

## Raise Your Hands: A Reaction to *Lean In*

Melanie Friese

Modern society continues to strive for gender equality in 2014, but it is not there yet. This research will add to the conversation of gender equality by showcasing how college students view their successful female peers differently than their successful male peers. After a review of the existing research, it became obvious that the majority of research involving gender and college revolves around the fields of study that each gender prefers to receive an education in and the gender of the professor's influence on the classroom. Little information productively examines perceptions that college students have of their successful female peers.

Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*, a book in which Sandberg describes her experiences becoming COO of Facebook while providing commentary on the situation of gender equality in the workforce in the United States of America in 2013, inspired this research. The study explores differences in perception based on the gender of collegiate peers. In the book, she cites various studies that support her main arguments (Sandberg, 2013). Sandberg cites the Heidi/Howard case study, which was done by Professors Kathleen L. McGinn and Nicole Tempest at Harvard University. These two professors wrote a case study about a real-life entrepreneur named Heidi Roizen. In the document, they describe her story of success and how she became a capitalist by relying on her expansive professional and personal network acquired by her extroverted personality. Professors McGinn and Tempest had a group of students read Heidi Roizen's story and another group read Howard Roizen's story; the only difference between the two stories was the gender of the protagonist (McGinn, 2010). After reading the story, the students rated Howard and Heidi on their success and achievements and their appeal as colleagues such as if they would want to work either for or with him or her. The

students rated both of them equally in terms of accomplishments; however, they thought Howard was likeable man while Heidi was an unfriendly woman (McGinn, 2010). This leads to Sandberg's conclusion that when a man is successful, he is well liked. When a woman does well, people like her less.

For the purposes of this study, all of the factors had to be brought down to the college level. The subject was changed from a woman well into her career to a woman in her college career and the question about working with the person was changed to working on a group project with the person. The hypothesis stated that students would display more negativity towards the female and they would like the male. The population that participated in the study consisted of students from Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU). Since this university has 3,000 enrolled undergraduate students on campus, the researcher decided to compose the story of a fictional student that attended SNHU. If the story was about a real person, the researcher feared that it would tamper with the results of the experiment. With a similar design as the Heidi/Howard study, one other document was created about a man named Andrew Reynolds. The only difference between Amber Reynolds and Andrew Reynolds is the gender of the main character. The following story was written about a woman/man named Amber/Andrew Reynolds:

At a young age, Amber/Andrew Reynolds knew that she/he would want to attend college to study business by the way she/he treated her/his possessions, Pokémon trading cards. Reynolds would keep an inventory of all of her/his Pokémon cards by their price, size, color, type, and weight. Sometimes she/he would bargain with students in kindergarten to trade their Pokémon cards for snacks and the best spots to play during recess. Her/his entrepreneurial spirit bloomed before she/he even began the second grade.

By her/his senior year of high school, Reynolds was President of her/his school's chapter of the National Honor Society, valedictorian of her/his class of 900 students, captain of the girls'/boys' soccer team, and a part-time writer for Business Weekly magazine. With all of her/his credentials, she/he received a full scholarship to Southern New Hampshire University to double major in business and accounting. Her/his dedication and hard work had finally paid off when she/he decided to attend SNHU and begin her/his promising future.

Outgoing and enthusiastic by nature, Reynolds was genuinely passionate about meeting her/his fellow peers and professors. The first day of class she/he dressed to impress and came prepared with questions and discussion points to participate in class conversations. Some might describe her/his as a "type A" personality, but she/he just wanted to get the most out of her/his education to best prepare herself/himself for her/his career. Her/his goal for her/his first year of college was to get an internship with Dyn, a local business that provides internet performance solutions, and acquire a seat in student government.

After being labeled as one of the most promising students on campus, Reynolds was nominated to be a part of the Southern New Hampshire University Presidential Ambassadors, she/he ran for a position in student government, and applied to be an admissions student leader. She/he was accepted to all of these positions and achieved the President's List in her/his first year of college.

Her/his second year of college proved to be more than she/he could have hoped. By being a part of the Presidential Ambassadors, Reynolds met members on the university's Board of Trustees, and acquired useful networking, business savvy skills

