

Leading People

The Gender and Leadership Wars

The *New York Times* recently published an interview with Carol Smith, a top executive at the Elle Group, a media company, about her views on leadership. In the interview, Ms. Smith said, “In my experience, female bosses tend to be better managers, better advisors, mentors, rational thinkers. Men love to hear themselves talk.” She added that she intentionally arrives late for meetings with men to miss their inevitable, boring conversations about golf and football before the meeting actually starts.¹

After the interview triggered an outpouring of comments posted to its web site, the *Times* invited six people to participate in an online debate one week later on what research says about the question, “Do women make better bosses?” I was one of the participants in this debate; the other five participants, all women, included researchers, consultants, and executives. As before, readers were invited to respond to the debate. Over 500 responses were received, some of which are excerpted below. Some of the responses were more fascinating than the debate itself.²

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” (*NC*, response #85, not knowing that my wife, Laura Graves, is also my coauthor on two chapters in this book as well as other publications), “five women and one man who was formerly the Chair of the Women in Management Division of the Academy of Management” (*Disillusioned*, #289, implying that this credential provided a good basis

to dismiss anything I had to say), and “five women and one boomer man” (*Becky*, #66, presumably after seeing my Web page photo).

Many respondents took 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 tended to draw conclusions about what all male and female bosses are like. Some argued that female bosses are inferior to male bosses:

I can't understand them, (so) how can I work for them? —*katman*, #4

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. —*smitel*, #344

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. —*BJ*, #426

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. —*Paulie*, #84

Women make better leaders when given the chance, and not only lately. —*John*, #439

As far as I can tell, women are better than men at just about anything. —*daldoc*, #444

A few respondents argued that neither male nor female bosses are superior:

Women are no better or worse than men, in general. There are only good managers and bad managers. —*Nancy*, #3

I have had good and bad experiences with both sexes. It completely depends upon the individual and not the sex. —*Joel*, #223

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.
—*hb*, #125

All bosses suck. This is a trick question. —*Jonathan*, #346

As the online debate continued, 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:

Response to *katman*, #4: This is one of the challenges women have faced in working for/with men. We deal with it. I suggest you do the same. —*Brenda*, #179

The vitriol with which so many male commentators have greeted this (debate) demonstrates well the obstacles that women still face in the workplace. —*Rachel*, #244

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. —*Caroline*, #302

Questions about sex differences and leadership have always been a topic of keen public interest and often a source of debate. This topic is not simply “hot” in the sense of being fashionable; it is also inflammatory. Some people tend to exaggerate sex differences (alpha bias), whereas other people tend to minimize or ignore sex differences (beta bias). Many people have strong beliefs about male and female similarities and differences in basic interests, abilities, attitudes, and behaviors.

As the number and vehemence of the responses to the *New York Times* debate suggest, questions about sex differences among managers or leaders (terms I will use interchangeably) stimulate especially heated debate. This is because corporate leaders are given 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, Canada, and the Netherlands.³ 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 differences and leadership together, and it is clear why so many people from all walks of life have strong opinions about what constitutes effective leadership as well as which sex, if either, is more likely to exhibit it.

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a live update from what may be called the “gender and leadership wars.” It examines preferences, stereotypes, attitudes, and behaviors associated with the leader role in relation to traditional gender stereotypes and roles. First, it considers 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 reviews attitudes toward female leaders. Fourth, it investigates whether (and, if so, how) female and male managers differ in their behavior and overall effectiveness as leaders. Finally, it considers what can be done to promote effective leadership by managers of both sexes.⁴

Leader Preferences

Due to the increased representation of women in management, 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. Nonetheless, when people state a preference, they still tend to prefer a male manager over a female manager. Over time, the Gallup Organization has asked people in 22 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. All over the globe, respondents have consistently expressed a preference for a male boss.⁵

According to the most recent poll results, obtained in 2006, twice as many Americans said that, if they were taking a new job, they would prefer a male boss (37%) than those who said they would prefer a female boss (19%); however, “It makes no difference to me” was the slight favorite (44%). Among men who stated a preference, 34% favored a male boss and 10% a female boss. Among women who stated a preference, 40% favored a male boss and 26% a female boss. Note that a greater proportion of

women than men said they would prefer a male boss. In contrast, according to 1975 poll results, 63% of men and 60% of women preferred a male boss, whereas 4% of men and 10% of women preferred a female boss. Overall, while preferences for a male boss have declined over time, a male boss is still preferred over a female boss by a 2–1 margin.⁶

