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FEMALE LEADERSHIP ADVANTAGE AND DISADVANTAGE: RESOLVING THE CONTRADICTIONS

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In the United States, women are increasingly praised for having excellent skills for leadership and, in fact, women, more than men, manifest leadership styles associated with effective performance as leaders. Nevertheless, more people prefer male than female bosses, and it is more difficult for women than men to become leaders and to succeed in male-dominated leadership roles. This mix of apparent advantage and disadvantage that women leaders experience reflects the considerable progress toward gender equality that has taken place in both attitudes and behavior, coupled with the lack of complete attainment of this goal.

A good introduction to the complexities of women's current status as leaders can follow from contemplating journalists' discussions of this topic. The most striking aspect of some recent statements in newspapers and magazines is that they are favorable to women's abilities as leaders. Some journalists seem to be saying that women have arrived or are arriving at their rightful position as leaders. Consider the following statement from *Business Week*: "After years of analyzing what makes leaders most effective and figuring out who's got the Right Stuff, management gurus now know how to boost the odds of getting a great executive: Hire a female" (Sharpe, 2000, p. 74). Not only did *Business Week* announce that women have the "Right Stuff," but also *Fast Company* maintained that "[t]he future of business depends on women" (Heffernan, 2002, p. 9). *Business Week* followed with a cover story on the new gender gap, stating, "Men could become losers in a global economy that values mental power over might" (Conlin, 2003, p. 78). Readers of these articles might conclude that contemporary women are well prepared for leadership and have some advantages that men do not possess.

Now examine statements of a different sort. Consider, for example, a *New York Times* editorial clearly stating that being a woman is a decided disadvantage for leadership:

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> When the crunch comes, the toughest issue for Clinton may be the one that so far has been talked about least. If she runs, she'll be handicapped by her gender. Anyone who thinks it won't be difficult for a woman to get elected president of the United States should go home, take a nap, wake up refreshed and think again (Herbert, 2006, p. A29).

Concerning corporate leadership, a *Wall Street Journal* editorial conveyed a lack of confidence in women in the statement that "[m]ale directors are simply afraid to take an unnecessary risk by selecting a woman" (Dobryznyski, 2006, p. A16). In addition, consider editorial writer Maureen Dowd's *New York Times* commentary on Katie Couric's ascension as the first female network evening news anchor: "The sad truth is, women only get to the top of places like the network evening news and Hollywood after those places are devalued" (Dowd, 2006, p. A21).

In contemporary culture of the United States, women on the one hand are lauded as having the right combination of skills for leadership, yielding superior leadership styles and outstanding effectiveness. On the other hand, there appears to be widespread recognition that women often come in second to men in competitions to attain leadership positions. Women are still portrayed as suffering disadvantage in access to leadership positions as well as prejudice and resistance when they occupy these roles.

How can women enjoy a leadership advantage but still suffer from disadvantage? To answer this question, the first step for social scientists should be to figure out if these female advantage and disadvantage themes have any validity. If both themes are to some extent accurate, a second challenge is to determine how these seemingly contradictory views can be reconciled with one another. I will show that these opinions put forth by journalists do have some

validity. In addition, I argue that the paradoxical phenomena that they note reflect the particular conditions in the United States (and some other nations) in this period of history—an era marked by considerable change in women's roles, combined with the persistence of many traditional expectations and patterns of behavior.

To address these important issues, I first consider cultural and scholarly definitions of what good leadership is and compare women and men in terms of this contemporary model of leadership. Then I present research pertaining to the actual effectiveness of female and male leaders as well as prejudice directed toward female leaders. Finally, I draw conclusions about the likely future of women's representation as leaders.

HOW IS GOOD LEADERSHIP DEFINED?

Are women excellent leaders, perhaps even better than men, on average or in some circumstances? To address these issues, researchers first have to answer the question of what good leadership is—what behaviors characterize effective leaders? Does effective leadership consist of the resolute execution of authority, the ability to support and inspire others, or skill in motivating teams to engage in collaborative efforts? All such characterizations of good leadership probably have some validity. As situational theorists of leadership contend (see Ayman, 2004), the appropriateness of particular types of leader behaviors depends on the context—features such as societal values, the culture of organizations, the nature of the task, and the characteristics of followers. Yet, despite this situational variability, leadership has historically been depicted primarily in masculine terms, and many theories of leadership have focused mainly on stereotypically masculine qualities (e.g., Miner, 1993). However, given that leaders' effectiveness depends on context, it is reasonable to think that stereotypically feminine qualities of cooperation, mentoring, and collaboration are important to leadership, certainly in some contexts and perhaps increasingly in contemporary organizations. As I show in this article, these issues are critical to understanding women's participation and success as leaders.

