

PREFACE

I was encouraged to write this book after one particular piece of my research suddenly took off at whirlwind speed, grabbing newspaper headlines around the world.¹ It was December 2016 when my co-author Tom Chang and I sat down in his office in Los Angeles and started talking about the battle for the thermostat – it seemed that women were always freezing in the office while men preferred it cold. You have probably seen women wrapped up in shawls and men sweating in their suits in your own workplace. Tom and I decided to test whether it is only comfort that gets affected by temperature, or does the performance of men and women depend on temperature too. In particular, we were eager to know how thinking – cognitive performance – changes when we vary the temperature. Tom and I are behavioral economists, so the best avenue for us to follow was patently obvious. We decided to run an experiment and find out how men and women act in different room temperatures.

We published our study in May 2019, showing that women's cognitive productivity is indeed harmed by the cold temperature while men's performance is barely affected. The results of the experiment immediately gained global attention. Suddenly, Tom and I were giving interviews to The New York Times, The Washington Post, Time magazine, CNN... you name it. Coverage of our research became the top trending article in the Atlantic: "Frigid Offices Might Be Killing Women's Productivity" – screamed the headline (and yes, in the Atlantic for a day or two the article was more popular than news about Donald Trump, which was a big deal at the time). Somewhat stunned by the international interest, I even gave a live video interview on BBC World News, barely managing to catch my breath as Tom and I went from studio to studio between TV and radio appearances. Within a couple of days, our "war for the thermostat" research had been covered in news articles in more than 60 countries (from China to Canada, Nigeria, Colombia, and even Azerbaijan and Zambia) and reached popular media such as People magazine, Cosmopolitan and even The Daily Show with Trevor Noah (in my dreams Trevor is reading this book... Anyway, thank you Trevor for the shout-out). Our temperature study was everywhere.² That is when I recognized that people were not just hungry for science, they were positively thirsting after it. They wanted evidential details of the whys and wherefores of the opposite

sexes.

After realizing just how much fascinating research can be found lying around in scientists' drawers, not reaching the broad audience outside of academic circles (only a tiny fraction of excellent research that is out there reaches you), I decided to write a book on gender differences and similarities based on science, so that I could educate as well as stimulate a wider audience.³ There is SO much knowledge in scientific journals that is tucked away from people outside of the scientific world. I sometimes think of academia as a closed community that writes letters to each other in the form of scientific publications. For example, we write a paper and after it gets cited by 50 people, it never again sees the light of day. What a waste, and what a real shame. There are so many useful insights that never reach the people who would actually be interested in seeing them. The knowledge just needs to get out there.

Books backed up with science and written in layman's terms have gained a lot of popularity in recent years. In my opinion, the main reason for this trend is that the world is becoming a very complex place and we *humans* are curious creatures who want to understand why and how things happen. Obviously, we can't all choose or want to be scientists, but regardless of our job title, *each of us* is eager to understand more about the world and its people. That's where we scientists come into play. We dissect, probe, and examine, asking the tough questions that lead to our most interesting and important scientific discoveries. This book aims at summarizing and explaining some of these fascinating discoveries. And these scientific discoveries are about us - humans. In particular, they are about whether the battle of the sexes is real or all in our minds.

We are hungry and thirsty for fascinating new insights, and the goal of this book is to sate that hunger and slake that thirst.

I really hope you enjoy reading the book as much as I have enjoyed writing it.