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NEXT STEP

WOMEN ACING CAREERS DEEMED UNFIT FOR THEM



ILLUSTRATION: EHSANUR RAZA RONNY

An average Bangladeshi woman is constantly told how to live her life. Whenever she attempts something daring or unconventional, she is told to play it safe and ordinary. Below are the stories of some extraordinary women who boldly defied stereotypes, scaled new heights, and set hopeful examples for women to follow. These are stories of triumph, and insufferable inequity, and many things in between.

ESHA YOUSUF, FILM DIRECTOR AND PRODUCER

Esha joined the film industry at the age of 26. In spite of coming from a renowned cultural family, she describes this phase as the most distinctively difficult phase of her life. Outside her immediate family and friends, she found it very difficult to convey to people that she had a real job even if it wasn't a typical 9 to 5 one. Even inside the industry, she felt like people were doubtful of her abilities as a woman to pull off big projects, land them safely and make a decent profit on top of that. The initial stares and glares at work slowly faded as the evidence of her worth became crystal clear, yet, gestures of indifference and disrespect continued to thrive. She has had male seniors put their hands just inches away from her face because she was truthful and right. She returned the favour later by explaining to the products of our horribly chauvinistic society, just how insulting it is to have someone do that to you. Nothing could pin her down as she went ahead and produced extraordinary films like Aynabaji (2016) and Guerilla (2011). Filmmaking gives her the freedom to express, experience and explore, and in spite of all stigma around it, there's absolutely nothing else she would rather do.

MARIA CHAKRABORTY, KARATE SENSEI AND JUDGE

Maria initially started learning Karate as a

fitness routine to help battle her sinus problem. Despite neighbours and acquaintances actively discouraging her, she became a black belt and competed in the district, divisional and national rounds and proceeded to win the Gold Medal in the International Championship. She started her career as a Karate Coach. Today, she is the Vice President of the Karate Committee and the Associate Director (Physical Education) at Asian University for Women. Outside university, she organises Karate Competitions where in spite of working harder than most men, her male seniors often refer to her as a "female referee," discrediting all her bigger titles and contributions that surpass her gender. She feels vastly underappreciated, but she derives fulfilment and motivation from her students' accomplishments. On a different note, she says that the very few women who choose this profession need to do house work even after an exhausting day of intense physical exertion, unlike men whose partners help them out. This along with some of the structural inefficiencies and constraints, discourage women to choose this career. Maria aspires to inspire women in pursuing their dreams.

SIFFAT SARWAR, FOUNDER AND COO AT SHOPUP

Siffat Sarwar started her career as a banker.

Soon she got frustrated at the menial nature of the work that allowed no personal expression. Moreover, she noticed that most women with older children quitted even if they were earning much more than their husbands. Society doesn't allow stay-at-home fathers even if they are willing. So, in her quest of a more meaningful and sustainable career, Siffat co-founded ShopUp, an e-commerce platform that caters to small and micro entrepreneurs. Her ex-colleagues, convinced that she was going to mess up her career, strongly advocated against it. Even her family discouraged her, wanting her to opt for something more "secure." She too was quite doubtful about her capabilities, like most women are made to be, from years of social conditioning. It is this social conditioning that teaches women to deprioritise themselves and their careers, resulting in the depressingly low numbers of women leaders. Siffat went for it anyway. Even after making it to the very top, she often finds it challenging to hit the perfect balance between getting people to like her and obey her without being labelled a "b*tch." However, she can see substantial positive impacts of her work on the lives of her many clients. Empowering entrepreneurs by helping them break barriers reconfirms her self-belief and motivates her to keep fighting.

