

*Translated by Chat cpt:*

Where men would have been admired for their assertiveness, I was portrayed as aggressive. Even my most significant successes were turned against me.

The Likeability Dilemma versus Being Less Polite

Management literature consistently advises women to be less polite, more self-assured, to take

on more challenges, and to speak openly about their achievements. However, when they do this, as I did in Soest, and behave more like men, they are often perceived as too ambitious, selfish, or aggressive.

In 2003, Harvard Business School conducted an experiment to test how men and women are perceived in the workplace. They used the case study of Heidi Roizen, a real-life entrepreneur. The case described how Heidi, with her outgoing personality and networking skills, became successful. The same story was given to two groups of students, with one difference: in the second version, Heidi was renamed Howard. When both groups were asked about their impressions, they found Heidi and Howard equally competent, which made sense since their achievements were identical. However, while Howard was seen as an appealing colleague, Heidi was labeled as "selfish" and "not someone you'd want to work with."

Research from Textio on workplace bias reveals in 2024 that organizations' highest performers are also getting the least helpful feedback. What's more, the same study also finds that women are negatively stereotyped at work up to seven times more often than men. The usual subjects are the biggest culprits. "Emotional" takes the cake with 78% of women

having been described by that term versus just 11% of men. "Unlikeable" was used to describe 56% of women versus 16% of men. "Difficult" is the most evenly spread of the negative stereotypes, with 32% of women, 21% of men, and 40% of non-binary and/or gender fluid people having been described as difficult at one point. More troubling than the unbalanced use of negative stereotypes is that the group at work who reported receiving the largest percentage of problematic feedback was high-performing women.

This data supports "tall poppy syndrome," which is a theory where those who achieve success or stand out are criticized or cut down by others. These high performers will find that their efforts and actions are more heavily scrutinized. Envy is often at the root of tall poppy syndrome, which makes one wonder if workplaces still don't want to see women shine too brightly— even if this desire is subconscious.

I, too, was repeatedly portrayed as aggressive, emotional, vulgar and that my tone was inappropriate. Here's just one example: when an investor decided, for strategic reasons, to withhold due payments to secure significant concessions worth millions, I firmly opposed this investor and ensured that the WMS received the payments without making any concessions, a monumental success and undoubtedly a highlight of my tenure. I am certain that a man would have been admired and celebrated for his assertiveness. However, I earned a reputation for being aggressive.

Similar situations arose when I negotiated purchase agreements, one after another, to secure the necessary land prices to meet the (supervisory) council's demand for cost neutrality in the projects. They even turned my greatest successes against me.

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