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LEADING PEOPLE

WHY WOMEN AREN'T CEOs ACCORDING TO WOMEN WHO ALMOST WERE

Why don't more women get that No. 1 job? . . . After years of biting their tongues, believing their ranks would swell if they simply worked hard, many senior women in business are concluding that the barriers are more deeply rooted and persistent than they wanted to believe.¹

The intersection of sex, gender, and leadership has been a topic of keen public interest and a source of debate ever since the proportion of women in management positions began to increase significantly in the second half of the 20th century. Although most topics related to sex and gender in the workplace elicit strong reactions, their linkages to leadership stimulate especially heated debate. This is because corporate leaders or managers (terms I will use interchangeably) receive an enormous amount of attention, especially in societies that place a high value on individualism rather than collectivism such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada.² In such societies, the success of organizations is attributed to the wisdom, values, and practices of their founders or current leaders. When organizations fail to achieve expected results, their leaders are the first to be blamed. Consider the issues of sex, gender, and leadership together, and it is clear why so many people from all walks of life have strong opinions about what constitutes effective leadership and who is more likely to exhibit it.

I experienced some of this heat when I participated in an online *New York Times* debate over the question, "Do women make better bosses?" I was one of six participants in this debate; the other five participants, all women, included researchers, consultants, and executives. Readers were invited to respond to the debate. More than 500 responses were received, some of which appear as follows.³

Several themes emerged in the responses. One theme was criticism of the composition of the debate panel. The panel was alternatively disparaged as “five females and one guy who wants to make his wife happy” (not knowing that my wife, Laura Graves, is also my coauthor on two chapters in this book as well as numerous other publications), “five women and one man who was formerly the Chair of the Women in Management Division of the Academy of Management” (implying that this credential provided a good basis to discredit anything I had to say), and “five women and one boomer man” (presumably after seeing my Web page photo).

Respondents tended to take strong positions on the question that was posed, writing passionately about their own experiences pro and con with female bosses, male bosses, or both. They also tended to draw conclusions about what all male bosses and all female bosses are like.

Some respondents argued that female bosses are inferior to male bosses:

I can't understand them, (so) how can I work for them?

No! As a female, I'll take the male egos any day. At least you know what to expect from a guy. Men are more level tempered. They lay it on the line. Women are egotistical BIT . . . es.

From my humble experience and that of virtually all of my business associates, women managers are more ruthless, more arbitrary, less compassionate, more sociopathic, and tend to be less knowledgeable and less involved in whatever they are doing. It seems to be all about climbing the ladder.

Other respondents argued that female bosses are superior to male bosses:

In my experience, women make better bosses. Generally, they do not have that asinine alpha male schoolyard crap baggage.

Women make better leaders when given the chance and not only lately.

As far as I can tell, women are better than men at just about anything.

A few respondents took a more neutral position on the question:

Women are no better or worse than men in general. There are only good managers and bad managers.

I have had good and bad experiences with both sexes. It completely depends upon the individual and not the sex.

Still other respondents argued that both male and female bosses leave a lot to be desired:

I have had two female bosses. Both were dishonest and manipulative. . . .
The male bosses I had were merely incompetent.

All bosses suck. This is a trick question.

As the online debate continued among readers, it turned on itself as some women criticized what they perceived as a sexist or clueless tone exhibited in many of the previous comments from men:

The vitriol with which so many male commentators have greeted this (debate) demonstrates well the obstacles that women still face in the workplace.

The outpouring of “women make the most inferior, back-stabbing, emotional, menopausal, passive-aggressive, ineffectual, lazy bosses” or “have a family” sentiment in these comments is a pretty stark picture of how overt sexism is still alive and acceptable today.

As I said, this is a heated topic!

The purpose of this chapter is to offer an update from what may be called the “sex, gender, and leadership wars.” Its approach is analogous to the poem, “The Blind Men and the Elephant,”⁴ based on a parable that originated in India in which six blind men of learning take a journey to see an elephant. The first man touches the elephant’s side and concludes it is like a wall. The second holds the elephant’s tusk and concludes it is like a spear. The third grips the elephant’s trunk and concludes it is like a snake. The fourth feels the elephant’s knee and concludes it is like a tree. The fifth grasps the elephant’s ear and concludes it is like a fan. Finally, the sixth man seizes the elephant’s tail and concludes it is like a rope. As the poem wraps up, the six men are heatedly debating the nature of the elephant, and none understands what the others have “seen.” They obviously have different ways of seeing the elephant. Each perspective provides some information about the elephant is like, but none of the perspectives conveys a full sense of what the elephant is like. All of these perspectives need to be taken into account when considering the nature of the elephant.