To answer the question of what constitutes good leadership, let us consider the very substantial knowledge that researchers have amassed concerning leadership style. Styles are relatively consistent patterns of social interaction that typify leaders as individuals. Leadership styles are not fixed behaviors but encompass a range of behaviors that have a particular meaning or that serve a particular function. Depending on the situation, leaders vary their behaviors within the boundaries of their style. For example, a leader with a typically participative style might display the collaborative behaviors of consulting, discussing, agreeing, cooperating, or negotiating, depending on the circumstances. Moreover, leaders may sometimes abandon their characteristic style in an unusual situation. In a crisis, for example, a leader who is typically participative may become highly directive because emergency situations can demand quick, decisive action.

In recent decades, leadership researchers have attempted to identify the types of leadership that are most appropriate under the conditions that are common in contemporary organizations. These conditions include greatly accelerated technological growth and the increased complexity of organizations' missions that follows from globalization of business and other endeavors. Accompanying these changes are increasing workforce diversity and, for many organizations, intense competitive pressures. As more complex relationships of interdependency have emerged, many of the traditional ways of managing have come under pressure to change (Kanter, 1997).

Leadership researchers responded to this changing environment by defining good leadership as future-oriented rather than present-oriented and as fostering followers' commitment and ability to contribute creatively to organizations. An early statement of this approach appeared in a book by political scientist James McGregor Burns (1978), who delineated a type of leadership that he labeled *transformational*. Researchers then developed these ideas about leadership style by designing instruments to assess transformational leadership and studying its effects (e.g., Avolio, 1999; Bass, 1998). In this tradition, transformational leadership involves establishing oneself as a role model by gaining followers' trust and confidence. Such leaders delineate organizations' goals, develop plans to achieve those goals, and creatively innovate, even in organizations that are already successful. Transformational leaders mentor and empower their subordinates and encourage them to develop their potential and thus to contribute more effectively to their organization. Other researchers have incorporated some of these same qualities under other labels, such as *charismatic leadership* (e.g., Conger & Kanungo, 1998).

These researchers also portrayed a more conventional type of leadership that they labeled *transactional*. Such leaders appeal to subordinates' self-interest by establishing exchange relationships with them. Transactional leaders clarify subordinates' responsibilities, reward them for meeting objectives, and correct them for failing to meet objectives. Finally, transformational and transactional leadership are both contrasted with a *laissez-faire* style that is defined by an overall failure to take responsibility for managing. These three leadership styles—transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire—are typically assessed by the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ; Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003). This instrument represents transformational leadership by five subscales, transactional leadership by three subscales, and laissez-faire leadership by one scale (see Table 1). Leaders' behaviors are rated on these subscales by their organizational subordinates, peers, or superiors and sometimes by the leaders themselves.

Is transformational leadership actually effective? Research based primarily on subordinates', peers', and superiors' evaluative ratings of leaders has shown that the answer to this question is yes. In a meta-analysis of

Table 1

Definitions of Transformational, Transactional, and Laissez-Faire Leadership Styles in the Multifactor Leadership (MLQ) Questionnaire and Mean Effect Sizes Comparing Men and Women

MLQ scale and subscale	*Description of leadership style*	*Effect size*
Transformational		−0.10
Idealized influence (attribute)	Demonstrates qualities that motivate respect and pride from association with him or her	−0.09
Idealized influence (behavior)	Communicates values, purpose, and importance of organization's mission	−0.12
Inspirational motivation	Exhibits optimism and excitement about goals and future states	−0.02
Intellectual stimulation	Examines new perspectives for solving problems and completing tasks	−0.05
Individualized consideration	Focuses on development and mentoring of followers and attends to their	−0.19
	individual needs	−0.19
Transactional		
Contingent reward	Provides rewards for satisfactory performance by followers	−0.13
Active management-by-exception	Attends to followers' mistakes and failures to meet standards	0.12
Passive management-by-exception	Waits until problems become severe before attending to them and intervening	0.27
Laissez-faire	Exhibits frequent absence and lack of involvement during critical junctures	0.16

Note. This table is from Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Engen, (2003), Tables 1 and 3. Effect sizes appear in a standardized sex difference metric, d, calculated for each study and averaged across all available studies with more reliable values weighted more heavily. Positive effect sizes for a given leadership style indicate that men had higher scores than women, and negative effect sizes indicate that women had higher scores than men. No effect size appears for overall transactional leadership because its component subscales did not manifest a consistent direction.

87 studies testing the relationships between these styles and measures of leaders' effectiveness (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; see also Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996), transformational leadership was associated with greater effectiveness. As for transactional leadership, its "contingent reward" component, which features rewarding subordinates for appropriate behavior, also predicted effectiveness, and it appeared to be almost as effective as transformational leadership. Rewarding subordinates for good performance especially predicted followers' satisfaction with their leaders. In contrast, drawing followers' flaws to their attention and otherwise using punishment to shape their behavior (the style aspect known as "active management by exception") showed only a weak positive relation to leaders' effectiveness. As expected, intervening only when situations become extreme (the passive aspect of management by exception) was ineffective, as was the uninvolved laissez-faire leadership style.