BRISTY SIKDER, SOFTWARE ENGINEER

Bristy Sikder studied Computer Science in

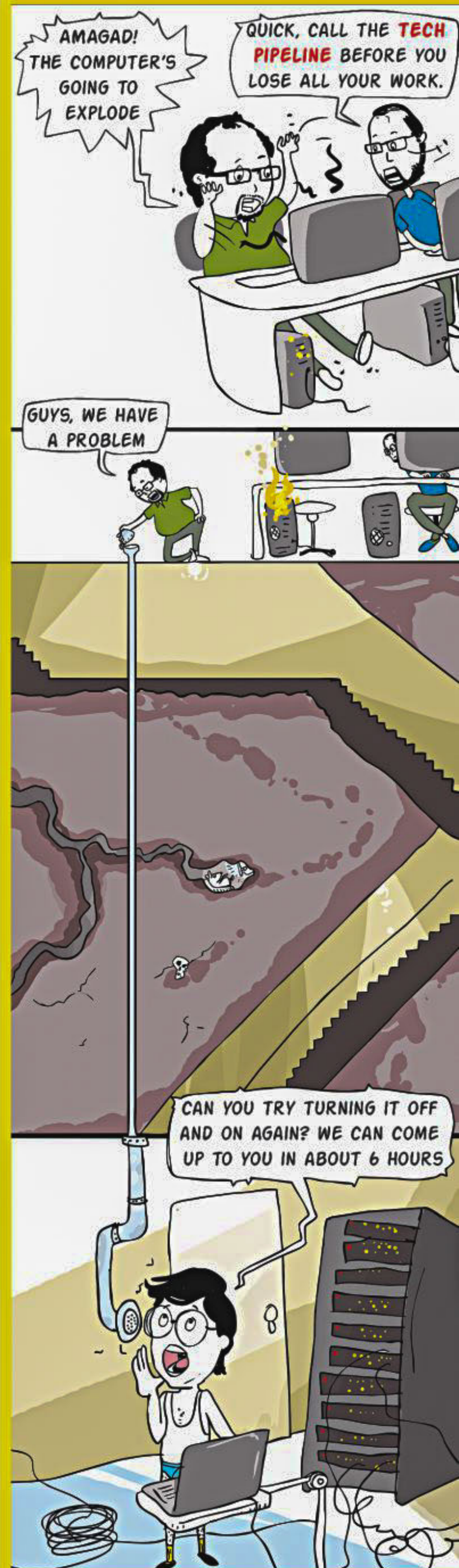
MIT. When she got her acceptance, many advised her to choose something more "feminine" like medical science instead. Nevertheless, she followed her passion and went through with her decision. She found that women composed only 10-20% of her class, and even there, the general idea was that women should study soft CS like User Interfaces, instead of more hard-core CS like systems or theory. While doing her internships at Google, Quora and Yugabyte, she discovered that the female to male ratio there was even worse. She was the only woman in Yugabyte, a start-up of almost 30 people. She says the reason behind this underrepresentation isn't a lack of ability or talent, but a constant societal pressure that destroys all budding ambitions that make women risk-averse and doubtful of their abilities. Apart from a few "guy-jokes" made during lunch that makes her uncomfortable, Bristy is moving upwards and onwards and against all odds, pursuing a solid career in hard-core CS. She will soon start working at Rubrik, one of the fastest growing start-ups at Silicon Valley led by Google and Facebook engineers.

SYEDA ADIBA ARIF

Adiba is a junior at IBA, DU. Reach her at adibaarif.3@gmail.com.

THE BOSSMAN

BY E. RAZA RONNY



Making a DIFFERENCE

Bangladesh is rapidly moving towards middle income status by 2021. Our businesses definitely offer immense opportunities for the growing economy and this diversity needs a stage for the stories untold. See Bangladesh make its mark on the global map as Making a Difference brings you our proudest success stories from across the country.

How to handle gender bias in the office

In 2017, Harvard Business Review conducted a research on a company where women comprise only 20% of senior roles. Unsurprisingly, they found that men and women's work patterns and performances were indistinguishable. Yet women weren't advancing whereas men were. Conclusion? There exist implicit biases and unconscious tendencies to favour men over women. Solution? It's not enough for women to just compete and show they're capable; attitudes must change, and women must take initiative.

Talk to someone

You can either confront the person being biased, or relay your situation to a trusted supervisor or a member of your human resources department. Determine the best person to approach who has enough control to aid you.

Keep records

Keep records of your communication, if possible, with other co-workers, including your boss. Should the need come, you will have protected yourself and can give proof of any inappropriate behaviour. Having evidence of what goes on between you and your co-workers will help give you some control over any situation that might arise.