In this spirit, the chapter examines the intersection of sex, gender, and leadership (i.e., “the elephant”) from six different perspectives. First, it reviews individuals’ preferences for male versus female leaders in general. Second, it compares stereotypes of leaders with gender stereotypes and examines whether leader stereotypes have changed over time. Third, it explores the linkages of major leadership theories to gender stereotypes. Fourth, it examines sex differences in leader behavior and effectiveness. Fifth, it considers glass ceilings, or barriers to the attainment of top management positions by

women that were alluded to in the opening passage of the chapter. Finally, it considers what can be done to promote effective leadership by managers regardless of what their sex may be.⁵

LEADER PREFERENCES

Individuals' preferences for male versus female leaders in general may reflect their personal biases or experiences and influence their responses to actual leaders. Ever since the 1950s, the Gallup Organization has regularly asked random samples of adults in various countries, "If you were taking a new job and had your choice of a boss, would you prefer to work for a man or a woman?" Respondents could also state that the sex of their new boss would make no difference to them. Historically, all over the globe, people have tended to express a preference for a male boss over a female boss.⁶

However, according to the most recent Gallup poll results, this tendency has disappeared among American adults. A majority (55%) stated that the sex of their boss would make no difference to them, and roughly equal percentages stated that they would prefer a male boss (23%) or a female boss (21%).⁷

In the Gallup results, leader preferences differed according to the age of the person being asked. Overall, American adults younger than 35 preferred a female boss over a male boss by 14% when they expressed a preference. Younger respondents may have been more likely to prefer a female boss than older respondents because they had greater experience in working with women as peers in educational programs and jobs. These results suggest that a generational shift may be taking place in leader preferences toward a greater preference for female leaders. If leader preferences for younger respondents in the Gallup results are mirrored in future generations, a bias favoring female leaders could replace the bias that once favored male leaders as new entrants to the labor force progress in their careers.

Leader preferences also differed according to the intersection of respondents' sex and age. Women under age 50 preferred a female boss over a male boss, whereas women 50 and older were more divided. In contrast, men 50 and older preferred a male boss over a female boss, whereas men under age 50 were more divided. The finding that younger women and older men had more clear-cut leader preferences than older women and younger men, respectively, is interesting. It suggests the potential for a clash between individuals over the linkage between sex and leadership on the basis of the combination of their own sex and age.

Further, leader preferences differed according to the intersection of employed respondents' sex and the sex of their current boss. About one-third of employed respondents stated that they have a female boss. Those with a female boss preferred a female boss over a male boss when they expressed a preference, whereas those with a male boss preferred a male boss over a female boss. Due to the increased representation of women in management

over time, more employees than ever before have had a female boss. In fact, many employees have become accustomed to working for a woman, having had two or more female bosses in their careers. This trend in itself may have contributed to the shift in leader preferences over time.

Individuals' leader preferences may also be influenced by their gender identity. In a study, respondents answered the Gallup poll question and also described themselves using the Short Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI). As described in Chapter 3, respondents' BSRI self-descriptions were classified as androgynous (high in masculinity and femininity), masculine (high in masculinity and low in femininity), feminine (low in masculinity and high in femininity), or undifferentiated (low in masculinity and femininity). Consistent with the Gallup results, a majority of respondents professed no preference for the sex of their hypothetical boss. When they expressed a preference, masculine respondents were more likely to prefer a male boss and feminine respondents a female boss. In contrast, respondents who were classified as androgynous or undifferentiated were less likely to express a preference. These results suggest that the preference to work for a male or female leader is a matter of both sex and gender.⁸

LEADER STEREOTYPES

Studies of the relationships among sex, gender stereotypes, and leader stereotypes were first conducted in the 1970s. Virginia Schein compiled a list of 92 characteristics that people commonly believe distinguish between men and women, the basis for gender stereotypes. She then asked a sample of U.S. middle managers to describe how well each of the characteristics fit women in general, men in general, or successful middle managers in general. Schein hypothesized that because the vast majority of managers were men, the managerial job would be regarded as requiring personal attributes thought to be more characteristic of men than women. In support of her hypothesis, she found that both male and female middle managers believed that a successful middle manager possessed personal characteristics that more closely matched beliefs about the characteristics of men in general than those of women in general.⁹

In more recent studies, U.S. women are less inclined to view management as the domain of men. They now associate the characteristics of successful managers more equally with those of women in general and men in general. A similar pattern of results is exhibited in countries with very different national cultures, such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, China, Turkey, and Sweden: Both men and women believe that men are more similar to successful managers than women are, but men endorse such beliefs to a greater extent than women do. These results suggest that international beliefs about managers may be best expressed as **think manager—think male**, especially among men.¹⁰

Tony Butterfield (my mentor) and I have taken different approaches to the analysis of leader stereotypes in a research program that also began in the 1970s. Over time, we have periodically asked part-time MBA students in the United States, nearly all of whom work full time, and undergraduate business students to describe both themselves and a “good manager” on the BSRI. We assess individuals’ self-descriptions and good-manager descriptions on both masculinity and femininity.

When we first collected data, the proportion of women in management positions in the United States was just beginning to rise. Based on this trend, we hypothesized that a good manager would be seen as possessing similarly high levels of masculine and feminine traits, an androgynous profile. However, contrary to our hypothesis, a good manager was seen as possessing predominantly masculine characteristics by a majority of respondents in all groups, including undergraduate and part-time graduate males and females. I obtained similar results in a separate study of actual managers’ stereotypes of a good manager. That is, the idea of **think manager—think masculine** prevailed in these studies.¹¹

Since then, as we have continued to assess individuals’ good-manager descriptions, the new results have been essentially the same as the earlier results. Although the proportion of respondents from different groups that describe a manager as possessing predominantly masculine characteristics has declined somewhat over time, men and women still describe a good manager in predominantly masculine terms.¹²

Overall, in studies conducted over four decades, men and women at different career stages, including undergraduate business students preparing to enter the workplace, part-time MBA students preparing for managerial careers, and practicing managers, have described a good manager as higher in stereotypically masculine traits than stereotypically feminine traits. Further, additional evidence suggests that support for these stereotypes is strong within specific occupations such as the military (“think military leader, think masculine”¹³), athletics (“think athletic director, think masculine”¹⁴), and politics (“think U.S. president or senator, think masculine”¹⁵). Thus, managerial stereotypes continue to reflect the dual notions of think manager—think masculine and think manager—think male.