Researchers' attention to transformational leadership reflects the cultural shift that has occurred in norms about leadership: In many contexts, the Powerful Great Man model of leadership no longer holds. Good leadership is increasingly defined in terms of the qualities of a good coach or teacher rather than a highly authoritative person who merely tells others what to do. As a demonstration of this shift, Mike Krzyzewski, the coach of the highly successful Duke University basketball team, has become not only a famous sports figure, but also a leadership guru who is in great demand for giving lectures to business executives (Sokolove, 2006). Krzyzewski's prominence as a model of good leadership is a sign of the times. The leadership styles that are most valued in contemporary organizations are modeled by an outstanding coach's ability to mentor athletes and foster effective teams.

The collaborative and participative aspects of leadership style, which are the major emphasis in feminist writing on good leadership (e.g., Chin, 2004), are inherent in this culturally approved style of transformational leadership. However, effective leadership is not defined merely by collaboration. Among other important qualities of this coach/teacher model of leadership is inspiring others to be creative and to go beyond the confines of their roles. It is also critical to serve as a role model who elicits pride and respect and to present a vision that delineates the values and goals of an organization. Rose Marie Bravo, CEO of Burberry Group, described her leadership style in terms that epitomize many of these features of transformational leadership:

> We have teams of people, creative people, and it is about keeping them motivated, keeping them on track, making sure that they are following the vision. I am observing, watching and encouraging and motivating . . . . We try to set an agenda throughout the company where everyone's opinion counts, and it's nice to be asked (Beatty, 2004, p. B8).

Business journalists have echoed some of these themes with statements such as "Boards are increasingly looking for CEOs who can demonstrate superb people skills in dealing with employees or other stakeholders while delivering consistent results" (Tischler, 2005).

DO WOMEN HAVE AN ADVANTAGE IN LEADERSHIP STYLE?

If women have a leadership advantage, it might show up in effective leadership styles that diverge somewhat from those that are typical of their male colleagues. Yet,

traditionally, researchers resisted any claims that women and men have different leadership styles. They argued that particular leader roles demand certain types of leadership, essentially confining men and women in the same role to behave in the same ways (e.g., Kanter, 1977; Nieva & Gutek, 1981; van Engen, van der Leeden, & Willemsen, 2001). This argument surely has some validity because women and men have to meet similar requirements to gain leadership roles in the first place. Once a leader occupies such a role, the expectations associated with it shape behavior in particular directions. These pressures toward similarity of male and female leaders make it likely that any differences in the leadership styles of women and men are relatively small.

Despite these similarity pressures, leaders have some freedom to choose the particular ways that they fulfill their roles. Good illustrations of opportunities for choice come from research on *organizational citizenship behavior*, which consists of behaviors that go beyond the requirements of organizational roles (Borman, 2004; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). For example, leaders may help others with their work and may volunteer for tasks that go beyond their job description. Most leadership roles afford considerable discretion in certain directions—for example, to be friendly or more remote, to mentor or pay little attention to subordinates, and so forth. Female–male differences in leadership behavior are most likely to occur in these discretionary aspects of leadership that are not closely regulated by leader roles.

Why might women and men display somewhat different leadership styles within the limits set by their leader roles? Women are faced with accommodating the sometimes conflicting demands of their roles as women and their roles as leaders. In general, people expect and prefer that women be communal, manifesting traits such as kindness, concern for others, warmth, and gentleness and that men be agentic, manifesting traits such as confidence, aggressiveness, and self-direction (e.g., Newport, 2001; Williams & Best, 1990). Because leaders are thought to have more agentic than communal qualities (Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002; Schein, 2001), stereotypes about leaders generally resemble stereotypes of men more than stereotypes of women. As a result, men can seem usual or natural in most leadership roles, thereby placing women at a disadvantage (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001). Although this dissimilarity between women and leaders appears to be decreasing over time, it has not disappeared (Duehr & Bono, 2006; Sczesny, Bosak, Neff, & Schyns, 2004). As a result, people more easily credit men with leadership ability and more readily accept them as leaders.

Because of these cultural stereotypes, female leaders face a double bind (Eagly & Carli, 2004, in press). They are expected to be communal because of the expectations inherent in the female gender role, and they are also expected to be agentic because of the expectations inherent in most leader roles. However, because agentic displays of confidence and assertion can appear incompatible with being communal, women are vulnerable to becoming targets of prejudice. Sometimes people view women as lacking the stereotypical directive and assertive qualities of good leaders—that is, as not being tough enough or not taking charge. Sometimes people dislike female leaders who display these very directive and assertive qualities because such women seem unfeminine—that is, just like a man or like an iron lady. Carly Fiorina, former CEO of Hewlett-Packard, complained, "In the chat rooms around Silicon Valley . . . I was routinely referred to as either a 'bimbo' or a 'bitch'—too soft or too hard, and presumptuous, besides" (Fiorina, 2006, p. 173).