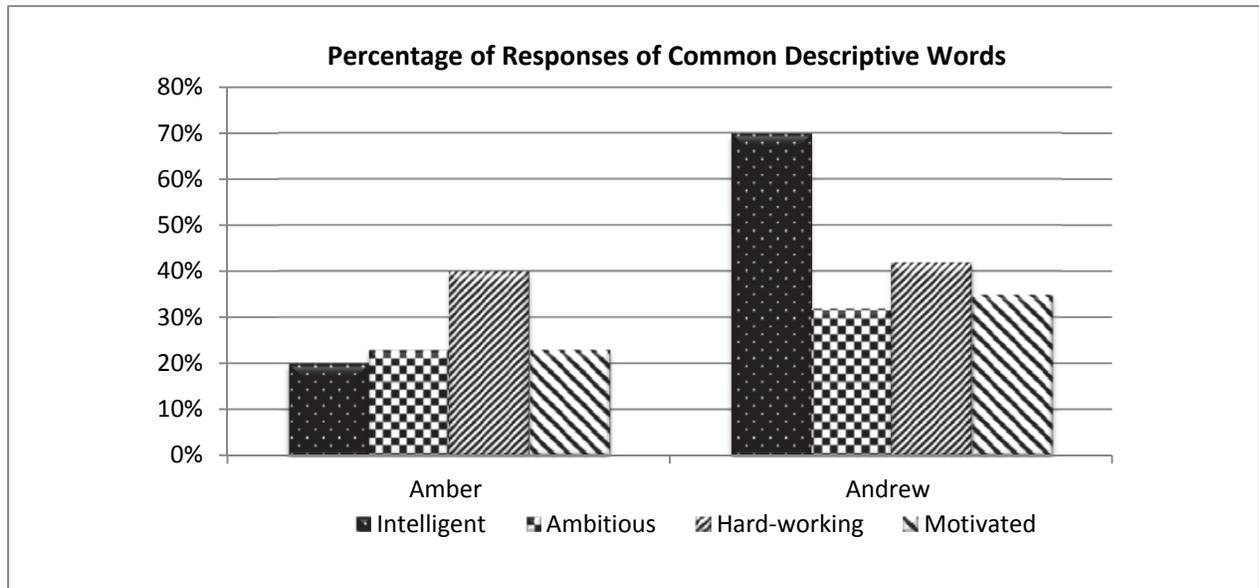
while developing meaningful relationships with ambitious students like her/his. She/he could talk her/his way through any crowd and make many powerful friends in the process.

Now, as a junior in college, she/he looks towards her/his future with confidence that she/he will achieve any goals that she/he sets for herself/himself. While she/he hopes to have a family one day, her/his career is the most important thing in her/his life right now. When she/he graduates, she/he wants to further her/his studies of business at the Harvard Business School.

Participants were randomly selected for the study from either the dining center or library on SNHU's campus in Manchester, NH. Utilizing a random number chart, a number was found to search for individual students at that specific interval to participate. Once the number was selected, the researcher counted off by every so many students that they saw sitting alone to best utilize the method of systematic random sampling. For example, if the random number was two, then every second student that the interviewer saw would be asked to participate in the study.

The participants were asked to help in a research project regarding what college students think about their successful peers; the main purpose of the study, regarding gender, was not mentioned during the interviews. After reading either the Amber or the Andrew story, the participant was asked what they thought about the person, to name five words to describe the person, and whether or not they would work with this person on a group project and to explain their reasoning. The process took about five minutes per person to complete. Overall, the participants were selected by systematic random sampling and they were given a factorial survey consisting of the previously mentioned three questions.

At the end of the experiment, 61 students had been interviewed. 31 males and 30 females had been interviewed; 16 males responded to the Andrew story, 15 females responded to the



Andrew story, 15 males responded to the Amber story, and 15 females responded to the Amber story. The same four descriptive words that were given for both of the stories were intelligent, motivated, hard-working, and ambitious (See Figure A.)

Figure A. The graph displays the common words given to describe each person in percentages.

Other positive words were given to describe both Andrew and Amber, but these were the most given words. Ambitious, hard-working, and motivated were given in about the same percentages; however, 70 percent of participants described Andrew as intelligent and only 20 percent of participants described Amber as intelligent. This was an interesting development for further research that perhaps people view intelligence differently depending on the gender of the person.

With more similarities to my thesis, the amount of negative responses to the female story surpassed that of the male story. 26 percent of male responses to Amber's story were negative and 86 percent of females responding to Amber's story were negative. In contrast, 12 percent of

male responses to Andrew were negative and 20 percent of female responses were negative. There were about 15 people per gender per story. To further explain these numbers, there were 4 negative comments given from men about Amber and 2 negative comments from men given about Andrew. For the female responses, 26 negative comments were given about Amber and only one negative comment was given about Andrew. Overall, this shows that the overwhelming majority of negative perception of the female, Amber, came from female participants.

In regards to the final question asked in the study, whether or not the participants would want to work with either Amber or Andrew, the results reflected the attitudes of the participants towards the subject. All participants of the opposite sexes were willing to work with each other. All of the men responding to Amber said yes and all of the women responding to Andrew said yes. Two men refused to work with Andrew and six women refused to work with Amber. Their reasoning for saying no gave further insight into their opinions of the person.

For Andrew, the two men both said that they thought he would take over the whole project and not let them do any of the work. For Amber, the six females did not want to work with her because she would stress them out too much and be too protective of the project. One participant stated that Amber would “make her life hell.” The female participants seemed to have a resistance to Amber’s character; whereas, the males were more concerned with the participating in the project with Andrew.

Overall, the data indicates that men are less likely to be discriminatory than women towards women. This idea could be explored in further research to determine if there is a logical causality. The scope of this study was limited to students at Southern New Hampshire University, so the findings could differ on different college campuses. The Amber/Andrew experiment proved the hypothesis true and contributed similar results as the Heidi/Howard study

demonstrating that successful undergraduate men and women are viewed as equally competent, but they are unequally likeable by their peers.

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