Are these leader stereotypes important? The answer to this question is a resounding yes. Leader and gender stereotypes put women at a distinct disadvantage by forcing them to deal with the perceived incongruity between the leader role and their gender role and thereby having their legitimacy as leaders questioned. If women conform to the female gender role by displaying predominantly feminine characteristics, they fail to meet the requirements of the leader stereotype. However, if women compete with men for leadership positions and conform to the leader role by displaying predominantly masculine characteristics, they fail to meet the requirements of the female gender role, which calls for feminine niceness and deference to the authority of men.

In contrast, because the leader role and the male gender role are perceived as congruent, men's legitimacy as leaders is not questioned.¹⁶

As a result of the incongruity between the leader role and the female gender role, women may be less likely to see themselves as good managers than men do. Because leader stereotypes are predominantly masculine and men tend to describe themselves as higher in masculinity and lower in femininity than women do, the correspondence between self-descriptions and good-manager descriptions has been consistently greater for men than women.¹⁷

This incongruity may affect women's pursuit of managerial careers. Women who do not see themselves as fitting the stereotype of a good manager may not develop management competencies and may be diverted from pursuing managerial careers. Those who see themselves as fitting the stereotype may be the ones who go on to graduate business programs and eventually seek managerial careers. However, when women apply for management positions, the incongruity may contribute to hostile or old-fashioned sexism directed toward women.¹⁸

When women assume leader roles, leader stereotypes may act as constraints on their behavior. Many organizations exert strong pressures on their members to conform to standards of behavior dictated by those in power. As long as men remain in the majority in top management ranks, the masculine leader stereotype is likely to prevail, and female leaders will be expected to behave like male leaders. Thus, a masculine stereotype of the good manager is self-reinforcing and inhibits the expression of femininity by women in management positions.

In addition, the mismatch between leader and gender stereotypes for women may constrain the advancement of female managers. When performance evaluations are conducted, women may receive lower ratings than men for similar levels of performance. Women may also be subjected to discrimination when decisions are made about promotions into higher leadership positions. Being competent does not ensure that a female manager will have the same amount of organizational success as her male equivalent. Barriers to women's attaining *top* management positions will be discussed at greater length later in the chapter.¹⁹

Do leader stereotypes depend on the sex composition of the management ranks? If the proportion of female managers rises more, will there be some point at which stereotypes of managers no longer agree with the masculine gender stereotype? Probably not. As discussed in Chapter 3, gender stereotypes have been generally stable over the past four decades despite considerable changes in women's and men's roles in the workplace and in society. Similarly, stereotypes of leaders have remained essentially the same despite the substantial increase in female managers during the same time period. There is little reason to believe that these stereotypes will change if even more women become managers. The upper levels of management remain a male bastion despite the overall increase in the proportion of female managers. If

stereotypes of leaders are influenced at all by sex ratios, they may be influenced most by the sex ratio of top executives.²⁰

Are stereotypes of leaders dependent on the racial and ethnic composition of the management ranks? Possibly. The vast majority of both female and male managers, especially at top management levels, are non-Hispanic Whites; women of color are the most underrepresented group at top levels. Leader stereotypes may largely reflect beliefs about the characteristics of leaders from the dominant racial and ethnic group in the managerial ranks and ignore the characteristics of leaders from other groups.²¹

How well do leader stereotypes apply to the practice of management? As noted in Chapter 3, stereotypes of all kinds tend to be durable and do not necessarily reflect current realities. Widely held stereotypes that men are better managers and better managers are masculine may not reflect what makes good managers. Instead, these stereotypes may reflect only that most managers have been men and that most men have been expected to live up to the masculine gender stereotype.

LINKAGES OF LEADERSHIP THEORIES TO GENDER STEREOTYPES

Theories of leadership go back at least as far as Machiavelli, who in *The Prince*, offered leaders the following advice:

(The question arises,) “Is it better to be loved more than feared, or feared more than loved? The reply is that one ought to be both feared and loved, but as it is difficult for the two to go together, it is much safer to be feared than loved.”²²

Note the masculine imagery in Machiavelli’s advice. Using terms with which we are by now familiar, he advises leaders to focus on dominance-oriented, agentic behaviors (associated with the masculine stereotype) to evoke fear rather than warmth-oriented, communal behaviors (associated with the feminine stereotype) to evoke love if there is a choice to be made. Of course, he was writing for princes, not princesses.

In this vein, early scholarly theories of what leaders do and what does and does not work well were based almost entirely on studies of male managers. A classic 1974 compendium of research results, Ralph Stogdill’s *Handbook of Leadership*, discovered few studies that examined female leaders exclusively or even included female leaders in their samples.²³ When female managers were present in organizations being studied, they were usually excluded from the analysis because researchers thought that their few numbers might distort the results. It was as if female managers, even though their numbers were

small, were less legitimate or less worthy of observation than male managers. Although researchers no longer exclude female managers from their samples, many of the existing theories of leadership were developed with male managers in mind. However, most theories refer to feminine and sex-neutral as well as masculine traits.