Tension between the communal qualities that people prefer in women and the predominantly agentic qualities they expect in leaders produces cross-pressures on female leaders. They often experience disapproval for their more masculine behaviors, such as asserting clear-cut authority over others, as well as for their more feminine behaviors, such as being especially supportive of others. Given such cross-pressures, finding an appropriate and effective leadership style is challenging, as many female leaders acknowledge. In fact, a study of *Fortune* 1000 female executives found that 96% rated as *critical* or *fairly important* "developing a style with which male managers are comfortable" (Catalyst, 2001).

How do female leaders resolve these cross-pressures? It would seem reasonable that these women might split the difference between the masculine and feminine demands that they face. Perhaps female leaders seek and often find a middle way that is effective yet neither unacceptably masculine nor unacceptably feminine (Yoder, 2001). The contemporary coach/teacher style, as epitomized by transformational leadership, might approximate this middle way because it has culturally feminine aspects, especially in its "individualized consideration" behaviors (Hackman, Furniss, Hills, & Patterson, 1992), and is otherwise quite androgynous. Is there evidence to support this supposition that women differ from men in leader behaviors, especially in the transformational aspects of style?

Empirical research for addressing this question about female and male styles of leading is extensive. The most recent meta-analysis comparing the leadership styles of men and women examined the contemporary distinctions between transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire styles (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). This review integrated the findings of 45 studies. Although many types of organizational managers were represented in the studies that were included, the majority were from either business or educational organizations. The managers' median age was 44 years; 53% of the studies examined managers in the United States and 47% examined managers in other nations or mixed, global samples. The measures of managers' typical leadership styles elicited estimates of the frequencies of the differing types of leader behaviors, which

were provided by leaders' subordinates, peers, or superiors, or by the leaders themselves.

As displayed in Table 1, this meta-analysis revealed that female leaders were more transformational than male leaders. Among the five aspects of transformational leadership, women most exceeded men on individualized consideration, which encompasses supportive, encouraging treatment of subordinates. Female leaders were also more transactional than male leaders in their contingent reward behaviors, whereas male leaders were more likely than female leaders to manifest the two other aspects of transactional leadership (active and passive management by exception) as well as laissez-faire leadership. All of these differences between male and female leaders were small, consistent with substantially overlapping distributions of women and men (Hyde, 2005).

Given the findings on the effectiveness of these leadership styles noted earlier (Judge & Piccolo, 2004), this project shows that women, somewhat more than men, manifest leadership styles that relate positively to effectiveness, and men, more than women, manifest styles that relate only weakly to effectiveness or that hinder effectiveness. Replicating these findings, a large-scale study primarily of business managers, which was not available when the meta-analysis was conducted, produced very similar results (Antonakis et al., 2003).

Although revealing relatively small differences, findings indicate an advantage for women leaders. Women, more than men, appear to lead in styles that recommend them for leadership. In contrast, men, more than women, appear to lead in less advantageous styles by (a) attending to subordinates' failures to meet standards, (b) displaying behaviors that entail avoiding solving problems until they become acute, and (c) being absent or uninvolved at critical times.

What accounts for these findings? As I have already suggested, the transformational repertoire of leadership behaviors (and contingent reward behaviors) may help women to resolve some of the typical incongruity between leadership roles and the female gender role because these styles are not distinctively masculine and some aspects, especially individualized consideration, are relatively feminine. Because transformational and contingent reward leadership are more compatible with the female gender role than were most older models of leadership, women may adopt these behaviors and thereby become more effective. Another possibility is that double standards, in which men have greater access than women to leadership roles, require that women be more highly qualified than men to obtain leadership roles in the first place (e.g., Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1997; Foschi, 2000). In fact, research shows that women face some disadvantage in obtaining promotions at all levels in organizations, not just at the highest levels (e.g., Baxter & Wright, 2000; Elliott & Smith, 2004). To the extent that women must overcome barriers to attain leadership roles and therefore are more stringently selected than men, women leaders may manifest a more effective set of leader behaviors mainly because they are more qualified. Both of these explanations, the one based on gendered expectations and the one based on double standards, may well underlie the observed differences in the leadership styles of women and men. Because this issue could not be resolved within Eagly et al.'s (2003) meta-analysis on leadership styles, it remains a critical issue for additional research. What is clear from the meta-analysis is that women leaders, on average, exert leadership through behaviors considered appropriate for effective leadership under contemporary conditions.

