Gender and leadership: Introduction to the special issue

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The recent surge of research on gender and leadership is remarkable. A Web of Science search for articles in this area estimated approximately 3000 published journal articles since 1970, 38% of which have publication dates of 2010 or later.[1] This growth demonstrates the rising academic interest in women as leaders, which accompanies growing public interest and widespread agitation for women's inclusion in the ranks of powerholders. Organizations such as 2020 Women on Boards (https://www.2020wob.com/) advocate for women in business leadership, and groups such as Emily's List (http://emilyslist.org/) support female candidates for political offices. The increasing visibility of female leaders—including Hillary Clinton as a potential President of the United States and Christine Lagarde as the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund—has intensified this interest. Although media have concentrated on women achieving political offices and high-level corporate positions, questions about women as leaders have emerged across many types of organizations (see Vinnicombe, Burke, Blake-Beard, & Moore, 2013). In a period when public opinion appears to favor more women in leadership roles (e.g., Pew Research Center, 2015), the perpetual question remains: Why aren't there more women leaders?

Researchers and scholars have responded to this question with a torrent of articles and books. Although applied psychology, management, and business offer the greatest number of studies, important work has emerged from many academic fields. Therefore, in compiling this Special Issue, we sought contributions beyond these best-represented fields, specifically from economics and political science. In the interdisciplinary spirit that accompanied the founding of the *Leadership Quarterly*, we hope that this group of articles encourages more integration of knowledge about leadership across the disciplines.

Given this richness of contemporary scholarship, our principal aim as editors of this Special Issue is to take stock of the knowledge about gender and leadership that has recently emerged in social science fields. Therefore, we especially welcomed focused reviews of empirical research on particular topics within the broad area of gender and leadership. Yet, we also welcomed some examples of new research that provides important insights into women's leadership. The resulting collection of twelve articles gives readers wide exposure to differing topics and points of view.

The first two articles in this Special Issue challenge some widely accepted understandings about gender and leadership. A common theme, probably the most popular emphasis of research in this area, is that discrimination is the main obstacle that women face in becoming leaders. As we have argued in our own work (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 1983, 2012), this discrimination flows from the definition of leadership primarily in culturally masculine terms that disfavor women. However valid this claim, it is possible that researchers and the general public have underestimated the extent to which women fall behind men in accumulating important career capital that can qualify them for leadership roles, especially at high levels. To correct this omission, Terrance Fitzsimmons and Victor Callan explore the importance of career capital and discuss the many settings in which women and men can gain this capital.

Another common narrative is that the presence of women on corporate boards, and in high-level leader positions more generally, enhances business organizations' financial success. This argument became known as the "business case" for women, whose participation presumably enhances companies' financial outcomes. This claim has been put forth in reports from advocacy

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[1] This search identified documents in all databases with titles that contained the words *gender* or *women* or *woman* or *female* or (*sex difference**) combined with *manager** or *leader**.

organizations (e.g., Catalyst, 2004) and management consultant companies such as McKinsey (e.g., Desvaux, Devillard-Hoellinger, & Baumgarten, 2007), but their evidence derives from relatively simple displays of relevant data. In contrast, as Reneé Adams explains, economists have provided far more sophisticated analyses that probe causal relations. The results she presents call for serious rethinking of the business case rationale for greater inclusion of women on boards.

Even though the research literature offers multiple reasons why women do not ascend to leadership roles at the same rate that men do, stereotyping and prejudice remain important. The understanding of how these obstacles reduce women's opportunities has expanded greatly in recent years, and this Special Issue includes four articles illustrating these advances. In the first of these articles, Crystal Hoyt and Susan Murphy review research showing that the threat of being stereotyped as incompetent can damage women's leadership performance and aspirations. They explore the intricacies of workplace stereotype threat effects, showing how they are reliant on stereotypes about women, men, and leaders in interaction with situational factors and individual differences among potential female leaders. As Andrea Vial, Jaime Napier, and Victoria Brescoll explain, these same stereotypes can make it difficult for women to achieve legitimacy for their leadership when they do hold power. A cascade of consequences can follow from women leaders' perceived illegitimacy, including a precarious psychology that can foster inadequate leader behavior.