There are two distinct types of behavior that managers may use to influence the actions of their subordinates. The first type, **task style** or task accomplishment, refers to the extent to which the manager initiates and organizes work activity and defines the way work is to be done. For example, a manager who reorganizes a department, develops a description of the function of each department member, formulates department and individual goals, assigns projects, and gives details on how projects should be conducted may be considered high in task style. The second type, **interpersonal style** or maintenance of interpersonal relationships, refers to the extent to which the manager engages in activities that tend to the morale and welfare of people. For example, a manager who expresses appreciation to subordinates for work performed well, demonstrates concern about their job and work satisfaction, and tries to build their self-esteem may be considered high in interpersonal style. A manager may be high in both task and interpersonal styles, low in both, or high in one but not the other.²⁴

Managers may also exhibit different decision-making styles. A leader who exhibits a **democratic style of decision making** allows subordinates to participate in decision making, whereas a leader who exhibits an **autocratic style of decision making** discourages such participation. These are generally considered to be opposite decision-making styles.²⁵

In recent decades, transformational and transactional leadership have been the primary focus of leadership theories.²⁶ **Transformational leadership** motivates subordinates to transcend their own self-interests for the good of the group or organization by setting exceptionally high standards for performance and then developing subordinates to achieve these standards. In this way, they turn followers into leaders. Transformational leaders exhibit four types of behavior: (1) *charisma*, by displaying attributes that induce followers to view them as role models and behaviors that communicate a sense of values, purpose, and the importance of the mission; (2) *inspirational motivation*, by exuding optimism and excitement about the mission and its attainability; (3) *intellectual stimulation*, by encouraging followers to question basic assumptions and consider problems and tasks from new perspectives; and (4) *individualized consideration*, by focusing on the development and mentoring of followers as individuals and attending to their specific needs.²⁷

In contrast, **transactional leadership** focuses on clarifying the responsibilities of subordinates and then responding to how well subordinates execute their responsibilities. Transactional leaders exhibit two kinds of behavior: (1) *contingent reward*, by promising and providing suitable rewards if followers achieve their assigned objectives and (2) *management by exception*,

by intervening to correct follower performance either in anticipation of a problem or after a problem has occurred. Those who engage in active management by exception systematically monitor subordinate performance for mistakes, whereas those who engage in passive management by exception wait for subordinate difficulties to be brought to their attention before intervening. Transformational leaders may be transactional when it is necessary to achieve their goals. However, transactional leaders are seldom transformational.

Distinct from both transformational and transactional leadership is **laissez-faire leadership**. Laissez-faire leaders avoid taking responsibility for leadership altogether. Such leaders refrain from giving direction or making decisions and do not involve themselves in the development of their followers.²⁸

Several linkages may be made between gender stereotypes and leadership theories. A high propensity to exhibit task-oriented behaviors such as setting goals and initiating work activity is associated with the masculine stereotype. A high propensity to exhibit interpersonally oriented behaviors such as showing consideration toward subordinates and demonstrating concern for their satisfaction is associated with the feminine stereotype. When individuals are high in the propensity to exhibit both task-oriented and interpersonally oriented behaviors, they adopt the profile of an androgynous leader.²⁹ However, when individuals are low in the propensity to exhibit either task-oriented or interpersonally oriented behaviors, their undifferentiated profile is not associated with either the masculine or the feminine stereotype; instead, they adopt the profile of a laissez-faire leader.

Further, the autocratic style of decision making is more associated with the masculine stereotype, reflecting a greater emphasis on dominance and control over others. In contrast, the democratic style of decision making is more associated with the feminine stereotype, reflecting a greater emphasis on the involvement of others.³⁰

The transformational leadership style appears to be more congruent with the feminine than the masculine gender role, whereas the transactional leadership style appears to be more congruent with the masculine than the feminine gender role. Transformational leadership is positively associated with nurturance and agreeableness, feminine traits, and negatively associated with aggression, a masculine trait. Individualized consideration is congruent with the feminine gender role because its developmental focus reflects a high concern with relationships and the needs of others. However, both active and passive management by exception seem congruent with the masculine gender role in their focus on correcting followers' mistakes because they stress immediate task accomplishment over long-term building of relationships and favor use of the leadership position to control others. In addition, contingent reward appears to be congruent with the masculine gender role because it is primarily task oriented.³¹

Recall that leader stereotypes place a high value on masculine characteristics. Even though early leadership theories were developed when there were

far fewer women in leader roles, review of major theories does not support these stereotypes. Overall, leadership theories do not suggest that either feminine or masculine behaviors are the key to leader effectiveness.

SEX DIFFERENCES IN LEADER BEHAVIOR AND EFFECTIVENESS

Researchers have devoted a great deal of attention to sex differences in leader behavior and effectiveness. In fact so many research studies have been conducted that several meta-analyses, which synthesize evidence from different groups of studies, have been reported.

