Preface

One of the first things I knew about myself was that I was going to college. At age 5 I knew my name, my address, my telephone number, and that I was college-bound. I had no idea what college was, but I knew I was going. My parents had not gone to college. My father had had neither the interest nor the means. But he wanted a college education for his children. My mother had had the interest, but not the psychological means. She had won a one-year scholarship but her father would not allow her to accept it—it would have meant living away from home in another state. My mother saw a college education for me as essential.

I resented on my mother's behalf the injustice that she had suffered. I resented, though she did not seem to, her subservient role in the household: it was inexcusable that she was at the beck and call of my grandfather, my father, my brother, and me. But I never failed to avail myself of her services. The only expression of my solidarity with her was my vow that my life would be different. I would get the college education she did not have. In my household I would not live a life of servitude; I would do my share of the work and no more.

My parents recognized my abilities, though they seldom praised me. They expected me to perform well in school, and I did. When I brought my report cards home they catechized me about the rare grade below "Excellent." Yet my own notion of my abilities came not from report cards, but from discussions and arguments with my parents and other adults. I felt that, if one went strictly by the merits of each case, I won. I was clearly right. The fact that the adults did not acknowledge my superiority did not cause me to doubt it. On my analysis, the adults won only because they were adults. I could hardly wait to be an adult myself, when nobody

could pull rank, and my arguments would prevail. When I was an adult everyone would have to agree that I was right if I was.

One way my parents expressed their aspirations for me was through the books they bought me. I remember a series on the childhoods of famous Americans, a number of whom were women: Jane Addams, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louisa May Alcott.[1] My mother's suggestion for my professional future was a job as librarian or schoolteacher. My father rejected those occupations as too low-paying. When I was a child he thought I should be an actress; when I was older he thought I should go into business.

At age 12 I acquired my own professional ambition. I saw the film *The Snake Pit,* and decided immediately that I would become a psychologist. I wanted to understand mental illness and help people get better. I wanted to understand how the mind worked. That general rubric—how the mind works—has covered my interests my entire life, although my research specialization became cognitive psychology, especially language acquisition, and not mental illness.

Throughout my teens I felt destined to accomplish something significant. I had no idea what that achievement might be. I just knew that I would contribute something important to the world.

In my teens I also thought about marriage. I wasn't sure if I would get married. If I did, it would be to the perfect man: someone who would be smarter than I and better than I at all the things I was good at. My perfect husband would be interested in and understand everything I had to say. He would love me completely. He would be handsome. He would be Armenian so that our children, if we had any, would be Armenian. His last name would begin with *V,* so that my initials (VVV) wouldn't change when I got married.

I had never met such a person (nor even read *Gaudy Night*). I would have agreed that the total package was highly unlikely. But I couldn't imagine marriage unless I admired and respected my husband, and could only imagine doing that if he were more intelligent than I. I also wanted *him* to admire, respect, and love *me,* and could only imagine him doing so if he were very intelligent.

In adolescence, then, I had a clear picture of my ideal future. It would consist of two things—the important psychological something I would

do with my life, plus the perfect man. And, no matter what, I would not be a servant at home, and I would not lose any arguments unless I was actually wrong. Although I was clear about the endpoint, I gave no thought to how I would get there. Other than doing well in school and going to college, I had no plans. It would all just happen.

Putting myself back into the mind of that child, I know how she would evaluate the adult me. She would judge my work as worthwhile but note severely that her aspirations have yet to be fulfilled. She would agree that J, the man I live with, meets the spirit if not the letter of all her serious requirements. She would approve of the household arrangements, but be astonished and dismayed to learn that the backing of an entire women's movement had been required to achieve that most basic form of fairness.

She would be furious about continuing to lose arguments even when she's right. She would be furious about not being listened to.

And that is the real reason I wrote this book.

From the beginning of my professional life in academia, I was aware of certain problems that seemed too petty to bother with, gnatlike. They detracted from my enjoyment but had, I thought, no major negative effect on my, or any other woman's, professional development. One common scenario went like this. I made a comment during a group discussion. The comment was ignored. A little later someone else made the same comment as if it were being made for the first time. The comment was discussed by the group.

What made it hard to get a handle on this problem was its variability. It didn't happen *every* time I or another woman made a comment. It didn't happen *only* to women. It wasn't *always* a man who restated the comment. Perhaps I simply wasn't making my points as well as I might have. The most reasonable generalization seemed to be that low-status people weren't listened to as much as high-status people, and that women tended to have lower status than men. The same thing happened to low-status men. End of story.

Until—in the early 1980s—I read a monograph called "Seeing and Evaluating People" by Geis, Carter, and Butler (1982). (That monograph was never published, but Haslett, Geis, & Carter 1992, published a book covering much of the same material.) The monograph suggested that

women were systematically evaluated less favorably than men were in achievement-related contexts and provided evidence from experiments in social psychology. What happened in professional discussions happened generally in professional life.

I read the monograph with a certain amazement. It seemed that my childhood anticipation of adulthood had failed to take gender into account. It had never occurred to me that the same argument would be received differently if made by a man than if made by a woman. It certainly had never occurred to me that the same resume would be rated more highly if a man's name rather than a woman's were at the top of the page (Fidell 1975). The monograph suggested that the two phenomena were related, that the same undervaluation of women was at work in both. The monograph inspired me to begin reading widely in social cognition, sex differences, economics, sociology, and organizational management.

I gradually began to develop my own understanding of how and why women were evaluated negatively relative to men. The analysis I formulated to explain the data I discovered affected me personally. It clarified events that formerly seemed mysterious or particular to the individuals involved. It increased my awareness of the importance of apparently trivial events. In addition to making me more observant, it helped me become more detached, more amused, and more tolerant. That is not to say that my capacity for outrage has died. There is a graph in chapter 11 that never fails to make my blood boil. But I don't take it personally.

On to the merits of the case.