DO WOMEN HAVE AN ADVANTAGE IN LEADER EFFECTIVENESS?

The research that I have described so far pertains to leadership style, which researchers have in turn linked to leaders' effectiveness. Based on these sources, the argument that women are more effective leaders than men is indirect—that is, women, somewhat more than men, manifest leadership styles that have been associated with effectiveness. Although this research is informative, it is important to examine research that has assessed effectiveness with more direct measures. There are two traditions of such research: (a) studies that relate organizations' effectiveness to the percentages of women among their executives and (b) studies that assess the effectiveness of individual male and female leaders.

Business organizations produce financial data that can serve as one measure of effectiveness. Thus, the studies relating the gender diversity of management groups to effectiveness are from the business sector. One such study, conducted by Catalyst, which is a research and advisory organization dedicated to advancing women's careers, analyzed data from the *Fortune* 500, which are the largest corporations in the United States as defined by their revenues. Using appropriate measures of financial performance for the period 1996 to 2000, Catalyst (2004) found that the companies in the top quartile of representing women among their executives had substantially better financial performance than the companies in the bottom quartile.

A more sophisticated study related the percentage of women in the top management teams of the companies in the *Fortune* 1000 to their financial performance from 1998 to 2000 (Krishnan & Park, 2005). These researchers took into account numerous control variables such as company size and industry performance. The findings showed that companies with larger percentages of women in their top management groups had better financial performance. Similar studies on large U.S. companies have revealed positive relationships between the percentage of women on boards of directors and financial performance in the 1990s (Carter, Simkins, & Simpson, 2003; Erhardt, Werbel, & Shrader, 2003). Yet, earlier U.S. studies produced more ambiguous outcomes (e.g., Shrader, Blackburn, & Iles, 1997), and a British study found no relation between board gender

diversity and financial performance in the FTSE 100, the largest corporations in the United Kingdom (Cranfield University School of Management, 2005).

These studies present the usual ambiguities of correlational data, and there is a clear need for larger-scale analyses that include a wider span of years and data from more nations. Nonetheless, recent U.S. studies show that women's participation as business leaders can coincide with economic gains for corporations. The good performance of business organizations that have more women among their executives provides an argument for nondiscrimination that complements the more fundamental arguments that discrimination flouts laws and violates the American value of equal opportunity.

The second approach to examining the effectiveness of female and male leaders entails assessments of the effectiveness of individual leaders, followed by comparisons of the male and female leaders. Given the wide range of leader roles examined in past studies of leaders' effectiveness, this research should reveal context effects by which leaders' effectiveness depends on the contours of leadership roles. Although leader roles are traditionally masculine in their cultural definition and male-dominated numerically, they vary widely in these respects. Some leader roles are less culturally masculine and in recent years are occupied by more women than men (e.g., human resources manager, medical and health services manager; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006, Table 11). Given the importance of the fit between gender roles and the requirements of leader roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002), the relative success of male and female leaders should depend on the particular demands of these roles. Leader roles that are highly male dominated or culturally masculine in their demands present particular challenges to women because of their incompatibility with people's expectations about women. This incompatibility not only restricts women's access to such leadership roles but also can compromise their effectiveness. When leader roles are extremely masculine, people may suspect that women are not qualified for them, and they may resist women's authority (Carli, 1999; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001).

Empirical support for the principle that the effectiveness of male and female leaders depends on the context emerged in another meta-analysis (Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995). This project integrated the results of 96 studies that had examined how well male and female leaders performed as leaders. The majority of these projects had studied managers in organizations, and a few had studied leaders in laboratory groups. The male and female leaders who were compared held the same or generally comparable roles. Most of the studies had evaluated leaders' effectiveness by having people (i.e., subordinates, peers, superiors, or leaders themselves) evaluate how well the leaders performed, and a few studies had objective performance-based outcome measures. Subjective performance evaluations can be biased—they could in particular be contaminated by prejudice against women, especially in male-dominated organizational settings. Nonetheless, a leader cannot be effective unless others accept his or her leadership. Therefore, subjective performance evaluations, even if biased, serve as one relevant measure of how well a person leads.

As anticipated, this meta-analysis found that men's effectiveness as leaders surpassed women's in roles that were male dominated or masculine in other ways. However, women's effectiveness surpassed men's in less male-dominated or less masculine roles. Specifically, women were judged to be less effective than men in leadership positions occupied by more men or associated with a higher proportion of male subordinates (or when effectiveness was assessed by ratings performed by a higher proportion of men; see also Bowen, Swim, & Jacobs, 2000, for similar findings). Consistent with these results, women were judged substantially less effective than men in the military, one of the most traditionally masculine environments. However, women were somewhat more effective than men in educational, governmental, and social service organizations, which have more women in managerial roles.