Why do people who state a preference tend to prefer a male boss? There are several possible explanations. First, stereotypes suggesting that leaders are more effective if they display personal characteristics associated with men rather than those associated with women may account for the preference for men as leaders. Second, prejudice directed toward female leaders may make it difficult for women to be as effective in the leader role as men and reduce their desirability as leaders. Third, women and men may differ in their actual behaviors in the leader role, with the behaviors exhibited by male leaders yielding better financial results for the organization and more satisfied subordinates, contributing to a preference for male leaders. We will consider the merits of these possible explanations for leader preferences as we proceed.

However, it is important to note that leader preferences differ according to the age of the person being asked. In the 2006 poll results, 18- to 34-year-olds were equally likely to say they preferred a male (31%) or female (29%) boss if they were taking a new job. Twice as many 35- to 54-year-olds preferred a male boss (38%) than a female boss (19%). Four times as many Americans who were 55 years old or older preferred a male boss (40%) than a female boss (11%). Thus, Generation Yers, who have had greater experience in working with women as peers in educational programs and professional jobs, are less likely to prefer a male boss and more likely to prefer a female boss than Generation Xers or baby boomers. These results suggest that, assuming that individuals' leader preferences do not change over their life spans, the overall sex bias in leader preferences favoring male leaders may diminish over time as new entrants to the labor force progress in their careers.

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.⁷

In more recent studies, U.S. women have less inclination 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.⁸

Tony Butterfield (my mentor) and I have taken a different approach to the analysis of leader stereotypes in a research program that also began in the 1970s. For three decades, 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 Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI).⁹ 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, what may be called an “androgynous” personal 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. Thus, the idea of **think manager—think masculine** prevailed in these studies.¹⁰

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.¹¹

Overall, in studies conducted over three 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 male”) and athletic administration (“think athletic director, think masculine”).¹² 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 aspiring female leaders at a distinct disadvantage by forcing them to deal with the perceived incongruity between the leader role and their gender role. 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.¹³

This incongruity between the leader role and the female gender role may affect women’s aspirations to seek management positions. For example, undergraduate business students’ self-descriptions on the BSRI exhibited stereotypical sex differences, with male students seeing themselves as more masculine and less feminine than female students. However, female and male undergraduates agreed on a description of the good manager as highly masculine. As a result, undergraduate women tended to describe a good manager as less like themselves than undergraduate men did. Undergraduate 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 attain managerial positions.¹⁴

When women decide to pursue management positions, they may encounter barriers in the selection process. Given leader stereotypes that

focus on masculine characteristics and males, women may be less likely than men to be hired for management positions. Moreover, once women assume leader roles, leader stereotypes 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 the top management ranks, the masculine leader stereotype is likely to prevail, and women throughout the organization will be expected to behave as men. 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 the leader role and the female gender role constrains 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, resulting in a “glass ceiling” that makes it difficult for them to rise in managerial hierarchies. Thus, being competent does not ensure that a female manager will have the same amount of organizational success as her male equivalent.¹⁵

Do leader stereotypes depend on sex ratios in 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 reported in Chapter 3, support for gender stereotypes has not diminished over the past three 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.¹⁶

Are stereotypes of leaders dependent on the racial and ethnic composition of the management ranks? The vast majority of both female and male managers are non-Hispanic Whites. Stereotypes of male and female leaders in general 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.¹⁷

How well do leader stereotypes apply to the practice of management? Stereotypes are resistant to change and do not necessarily reflect current

realities. Widely held stereotypes that men are better managers and that better managers are masculine may not reflect what makes good managers. Instead, these stereotypes could reflect only that most managers have been men and that most men have been expected to live up to the masculine stereotype.