Sex differences have been examined in several types of leader behaviors. A meta-analysis of sex differences in task style, interpersonal style, and democratic versus autocratic decision-making style divided studies into three types: (1) laboratory experiments that compare the behavior of male and female leaders in group simulations; (2) assessment studies that compare the behavioral inclinations of men and women who do not currently hold leadership roles, such as business students; and (3) organizational studies that compare the actual behavior of men and women in equivalent leadership roles. As gender stereotypes would predict, women tended to be higher in interpersonal style than men but only in laboratory experiments and assessment studies. That is, this sex difference was present only for individuals who participated in laboratory experiments and for non-leaders who were assessed on how they would behave if they actually were leaders; there was no sex difference in the interpersonal style of actual managers. Contrary to gender stereotypes, men and women did not differ in task style in any type of study. However, a consistent sex difference emerges in individuals' tendencies to adopt a democratic versus autocratic style of decision making. In support of gender stereotypes, women tended to be more democratic, less autocratic leaders than men in all settings and circumstances—for actual leaders, non-leaders, and participants in laboratory experiments.³²

A meta-analysis of sex differences in transformational and transactional leadership found that female leaders are more transformational than their male counterparts. Women rated higher than men on all dimensions of transformational leadership: charisma (especially attributes that motivate pride and respect), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Women also rated higher than men on the contingent reward dimension of transactional leadership. In contrast, men rated higher than women on two dimensions of transactional leadership: active management by exception and passive management by exception. Men also rated higher than women in laissez-faire leadership.³³

A meta-analysis of the linkages of transformational and transactional leadership to leader effectiveness found that all of the dimensions of

transformational leadership and the contingent reward dimension of transactional leadership are positively associated with leader effectiveness as reflected in individual, group, and organizational performance. In contrast, passive management by exception and laissez-faire leadership are negatively associated with leader effectiveness.³⁴ Thus, these results suggest that women rate higher than men in behaviors that contribute to their effectiveness as leaders and lower than men in behaviors that detract from their effectiveness.

However, a meta-analysis on sex differences in leader effectiveness found that women and men did not differ overall in their effectiveness as leaders. Most of the studies included in this meta-analysis were conducted in organizational settings. Men were more effective than women in military settings, which are extremely male-intensive, whereas women were more effective than men in education, government, and social service settings, which are less male-intensive. Neither men nor women were more effective in business settings. Men were more effective than women when the particular leader role examined was more congruent with the male gender role and when there was a larger proportion of men as both leaders and subordinates. Further, men were more effective than women in lower-level management positions, whereas women were more effective than men in middle-level management positions. The position of middle manager is often regarded as requiring heavy use of interpersonal skills to wield influence, which would favor women according to gender stereotypes. There were not sufficient studies of men and women in top management positions to include in the meta-analysis in part because the numbers of women in such positions is so small.³⁵

Another meta-analysis focused on the source of perceptions of leader effectiveness. Overall, as in the meta-analysis reported here, there was no sex difference in perceived leader effectiveness. However, when self-ratings of leader effectiveness were examined, men rated themselves as more effective as leaders than women rated themselves. In contrast, when others' ratings of leader effectiveness (e.g., ratings by bosses, subordinates, or peers) were examined, women were rated as more effective as leaders than men. These results suggest that men may overestimate and/or women underestimate their own leader effectiveness compared with how others perceive them as leaders.³⁶

In summary, the bulk of evidence regarding sex differences in leader behavior suggests the existence of stereotypical differences. As gender stereotypes would predict, women are higher in interpersonal style than men in laboratory experiments and assessment studies (but not organizational studies), and they are higher in democratic decision making than men in all types of studies. Women are also higher than men in dimensions of transformational leadership, which are associated with the feminine stereotype, and lower than men in active and passive management by exception, which are associated with the masculine stereotype. Contrary to gender stereotypes, women are higher than men in the contingent reward dimension of transactional leadership. Women and men do not differ in task style in any type of study.

However, the stereotypical differences that were found favor women, not men. Women are higher than men in dimensions of behavior that contribute to leader effectiveness (charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and contingent reward) and lower than men in dimensions of behavior that detract from leader effectiveness (passive management by exception and laissez-faire leadership). Women also make greater use of a democratic decision-making style than men.

Studies that measure leader effectiveness find a sex similarity. However, self-ratings of leader effectiveness favor men, whereas ratings by others favor women. Also, situational factors influence whether men or women are more effective as leaders. These factors include the nature of the organizational setting and leader role, the proportions of male leaders and followers, and the managerial level of the position. As a result, some leader roles are more congenial to male leaders, whereas other leader roles are more congenial to female leaders.

Thus, the evidence clearly refutes the stereotypes that men are better leaders and that better leaders are masculine. Effective leadership today requires a combination of behaviors that are masculine (e.g., contingent reward) and feminine (e.g., individualized consideration) and the absence of other behaviors that are sex-neutral (e.g., laissez-faire leadership). Women exhibit more of the behaviors that contribute to leader effectiveness than do men. However, situations differ in whether they favor women or men as leaders.

