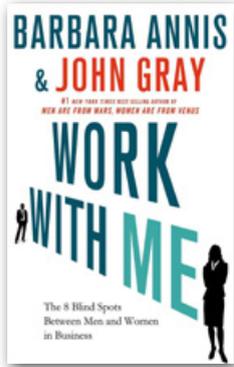
## Resolving Our Blind Spots

Greater understanding can only lead to a greater appreciation for each other and the realization that our gender differences are intended to complement, not compete. We need to learn to stop the blame game, to see each other for the first time without blinders, to value each other, to want to work together, and to find greater success and satisfaction at work and in our personal life.

You'll discover that once you're on this journey, you'll grow more actively conscious of others, become better listeners, and learn to communicate your intentions with greater clarity. You'll often find yourself asking the question, "Am I being gender-intelligent about this?"

**You'll grow in your Gender Intelligence, and engage more confidently, comfortably, and competently with others. 📖**

# Info



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**ABOUT THE AUTHORS** | Barbara Annis is a world-renowned expert on Gender Intelligence® and inclusive leadership, advocating the value and practice of Gender Intelligence in over 60 Fortune 500 companies, governments, and numerous organizations across the globe. Her book, *Same Words, Different Language* is a seminal contribution to the new conversation between men and women at work. **John Gray, Ph.D.** is the leading relationship expert in the world and best-selling relationship author of all time. His book, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, is ranked by USA Today as one of the top 10 most influential books over the last 25 years.

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