Despite the focus on stereotyping in much research on gender and leadership, the stereotype of women as emotional has been neglected, despite its strength and ubiquity. Victoria Brescoll makes a compelling case for the importance of this aspect of the female cultural stereotype. As Brescoll explains, being viewed as a representative of the more emotional sex constrains women's leader behaviors, with potentially damaging consequences. Finally, researchers have begun to take into account that gender stereotypes vary across racial groups in society and that these differences affect reactions to women as leaders. Ashleigh Rosette, Christy Zhou Koval, Anyi Ma, and Robert Livingston provide a compelling analysis of the ways that overall stereotypes about women as less agentic than men vary across racial groups. Their analysis inspires deeper thinking about the dimensions that researchers use to represent stereotype content and about the interactions of gender and racial stereotypes in influencing women's opportunities for leadership.

In considering the reasons for the scarcity of female leaders, researchers have also investigated the impact of group and organizational structures. As work in this area has become more elaborated, it spans many different issues and perspectives (see Kumra, Simpson, & Burke, 2014). We include four articles that represent some of these research endeavors. The first paper, written by Michelle Ryan, Alexander Haslam, Thekla Morgenroth, Floor Rink, Janka Stoker, and Kim Peters, reviews research on the *glass cliff*—the tendency for women to have access to high-level leadership positions that are inherently risky and ultimately prone to failure. The authors not only provide evidence of the glass cliff but also explore the processes that give rise to it and the conditions that regulate its occurrence. Their analysis yields insight into some of the unique problems that can be faced by women at the highest organizational echelons. For another perspective on women who attain high-level leadership positions, Belle Derks, Colette Van Laar, and Naomi Ellemers examine such women's treatment of other women. They identify a *queen bee phenomenon* whereby women leaders in male-dominated organizations can be prompted to distance themselves from more junior women and in the process legitimize gender inequality in their organizations. These authors propose that this behavior is as much a result as a cause of discrimination against women in the workplace.

Aspects of group structure illuminate the emergence and participation of female leaders. Based on their two studies, James Lemoine, Ishani Aggarwal, and Laurens Bujold Steed explore the conditions that favor the emergence of women as leaders in groups composed primarily of men. Their research demonstrates the importance of group personality composition—specifically, group-level extraversion—in fostering women's emergence. Beyond the issue of women's underrepresentation in many decision-making groups lies the matter of how influential women are in such groups. This question is the subject of the article by Tali Mendelberg that examines influence in both natural and controlled settings. She makes the case that groups' procedures for making decisions can profoundly affect whether women have influence equal to men. This research illustrates one of the ways that group-level norms and procedures can mitigate or exacerbate women's lesser voice and authority.

The last two articles in this Special Issue focus on the efficacy of organizational and societal remedies for increasing women in leadership roles. In an effort to determine the effects of family-oriented work-life practices, Kateryna Kalysh, Carol Kulik, and Sanjeewa Perera examine the availability of these practices within organizations and their subsequent effects on the proportion of women in management. Their findings indicate that work-life practices can have a positive effect, especially family-friendly leave arrangements and direct provision of services (e.g., childcare or eldercare), but only after a substantial time lag and only in some organizational contexts. Although this research thereby demonstrates the positive effects of some family-oriented work-life practices on women's representation as leaders, it also challenges some overly broad assumptions about the effectiveness of such initiatives.

The final article, authored by Victor Eduardo Sojo, Robert Wood, Sally Wood, and Melissa Wheeler, describes several studies assessing the effectiveness of various policies that act more directly on the number of women in leadership positions: diversity reporting requirements, the setting of targets, and the implementation of quotas. Analyzing data from boards of directors of both Fortune 500 companies and publically traded companies across 91 nations as well as from parliaments across 190 nations, they demonstrate the importance of goal-setting in inducing higher female representation. The broad scope of their findings furthers understanding of some of the types of interventions that can remedy women's underrepresentation in a wide spectrum of leadership roles.

The way forward

This impressive set of twelve articles provides evidence of considerable investment in research on gender and leadership and its payoff in enhanced knowledge. The scope of findings is much larger than what one of us encountered 10 years ago when

working on a book that surveyed this area (Eagly & Carli, 2007). This increased evidence tests some of the easy generalizations that researchers and scholars offered at earlier points and reveals that gaps in knowledge still remain.

That challenges remain makes sense, given that the topic was something of a latecomer to scholarship on gender. In social science fields, an outpouring of research on women and gender began in the 1970s and 1980s along with the second-wave feminist movement (e.g., for psychology, see Eagly, Eaton, Rose, Riger, & McHugh, 2012). Although this social movement brought serious questioning of men's dominance of power and authority in society, much research and social action initially addressed some of the most obvious difficulties inherent in women's relative powerlessness, such as sexual harassment, violence against women, and lack of reproductive freedom. Women's underrepresentation in leadership only gradually became a major focus of research and advocacy.