GLASS CEILINGS

In the opening passage of the chapter, women who were in the running to become a chief executive officer (CEO) but did not quite make it reflected on what they felt had kept them from attaining the top position in corporate hierarchies. They concluded that despite their optimism earlier in their careers, barriers to their further advancement were more deeply rooted and persistent than they wanted to believe. In this section of the chapter, we review what these barriers may be.³⁷

So far, we have suggested some potential barriers to women's attainment of top management positions. For example, according to the most recent Gallup poll results, men 50 and older represent the only remaining sex-and-age group that prefers male leaders over female leaders.³⁸ Because this group also represents the vast majority of current CEOs, their leader preferences (or biases) do not bode well for women's eventually replacing them. Also, leader stereotypes that men are better managers and better managers are masculine place women at a disadvantage in advancing to top management compared to men with equivalent credentials.³⁹

The **glass ceiling** has been defined as "a transparent barrier that (keeps) women from rising above a certain level in corporations."⁴⁰ The term was first coined to refer to women's restricted access to top management levels,

although glass ceilings can exist at any managerial level. The glass ceiling metaphor characterizes (1) success as climbing to the peak of a mountain and (2) impediments to success as transparent ceilings that block or limit access to the peak for women as a group; women can see the peak, but they face greater obstacles than men as a group in attaining it. Similar metaphors include labyrinth, sticky floor, concrete ceiling, celluloid ceiling (for women in Hollywood), grass ceiling (for women in agriculture), and marble ceiling (for women in government); we will use the term “glass ceiling” because it has been the most popular metaphor to refer to barriers to women’s attaining top management positions.⁴¹

Early scholars distinguished between **person-centered explanations** for glass ceilings, which suggested that women’s traits and behaviors were less suitable than those of men for top management positions, and **situation-centered explanations**, which suggested that organizational work environments suppressed their attainment of top management positions. Characteristics of work environments that constrained women’s advancement were seen as including leader preferences and stereotypes favoring male leaders (discussed earlier in this chapter), male decision makers’ perceiving male candidates for top management positions as similar to themselves and thereby fitting their mental prototype for an ideal top executive (discussed in Chapter 4), and group dynamics directed toward “token” female members (discussed in Chapter 5).⁴²

The **opt-out revolution** is an example of a person-centered explanation for glass ceilings that received a great deal of media attention. Media reports suggested that highly educated women were “opting out” of careers that put them on the fast track for top management positions due to parenthood or other personal reasons. However, research has suggested that women aspire to managerial careers just as much as men do. When they don’t, it is because of managers’ biased evaluations of them as less career-motivated than men, which hinders their being developed for top management positions and suppresses their managerial aspirations, rather than for personal reasons. Further, a study of the intersection of sex, gender, and aspirations to top management found no sex difference in aspirations; instead, individuals with a high-masculinity gender identity aspired to top management more than those with a low-masculinity gender identity. Thus, this person-centered explanation for glass ceilings may be due more to individuals’ gender identity than their sex.⁴³

Decision makers’ perceptions of the effects of senior-level women’s versus senior-level men’s hormones is an example of a person-centered explanation that focuses on biological forces (discussed in Chapter 3). Decision makers for promotions to top management, who are overwhelmingly male, may perceive senior-level women as governed by fluctuating hormones throughout and beyond their reproductive years, indicating their lack of competence to make rational decisions required of a top executive. In contrast, senior-level men’s hormones are assumed to be less problematic; in fact, a combination of high testosterone and low cortisol levels is associated with men’s attaining

high status in managerial hierarchies. This barrier to women's attaining top management positions represents a **perceived linkage between "reproductivity and productivity."** The negative effects of this perceived linkage for women were also seen in research regarding sex discrimination on the basis of pregnancy discussed in Chapter 4. They reflect a general discomfort with female bodies in the workplace, in this case in top management positions.⁴⁴

More recently, **social-system-centered explanations**, focusing on gender-related factors such as gender stereotypes, gender roles, gender socialization, and gendered organizational structures, have been invoked for the low proportion of women in top management positions. Gender stereotypes, gender roles, and gender socialization have already been discussed in detail in Chapter 3. How may organizational structures be gendered? To cite a simple example, consider where the concept of organizational hierarchy, a familiar organizational structure, came from. Might it have come from men's greater display of dominance in patriarchal social systems, including in work teams as discussed in Chapter 5 and in organizational settings overall? Hierarchies enable employees in higher-level positions, whomever they may be, to dominate employees in lower-level positions. Hierarchies may have become the prevalent organizational form because they were designed by men to meet the needs of men. Other organizational forms such as a web structure (in which the manager is a central coordinator more than a controller) or hub structure (in which all employees' work is interconnected) less reflect individuals' needs for dominance over others.⁴⁵

Also, do you see how the glass ceiling metaphor is gendered in itself? It implies that achieving ultimate career success is analogous to climbing a mountain to the top, which may take place on the backs of others whom the climber has dominated along the way. Options for how individuals may define success in their own terms are discussed in Chapter 8.