This meta-analysis also showed that female managers fared particularly well in effectiveness, relative to male managers, in middle-level leadership positions. This finding is sensible, given middle management's usual demands for complex interpersonal skills (e.g., Paolillo, 1981), most of which are encompassed in the communal repertoire of behaviors. Additional data on characteristics of the leadership roles was derived from a panel of judges assembled to give ratings of the roles. These data showed that women exceeded men in effectiveness in leader roles perceived as attractive to women and as requiring such stereotypical female characteristics as cooperativeness and the ability to get along well with others. Men exceeded women in effectiveness in roles perceived as attractive to men and as requiring such male stereotypical characteristics as directiveness and the ability to control others. Overall, effectiveness tracked gender stereotyping quite closely. These findings likely reflect a conflux of causes, including women's generally effective leadership styles, gender stereotypes about abilities and personality traits, and the prejudicial reactions that female leaders encounter, especially in more masculine settings.

It is hardly surprising that female leaders encounter difficulties in masculine settings. In such environments, leaders often confront the challenges of masculine organizational culture that may make it difficult for women to feel comfortable and to gain authority (e.g., Alvesson & Billing, 1992; Lyness & Thompson, 2000; Silvestri, 2003; Wajcman, 1998). Further, women in highly masculine domains often have to contend with expectations and criticisms that they lack the toughness and competitiveness needed to succeed. In such settings, it is difficult for women to build helpful relationships and to gain acceptance in influential networks (Timberlake, 2005). Given these hurdles, advancing up a highly male-dominated hierarchy requires an especially strong, skillful, and persistent woman. She has to avoid the threats

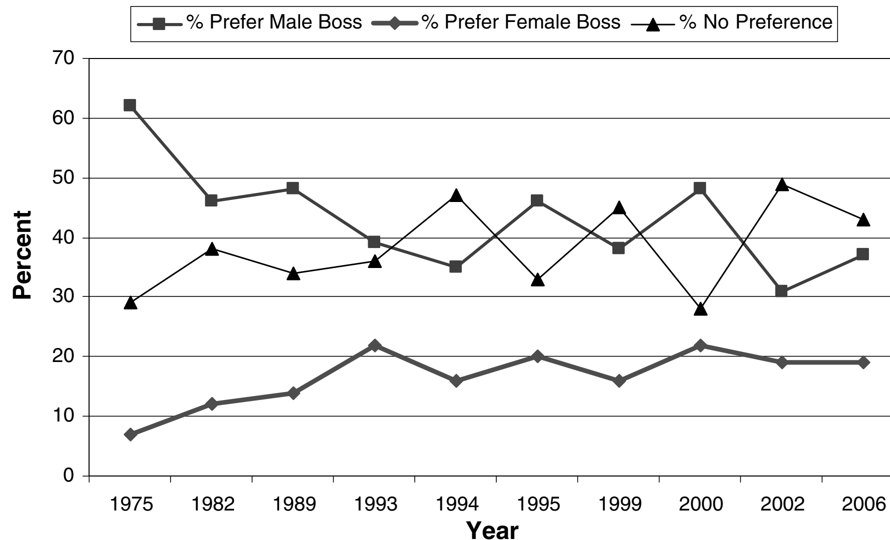

Fig. 1. Preferences for male or female boss in Gallup polls from 1953 through 2006 (Carroll, 2006).

to her confidence that other people's doubts and criticisms can elicit. Such a woman is also vulnerable because her gender, which is so highly salient to others, can be quickly blamed for any failings.

WHERE IS THE FEMALE DISADVANTAGE?

Our meta-analytic demonstration that women fare less well than men in male-dominated and masculine leadership roles identifies context-specific disadvantage (e.g., Eagly et al., 1995)—that is, in some leadership roles, women face obstacles that men do not face. If women who are in fact equal to their male counterparts are treated differently either in their access to male-dominated leader roles or in evaluations of their performance once they are in such roles, women would indeed face disadvantage as leaders. Such disadvantage would be prejudicial, as defined by less favorable treatment of women than men, despite their objective equality (Eagly & Diekman, 2005).

One place to look for evidence of prejudicial disadvantage is in studies of attitudes toward female and male leaders. Especially informative are national polls that have asked representative samples of respondents for evaluations of men and women as leaders. Such polls have consistently shown favoritism toward male over female leaders. For example, for many years, pollsters have asked people what they think about personally having a job in which a woman or a man has authority over them. The specific Gallup Poll question is "If you were taking a new job and had your choice of a boss, would you prefer to work for a man or woman?" The responses obtained from Americans in selected years ranging from 1953 to 2006 appear in Figure 1. These data show a preference for male bosses over female bosses, although this differential in favor of men has decreased substantially through the years. In particular, a sharp drop occurred from 2000 to 2002, albeit followed by a modest increase in favor of men from 2002 to 2006 (Carroll, 2006). Despite this marked erosion of the huge advantage that male bosses had in the middle of the 20th century, men still retain a clear advantage in 2006, with 37% of respondents preferring a male boss compared with 19% preferring a female boss. However, the most popular response in recent polls, given by 43% of the respondents in 2006, is the egalitarian "no preference" or "it doesn't matter" response, which requires that the respondent spontaneously break away from the man versus woman response format of the question.