Attitudes Toward Women as Leaders

In 1965, *Harvard Business Review* (which then used the subtitle *The Magazine of Thoughtful Businessmen*, a choice that reflected the times) published results from a survey of executives' attitudes toward women in managerial roles. Most female executives (82%) had a favorable attitude toward women in management; they believed that women should be treated as individuals rather than as a uniform group. In contrast, a large proportion of male executives (41%) had an unfavorable attitude toward women in management. They believed not only that women were special but also that they had a special place, which was outside the ranks of management; this is what benevolent sexists would think. Older men tended to be more accepting of women in managerial roles than were younger men. Also, men who had been superiors or peers of women managers thought more favorably of them than did men who had worked only for men. Overall, few men (27%) thought that they would feel comfortable working for a woman boss.¹⁸

Respondents to the 1965 survey gave several reasons for their negative attitudes toward female executives. According to a large proportion of both male and female executives, women themselves were part responsible for the negative attitudes because they had accepted their exclusion from managerial ranks without major protest. Societal prejudices against women working outside the home were also cited. Many men did not want to contend with women as well as with other men for the keenly competitive managerial jobs; younger men particularly may have felt in competition with women for managerial jobs.

Over the next four decades, the composition of the managerial ranks changed considerably. According to replications of the original *Harvard Business Review* survey conducted 20 and 40 years later, male executives' attitudes about whether women belong in leader roles also changed considerably. The proportion of male executives who expressed a favorable attitude toward women in management increased from 35% in 1965 to 88% in 2005. Similarly, the proportion who would feel comfortable

working for a woman boss increased from 27% in 1965 to 71% in 2005. These are *huge* shifts in male executives' attitudes. In comparison, the proportion of female executives who expressed a favorable attitude toward women in management remained generally high, ranging from 82% in 1965 to 88% in 2005.¹⁹

Moreover, male executives in 2005 were more positive about how female executives were being accepted in business than the women themselves. The proportion of men who thought that a woman must be exceptional to succeed in business dropped from 90% in 1965 to 32% in 2005, whereas this proportion dropped by a lesser amount, from 88% to 69%, for women. Similarly, the proportion of men who thought that the business community would never fully accept women executives fell from 61% in 1965 to 16% in 2005, whereas this proportion fell from 47% to 34% for women, a smaller drop-off. Thus, female executives viewed the business community's general attitude toward women as executives in a less favorable light than male executives did.

Another way of examining attitudes toward male versus female leaders is to conduct laboratory or field studies in which participants evaluate the behaviors of leaders. In laboratory studies, leader behavior is held constant; only the sex of the leader is varied. In field studies, real subordinates evaluate the behaviors of real managers. A meta-analysis of laboratory studies of sex differences in evaluations of leaders found a tendency for female leaders to be evaluated less favorably than male leaders. This tendency, however, was more pronounced under certain specific circumstances. Female leaders were particularly devalued relative to male leaders when they (a) used a stereotypically masculine leadership style, (b) occupied a traditionally male-intensive leader role, and (c) were evaluated by males. These findings suggest that attitudes toward women as leaders are most negative when the leadership style or situation invokes traditional male norms. Women who exhibit the same leader behavior as men may be evaluated less favorably because of their sex.²⁰

In studies of actual managers and their subordinates, subordinates typically express similar satisfaction with male and female managers. Subordinates do not appear to respond differently to male and female leaders for whom they have actually worked. The experience of having been supervised by a woman contributes to more positive attitudes toward women as leaders. Being in direct contact with or proximity to women as leaders may serve to dispel stereotypes about whether women belong in leader roles. However, individuals' attitudes toward women as leaders do

not become more positive with experience unless that experience itself is positive. When individuals are more *satisfied* with their interactions with women leaders, they are more positive about women in leader roles.²¹

As noted earlier, many people still see an incongruity between the female gender role and the leader role, which often puts female leaders in a glaring spotlight solely because they are women. For example, after PepsiCo announced that Indra Nooyi would become its new CEO in 2006, the headline of the *New York Times* story was “A Woman to Be Chief at PepsiCo.” Nooyi’s ascent to the position increased the number of female CEOs of *Fortune* 500 companies at the time from 10 to 11, a 10% increase, which may seem noteworthy. However, it decreased the number of male CEOs of such companies from 490 to 489, hardly a significant decline (.2%). No headline has ever announced “A Man to Be Chief at Acme Corp.”²²