Research on **glass cliffs** has addressed the question: "When women attain top management positions, where do they find themselves?" The answer is: "They find themselves in precarious leader positions." The traditional "think manager—think male" association is weakened during times of poor organizational performance and replaced by a "think crisis—think female" association. As a result, female CEOs experience extra pressures than their male counterparts at the outset. They have shorter terms, come under greater threat from activist investors, and are more likely to be forced out of their jobs rather than having a planned exit or leaving due to a merger or acquisition. Contributing to these conditions, media stories about companies in a crisis mode are more likely to cite the CEO as a source of blame when the position is held by a woman rather than a man. Glass cliffs represent a type of sex discrimination that occurs as women break through glass ceilings.⁴⁶

The term "sex segregation," which was used to refer to the unequal distributions of women and men across occupations in Chapter 2, may also be applied to unequal distributions of women and men within the managerial

ranks of organizations. Glass ceilings reflect vertical sex segregation within managerial ranks. In contrast, **glass walls** represent horizontal sex segregation within managerial ranks. That is, within the same managerial level, female managers tend to be concentrated in some functions and male managers in other functions. In managerial hierarchies, **line jobs**, which are central to the provision of organizational products and services, tend to be higher in status and opportunities for promotion to top management than **staff jobs**, which are peripheral to the provision of products and services. Not coincidentally, male managers are more prevalent than female managers in line functions and less prevalent in staff functions. Further, within staff functions, female managers are less likely than male managers to move into line functions. Reflecting the existence of glass walls, female managers are concentrated in staff functions such as human resources, corporate communications, and public relations; in contrast, male managers are concentrated in line functions such as operations, sales, and research and development. Glass walls provide a further explanation for glass ceilings: Because middle- and lower-level female managers are concentrated in staff functions with limited opportunities for advancement, they are less likely than male managers to attain top management positions.⁴⁷

As the proportion of women in top management positions has ever so slowly risen, research has examined the consequences of this development for other women. The **consequences of women's breaking through glass ceilings for other women** have been depicted in both negative and positive terms. On the *negative* side, there is evidence of psychological "micro-violence" in women's work relations with other women. Women in top management have been found to exhibit micro-violence across organizational levels by manipulating relationships with, distancing themselves from, and hindering the advancement of lower-level women. Whereas early usage of the "queen bee" metaphor blamed top-level women themselves for having negative relations with lower-level women, others have blamed gendered social systems in which women in top management feel compelled to "ventriloquize patriarchal attitudes." This body of research suggests that individual women's rising above a glass ceiling, rather than shattering it for other women, contributes to keeping them below it.⁴⁸

On the *positive* side, there is evidence of senior women's helping other women. For example, women are more likely to be promoted to top management positions when there is greater representation of women on the boards of directors; in turn, female CEOs are more likely than male CEOs to seek female board directors. Also, higher proportions of women in top management positions have been found to contribute to lower-level women's feeling less competitive with each other, which would minimize the kinds of micro-violence in women's work relations that were described here. Further, increases of women in top management have been associated with increases of women in lower-level managerial positions. This body of research suggests that individual women's rising above a glass ceiling is aided by other women

who have already risen above the same ceiling and foster positive work environments for lower-level women. Given this mixed evidence, further research is needed to identify the conditions under which the presence of women in top management hinders or helps other women.⁴⁹

If women in general experience barriers to attaining top management positions, women of color experience even greater barriers. Because of the predominance of White men in these positions, women of color are two degrees removed from what may be regarded as the White male top management prototype; in contrast, White women and men of color are one degree removed from this prototype. As noted earlier, women of color are the most underrepresented group in the top management ranks. Thus, the intersection of sex and race also influences the extent to which individuals experience barriers to their attaining top management positions.⁵⁰

Yet, the question remains as to whether there actually *are* barriers to women's attaining top management positions, which would shock the women who had risen to senior management positions in the opening passage but not the CEO position. In recent years, a scholarly debate has emerged over whether there is **a female advantage or disadvantage in access to top management**. The primary argument for a female advantage has been that as research has found, women tend to be more effective leaders than men. The primary argument for a female disadvantage has been that any advantage women may have in leader behaviors is lost if their abilities as leaders are dismissed or treated with skepticism solely because they are women.⁵¹

We do not need to choose between arguing for a female advantage or disadvantage in access to top management. Indeed, both views may be true, and the two phenomena may offset each other to some extent. That is, women may possess an advantage in leadership style, as suggested by meta-analyses linking the behaviors they display more than those of men with leader effectiveness, and a disadvantage in promotion decisions about top management positions, as suggested by leader stereotypes of think manager—think male and think manager—think masculine. Overall, this suggests that any organizational processes that neutralize or eliminate the effects of stereotyping on the basis of leader sex will contribute to the shattering of glass ceilings, which leads us to the implications of our viewing the “elephant” of the intersection of sex, gender, and leadership from different perspectives.

PROMOTING EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

In Chapter 3, Sandra Bem was quoted as saying that “*behavior* should have no gender.”⁵² Ideally, to amend Bem's statement, *leader behavior* should have no gender. As some of the comments on the *New York Times* online debate stated, the sex of individuals who hold leader roles should be of little concern. What should matter is how well individuals respond to the demands of the particular leader role that they occupy regardless of their sex.

What is required to create a working environment in which individuals with equal leadership abilities have an equal chance to be effective in the leader role? Table 6.1 summarizes recommended actions. To achieve this objective, prejudices against women as leaders must be confronted. Such prejudices are most likely to be exhibited in masculinized work settings in which the majority of leaders and followers are men and the leader role is associated with the male gender role. In such settings, the playing field is tipped in favor of men.⁵³

To give women a greater chance of being effective in highly masculinized settings, organizations need to consider the ways in which leaders are evaluated. When leaders in masculinized settings are evaluated on the basis of whether they promote group cohesiveness and develop subordinates for future roles as well as accomplish tasks, female leaders, who rank higher in individualized consideration than male leaders, have more of an opportunity to be seen as effective. To take advantage of this opportunity, they need to have resources to promote subordinate development.