Another poll question appearing over many decades has addressed political leadership. Since 1937, polls have asked whether respondents could vote for a well-qualified woman nominated for president by their own party. As shown in Figure 2, approval has increased from only 33% of respondents in 1937 to 92% in 2006 (CBS News/New York Times, 2006; Moore, 2003). However, in response to the question about whether America is "ready for a woman president," only 55% agreed in 2006, up from 40% in 1996 when this question first appeared (CBS News/New York Times, 2006). Despite these apparent reservations about a female president, the results of elections give some evidence of support for office holding by women. Once women achieve nomination (and women are far less likely than men to become candidates; Fox & Lawless, 2004), women are as successful as men in winning primary and general elections for state legislatures, governorships, and the U.S. House and Senate (Seltzer, Newman, & Leighton, 1997). There is even evidence that in recent years women are slightly preferred in some elections, although this type of female advantage emerges only among female voters (Smith & Fox, 2001).

The favorable changes that have taken place in attitudes about female leaders reflect more general changes in

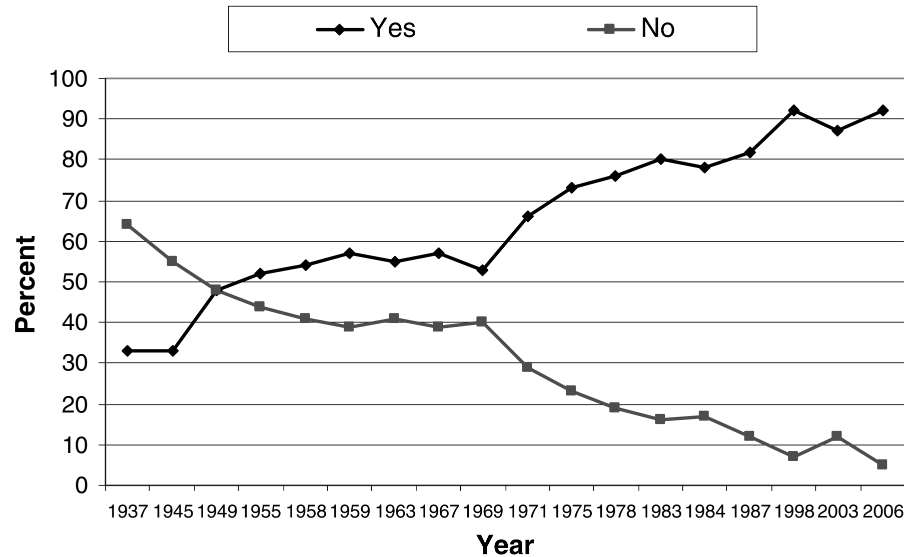

Fig. 2. Willingness to vote for a woman candidate for president in Gallup polls from 1937 through 2006 (CBS News/New York Times, 2006; Moore, 2003).

attitudes about gender (Brooks & Bolzendahl, 2004; Inglehart & Norris, 2003). Those who support women's leadership opportunities also endorse less traditional gender roles and approve of women's paid employment. All of these attitudes have changed greatly over the years, often with very pronounced changes toward greater endorsement of equality in the 1970s and 1980s, generally with some leveling off or even small reversals of change in quite recent years. Of course, gender prejudice can be compounded by prejudice based on other types of group membership such as race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (Ferdman, 1999; Ragins, Cornwell, & Miller, 2003). Additional research may clarify whether women of color and of lesbian or bisexual identity can face double or even triple doses of prejudice as leaders or potential leaders.

CONSEQUENCES OF PREJUDICE TOWARD FEMALE LEADERS

Although prejudicial attitudes do not invariably produce discriminatory behavior, such attitudes can limit women's access to leadership roles and foster discriminatory evaluations when they occupy such roles. Social scientists have evaluated women's access to leadership roles through a large number of studies that implement regression methods.

To explain gender disparities in leadership, such studies have determined whether variables that may differ between the sexes, such as hours worked per year and type of occupation, account for gender gaps in wages or promotions (see Blau & Kahn, 2000; Maume, 2004; U.S. General Accounting Office, 2003). These studies examine whether sex still predicts wages or promotions even after the effects of the other variables are controlled—thus making men and women statistically as equivalent as possible except for their sex. Sometimes researchers control not only for differences between women and men in characteristics such as years of education and work experience, but also for differences in the wage returns associated with such characteristics. The gender gap that remains after instituting such controls provides an estimate of sex discrimination. Such methods have almost always shown that women have a discriminatory wage and promotion disadvantage compared with men. This generalization holds for studies with nationally representative samples as well as for studies with more specialized or limited samples (see Eagly & Carli, in press).