The focus of this section has been on attitudes toward women, not men, as leaders. Male leaders essentially are taken for granted. Having a woman as a manager has only recently become a common experience for workers. As more people have more experience with women in leader roles, female leaders may elicit less negative reactions. However, prejudices against women as leaders resulting from sexist attitudes are unlikely to disappear completely. Hostility toward women as leaders may be less openly expressed than in the past, but this does not mean that it does not exist. Women continue to face prejudices in the leader role that men do not face. These prejudices make it more difficult for women to be effective as leaders.²³

Leader Behavior and Effectiveness

To what extent do perceptions of leadership match current realities? Are men and masculine behaviors really best in leadership positions as leader stereotypes suggest? To consider these questions, let’s review how the major theories of leadership regard the merits of stereotypically feminine or masculine behaviors. Finally, we will examine research evidence on sex differences in leader behavior and effectiveness.

Theories of Leadership

Early 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.²⁴ When female managers were present in organizations being studied, they were usually excluded from the analysis because their few numbers might distort the results! It was as if female managers were less legitimate or less worthy of observation than were male managers. Although management 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 characteristics.

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 style, low in both, or high in one but not the other.²⁵

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.²⁶

Some leadership theories regard different types of leader behavior as appropriate for different situations. For example, **situational leadership theory**, originated by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard, recommends that managers adopt high task–low interpersonal, high task–high interpersonal, low task–high interpersonal, and low task–low interpersonal styles in that order as their subordinates' maturity increases. More mature subordinates are more willing and able to take responsibility and have greater education and experience relevant to the task at hand. Also,

Tannenbaum and Schmidt's leadership theory recommends that managers become more democratic and less autocratic in decision making as subordinates display a greater need for independence, readiness to assume responsibility, and ability to solve problems as a team.²⁷

In recent years, transformational and transactional leadership have become the primary focus of leadership theories.²⁸ **Transformational leaders** motivate 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.²⁹

In contrast, **transactional leaders** focus on clarifying the responsibilities of subordinates and then responding to how well subordinates execute their responsibilities. They 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. Transactional leaders 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.

The call for transformational leadership has occurred partly in recognition of the changing economic environment in which organizations

operate. As global environments become more turbulent, highly competitive, and reliant on new technologies, they call for “high-involvement” organizations with decentralized authority, flexible structures, and fewer managerial levels. Individuals who are able to articulate and rally followers behind a unified vision, stimulate creativity in achieving the vision, and develop rewards, recognition, and career opportunities for high-performing specialists are best suited for leader roles in such organizations. Management approaches that emphasize open communications and delegation are most conducive to the rapid innovation and response to customers that organizations need to survive in such environments. As a result, successful organizations are shifting away from an authoritarian model of leadership and toward a more transformational and democratic model.³⁰

Gender Stereotypes and Leadership Theories

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. The feminine stereotype is associated with a high propensity to exhibit interpersonally oriented behaviors such as showing consideration toward subordinates and demonstrating concern for their satisfaction. When individuals are high in the propensity to exhibit both task-oriented and interpersonally oriented behavior, they adopt the profile of an androgynous leader. However, when individuals are low in the propensity to exhibit either type of behavior, they may be regarded as undifferentiated. In contrast, situational leadership theory suggests that leaders should be masculine, androgynous, feminine, and finally undifferentiated (low in both masculine and feminine traits) in turn as followers increase in maturity and the leader’s need to demonstrate task behavior abates.³¹

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. Tannenbaum and Schmidt’s leadership theory recommends that leaders behave in an increasingly feminine manner as their followers gain independence, responsibility, and the ability to work well as a team.³²

Overall, 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.³³

Recall that leader stereotypes place a high value on masculine characteristics. Even though early leadership theories were developed at a time when there were far fewer women in leader roles, review of major theories does not support these stereotypes. Leadership theories also do not endorse feminine characteristics exclusively. The recent calls for transformational leadership over transactional leadership and for democratic decision making over autocratic decision making place somewhat more emphasis on feminine characteristics than masculine characteristics. Other theories, such as situational leadership theory and Tannenbaum and Schmidt's leadership theory, recommend that leaders vary the amount of masculine and feminine characteristics they display according to the situation. Thus, leadership theories do not suggest that either feminine or masculine behaviors are the key to leader effectiveness.