Organizations need to take steps to increase the legitimacy of female leaders. As for the selection of team members (see Chapter 5), the appointment of individuals to leadership roles should be accompanied by publicity about their special skills, expertise, and accomplishments. This information should be provided for all individuals who assume leader roles, not just women, to avoid drawing attention to female leaders as a group. Such an action will reduce the potential for stereotyping of leaders according to their sex because of insufficient or inaccurate information.⁵⁴

TABLE 6.1 ■ Recommended Actions

1. Confront prejudices against leaders on the basis of their sex.
2. Evaluate leaders on the basis of task accomplishment, group cohesiveness, and development of subordinates for future roles.
3. Publicize qualifications of individuals assigned to leader positions.
4. Develop the capabilities of all individuals to play leader roles.
5. Create conditions that give female and male leaders with equivalent credentials equal chances to succeed.
6. Confront beliefs that you do not have what it takes to be a great leader, and prove them wrong.
7. If you are the first woman to hold a particular leader position, take advantage of being seen as a symbol of change.
8. Increase accountability of decision makers, and promote uniformity on the decision-making process for all managerial positions.
9. Make promotion procedures for managerial positions well-known to all potential applicants.

Male leaders in settings that are more congenial to women face somewhat different issues. Because men have more societal status than women, they are likely to be granted higher status in a feminized work setting than female leaders are granted in a masculinized work setting. However, male leaders may still be subjected to sexist attitudes. As discussed in Chapter 3, negative attitudes toward men may range from hostile sexism to benevolent sexism. Male leaders do not deserve to be the target of sexist attitudes any more than female leaders do. When sexist attitudes are directed toward male as well as female leaders, they have to be addressed.

No matter what the setting, organizations need to be ready to act when their members embrace stereotypical views or display prejudices toward members of one sex as leaders. Although beliefs (e.g., leader stereotypes) and attitudes (e.g., biases against women or men as leaders) are difficult to change, organizations must take steps to counteract problematic beliefs and attitudes. Leadership training programs should make individuals aware of the ways in which biases related to sex (as well as race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, etc.) can affect their decisions and teach them how to move beyond their own biases.⁵⁵

When stereotyping of leaders occurs in an organizational setting, the risk is that potential or actual leaders will fall for the stereotypes and see themselves as others see them, whether or not their personal traits actually fit the stereotypes. No matter how they may be stereotyped, leaders of both sexes need to be ready to demonstrate their capabilities as leaders and to disprove anyone who thinks otherwise. Asking their superiors to back them up when others second-guess them may also be helpful in establishing their leadership credentials.⁵⁶

Women who enter leadership levels numerically dominated by men are often seen as powerful symbols of changing organizational realities. The appointment of women to top management positions may mean that the organization now values the attributes associated with women and may give newly appointed female executives a surprising degree of influence. They should be ready to take advantage of their status as symbols of change.⁵⁷

Conditions that contribute to the existence of glass ceilings need to be recognized and changed. The U.S. government provides a good example of conditions that discourage the existence of glass ceilings. It places a high degree of emphasis on procedural fairness in making promotion decisions for its nonmilitary top management positions except those reserved for political appointees, known as the Senior Executive Service (SES). First, it requires that all open SES positions be made known through a public announcement. Second, it requires that all promotion decisions be made using the same basic procedure. Third, it requires that records be kept of the entire decision-making process. By providing structure to the decision-making process and enabling identification of decisions that are not properly made, these requirements make decision makers accountable for how their SES promotion decisions are made.⁵⁸

The U.S. government's experience suggests that when decision making is open and a systematic procedure is used, conditions that contribute to the existence of glass ceilings may be averted. When procedures for promotion decisions are standardized and criteria for decisions are well established, qualified women may fare at least as well as qualified men. When procedures are not standardized, or when criteria for promotion decisions are unspecified or vague, there may be more occasion for leader stereotypes and prejudices favoring men to affect the outcomes of the promotion process. The promotion procedures used for top management positions in the federal government may also be beneficially applied to promotion decisions about open management positions at lower levels.

In conclusion, evidence increasingly suggests that women tend to be better suited than men to serve as leaders. However, this is *not* to say that organizations should choose women for leader roles on the basis of their sex. The challenge for organizations is to take advantage of and develop the capabilities of all individuals who have the potential to be effective leaders and then create opportunities and conditions that give all leaders a chance to succeed. The proper goal for leadership training programs is not to teach men how to behave more like women or to teach women how to behave more like men. No matter what the intersection of sex, gender, and leadership may be, the goal should be to enhance the likelihood that all leaders are effective.

As for the six blind men who journey to see the elephant, it may be beyond our grasp to gain a full sense of what the intersection of sex, gender, and leadership is like. However, unlike the six blind men, we don't need to engage in heated debate over whose view is superior. None of the ways of seeing that are presented in this chapter as different perspectives of this intersection is inherently superior to the other ways of seeing.⁵⁹

The last word in this update from the sex, gender, and leadership wars appropriately comes from another of the more than 500 responses to the *New York Times* online debate:⁶⁰

Rather than looking backward, I hope that we will look toward the potential of men and women to be great managers and remove obstacles in their way.

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