Propose an informative session

A workshop or a large group session can help, even if it's just by getting the issue of gender bias out there in the first place. Being aware and making aware of gender bias is the first step toward correcting it.

Assert your position

Emphasising your strengths and

the value they have is effective in defusing negative perception. Show them that your work is no less than theirs. Band together Finding other strong women within your workplace is very important. It's highly likely that they have had common experiences, and you can share strategies for dealing with them. In times, they can even get you out of a bind.

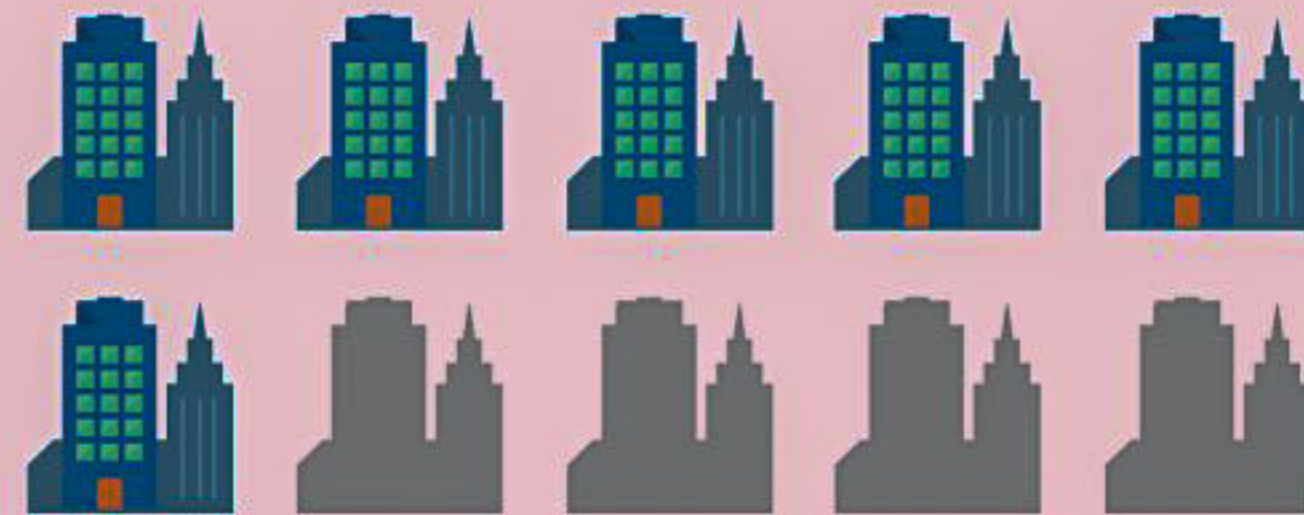
If you're a business owner...

Teach all of your personnel and supervisors what constitutes as gender discrimination and inequality. Train them how to identify both the implicit and explicit signs. Knowing about it is only the first step; they must also be taught to how to deal with it and prevent it from happening again in the future.

SHABIBA BINTE HABIB

Shabiba is a senior at BRAC University. Reach her at shabibabh1995@gmail.com.

5 shocking statistics on gender bias in the workplace



Only 6 out of 10 businesses in G7 countries have women in senior management positions.

30%

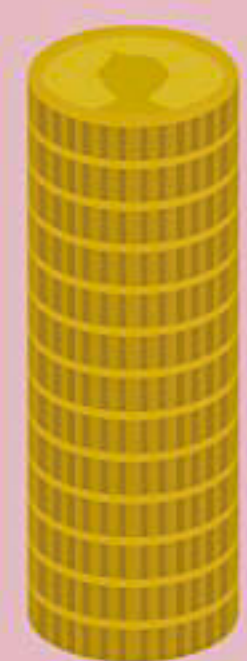
less chance of women participating in the labor force than men

60%

women work in the service sector, a commonly gender stereotyped profession

6.4%

female CEOs in Fortune 500 companies



Men earn \$21,000 on average around the world



Women earn \$11,000 on average around the world