Sex Differences

Although leadership theories do not exclusively promote either masculinity or femininity, researchers have devoted a great deal of attention to sex differences in leader behavior and effectiveness. Over time, three distinct perspectives have emerged regarding these differences:

1. **Stereotypical differences favoring men.** Female and male managers differ in ways predicted by gender stereotypes, with men's preponderance of masculine traits making them better suited as managers.

2. **Stereotypical differences favoring women.** Female and male managers differ in accordance with gender stereotypes, but femininity is particularly needed by managers to be effective in today's workplace.
3. **No differences.** Women who pursue the nontraditional career of manager do not adhere to the feminine stereotype and behave similarly to men who pursue managerial careers.

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, which compare the behavior of male and female leaders in group simulations; (2) assessment studies, which compare the behavioral inclinations of men and women who do not currently hold leadership roles, such as business students; and (3) organizational studies, which 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 nonleaders 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, nonleaders, and participants in laboratory experiments.³⁴

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 did men on the contingent reward dimension of transactional leadership. In contrast, men rated higher than women did on two dimensions of transactional leadership: active management by exception and passive management by exception. Men also rated higher than did women in laissez-faire leadership.³⁵

Evidence from meta-analysis also suggests 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.³⁶ Thus, the above results suggest that women rate higher than men do in behavior that contributes to their effectiveness as leaders and lower than do men in behavior that would detract from their effectiveness.

A separate meta-analysis on sex differences in leader effectiveness found that women and men overall did not differ 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 have not been sufficient studies of men and women in top management positions to allow a comparison of the sexes using meta-analysis.³⁷

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. Offering some support for the “no differences” perspective, 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, contingent reward) and lower than men in dimensions of behavior that detract from leader effectiveness (passive management by exception, laissez-faire leadership). Women also make greater use of a democratic decision-making style than men. Moreover, trends in the economic environment seem to call for a transformational and democratic leadership style that is associated more with women than men.

Studies that directly measure leader effectiveness, however, rate women as no more or less effective than men. Additional evidence suggests that 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 behaviors that contribute to leader effectiveness than do men. However, situations differ in whether they favor women or men as leaders.

Promoting Effective Leadership

In Chapter 3, Sandra Bem was quoted as saying that “behavior should have no gender.”³⁸ Ideally, to amend Bem’s statement, leader behavior should have no gender. As Nancy and Joel said in their comments on the *New York Times* online debate quoted earlier, the sex of individuals who hold leader roles should be of little concern. What should matter is how well individuals, male and female, respond to the demands of the particular leader role that they occupy. However, the sex of leaders often makes a difference to others in different cultures. Many individuals, especially men, describe leaders in stereotypical terms that favor males over females. Individuals who state a preference tend to prefer male over

female leaders. They also tend to hold attitudes that make it difficult for female leaders to be effective in their roles.

What is required to create a working environment in which members of both sexes 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.³⁹

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 also 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

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 leaders of both sexes 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.

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.⁴⁰

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, attitudes toward men range from hostility to benevolence, with women scoring higher in hostility toward men and lower in benevolence toward men.⁴¹ 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., prejudice against women as leaders) are difficult to change, organizations must take steps to counteract problematic beliefs and attitudes. Diversity training programs should make individuals aware of the ways in which biases related to sex (as well as race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and so on) can affect their decisions, and to teach them how to move beyond their own biases. Organizations should also encourage employees to engage in the most effective kinds of behavior, whatever their beliefs or attitudes may be.

When stereotyping of leaders does occur 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.⁴²

Women who beat the odds and enter leadership levels previously controlled 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.⁴³

In conclusion, evidence increasingly suggests that women tend to be better suited than men to serve as leaders in the ways required in the global economy. 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 in leader roles and then to create conditions that give leaders of both sexes an equal chance to succeed. The proper goal for leadership training programs is not to teach men how to behave more like women, nor is it to teach women how to behave more like men. No matter what the linkage between gender and leadership may be, the goal should be to enhance the likelihood that all people, women and men, will be effective in leader roles.

The last word in this live update from the gender and leadership wars appropriately comes from a response to the *New York Times* online debate:⁴⁴

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. —*Julie*, #387

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