To address the question of discrimination in hiring, some psychologists and researchers in organizational behavior have used a different research method—specifically, experiments in which research participants evaluate individual male or female managers or job candidates. In such experiments, all characteristics of these individuals are held constant except for their sex. The participants evaluate how suitable these individuals are for hiring or promotion or how competent they are in their jobs. These experiments have also demonstrated bias against women.

One type of experiment has presented application materials such as résumés to research participants, with either a male name or a female name attached to the materials. Different participants receive the otherwise identical male and female versions of the information. Davison and Burke (2000) conducted the most recent review of these experiments, integrating the findings of 49 reports. This meta-analysis found that men were preferred over women for masculine jobs such as auto salesperson and sales manager for heavy industry (mean $d = 0.34$), and women over men for feminine jobs such as secretary and home economics

teacher (mean $d = -0.26$). For gender-neutral jobs such as psychologist and motel desk clerk, men were also preferred over women, although to a somewhat lesser extent than for masculine jobs (mean $d = 0.24$; Davison, 2005, personal communication). Thus, men had an advantage over equivalent women, except in culturally feminine settings. These biases are not trivially small. For example, the bias against women in masculine jobs roughly corresponds to rates of success of 59% for men and 42% for women, when success is a favorable recommendation for a job.

Other experiments have examined evaluations of leaders, usually by presenting written descriptions of managerial behavior that differ only in the sex of the leader. A related type of experiment examined subordinates' evaluations of male and female leaders who had been trained to lead laboratory groups in the same style. A meta-analysis of 61 of these two types of experiments assessing the evaluation of equivalent male and female leaders yielded a very small overall tendency for participants to evaluate female leaders less favorably than male leaders, but this devaluation increased for male-dominated leadership roles and especially for leaders with more autocratic and directive styles (mean $d = 0.05$ for overall bias, 0.09 for male-dominated roles, 0.30 in autocratic style; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992).

In summary, correlational and experimental studies of gender bias show female disadvantage that is concentrated in male-dominated roles. Although this bias reverses to favor women in feminine settings such as applying for a secretarial job, it is not clear that the attitudinal bias systematically favors women for any leader roles. However, more research is needed to establish the magnitude and direction of gender biases in relation to managerial roles such as human resources manager that have become somewhat female dominated.

ADVANTAGE PLUS DISADVANTAGE

Research has established a mixed picture for contemporary female leadership. Women leaders on average manifest valued, effective leadership styles, even somewhat more than men do, and are often associated with successful business organizations. Attitudinal prejudice against women leaders appears to have lessened substantially, although even now there are more Americans who prefer male than female bosses. People say that they would vote for a woman for president; however, only slightly more than half of Americans indicate that the country is ready to have a female president. Because of the remaining prejudicial barriers, women face challenges as leaders that men do not face, especially in settings where female leaders are nontraditional. Such signs of advantage mixed with disadvantage and trust mixed with distrust are contradictory only on the surface. They are manifestations of gender relations that have changed dramatically yet have not arrived at equality between the sexes.

Many women have contended successfully with barriers to their leadership, as shown by the fact that women now have far more access to leadership roles than at any other period in history. This access is especially great in the United States, where women constitute 24% of the chief executives of organizations, 37% of all managers, and 43% of individuals in management, financial, and financial operations occupations (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006, Table 11). Although no one would argue that gender equality has arrived or is even near at hand, such statistics reflect massive social change in women's roles and opportunities.

The inroads of women into positions of power and authority reflect many underlying changes (Eagly & Carli, 2003, in press)—above all, women's high level of paid employment (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007) and a lessening of the time demands of women's housework, accompanied by greater sharing of childcare and housework with husbands and partners (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005). Associated with these shifts in roles is a large increase in women's education, whereby young women have become more educated than young men (U. S. National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). Because these changes in employment and education are accompanied by psychological changes in the form of increasing agency in women (e.g., Twenge, 1997, 2001) and greater career ambition (e.g., Astin, Oseguera, Sax, & Korn, 2002), women have achieved many more leadership positions than in the past. Women continue to encounter impediments to leadership within organizations, but many of these impediments can be removed or weakened by organizational changes designed to improve women's (and minorities') access to and success in leadership roles (e.g., Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006; Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002; Yoder, Schleicher, & McDonald, 1998).

Given the profound changes taking place in women's roles and in the cultural construal of good leadership, it is clear that women will continue their ascent toward greater power and authority. The 20th-century shift toward gender equality has not ceased but is continuing (Jackson, 1998). The presence of more women in leadership positions is one of the clearest indicators of this transformation.

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