Questions about the scarcity of women as leaders led quickly to research on prejudice and discrimination. Also, understanding how this underrepresentation is fostered and perpetuated in work settings led to research about contextual elements of groups and organizations. The papers we have assembled here provide new insights into these two major areas of inquiry and, in doing so, raise new questions.

Gender discrimination

From the perspective of the legions of women who have encountered women-specific challenges as they attempted to rise to higher positions, discrimination seemed to be the chief barrier to their leadership. Discrimination became the most powerful narrative about the reasons for women's underrepresentation in leadership roles. Researchers, seeking to identify the processes underlying such discrimination, focused on gender stereotypes as the source of the problem. The ensuing studies on gender stereotypes and their effects on discriminatory attitudes and behavior have provided support for the link between gender stereotypes and discrimination. Yet, these investigations have revealed the need for more nuanced analyses.

The cultural belief that women, as the less agentic sex, are underqualified for leadership undermines women in ways that are becoming more fully understood. Several articles in this issue exemplify this progress. As Hoyt and Murphy show, the cultural belief in women's lesser competence for leadership can impede them from performing effectively and, ironically, this undermining is strongest in environments that are particularly important for women to enter—namely, male-dominated settings. Even for women who do successfully transcend such challenges, further difficulties may follow, one of which is the perception that their leadership is illegitimate, as Vial and her colleagues discuss. Negotiating such positions effectively requires skill in tailoring one's displays of emotion to be neither too intense nor too controlled, as Brescoll argues. Moreover, in ways that are just beginning to be revealed by investigations such as those of Rosette and her colleagues, these phenomena may differ depending on a leader's race as well as other attributes such as age and social class origins.

Overall, the articles in this Special Issue make clear that the ways in which gender stereotypes affect women seeking leadership roles are not yet fully understood. For example, there may be additional facets of these stereotypes that are worthy of study as well as consequences that have not been fully recognized. The authors of these articles further suggest that discrimination results from interactions of gender stereotypes with the social settings in which women seek and enact leadership. Encouraged by these important insights, researchers should continue to work to understand the processes that underlie discrimination and its detrimental consequences and to identify the conditions that allow it to flourish.

Group and organizational context

As women have continued to enter the workforce, it has become clear that the social context plays a crucial role in the degree to which they are obstructed in their leadership aspirations. Therefore, the consequences of the group and organizational contexts have increasingly attracted researchers' attention. Several articles in this issue should inspire further investigation of the complexities of contexts.

As shown by Ryan et al., if women are brought on board when organizations are most in distress and their leaders therefore are in jeopardy of failing, then the case for women leaders is often undermined by examples of their apparent inadequacy. Moreover, as argued by Derks and her colleagues, if the few women who are in leadership positions in male-dominated organizations thwart the progress of women junior to them, their actions impede women's advancement into leadership roles. The striking nature of these outcomes inspires further inquiry into the unique pressures that female leaders may experience in different organizational contexts. Moreover, this research highlights the need to identify consequential features of organizational contexts beyond their gender composition.

Women's experiences as leaders are also affected by the structural features of the groups in which they work. Aspects of group structure can interact with gender representation in producing outcomes for women as group members. As demonstrated in the Special Issue, structural elements—namely, group personality (as studied by Lemoine et al.) and decision rules (as studied by Mendelberg)—affect leader emergence and influence. Research would do well to expand on these themes by examining other elements of group structure that can facilitate or hinder women as leaders. Also worthy of investigation are other outcomes such as the tasks that women are assigned, the degree to which women's voices are heard, and the centrality of women in the group's activities.

Challenges for research

Assembling this Special Issue turned out to be a major task, given that 78 papers were submitted. The most difficult aspect of the editor role is turning away many interesting papers, all of which have potential to become valuable contributions. After

viewing this abundance of promising work from many authors, we have reflected on what the ultimate purposes are of these projects as well as of the many already published studies on gender and leadership. For many researchers, the proximal goal is to answer the question of why women are not equally represented in leadership. The ultimate goal is often to produce knowledge that promotes gender equality in society and by doing so, improves the functioning of groups, organizations, and governments. A more gender-equitable society should be a better society—more peaceful and productive for all. However noble such goals may be, the route from research to social policy and social change is fraught with difficulties.

One consideration limiting progress toward such goals is that research that captures the attention of advocates and policy makers generally conforms to broader cultural narratives, thereby omitting important evidence that is less consistent. The idea that it is mainly prejudice and discrimination that hold women back fits these narratives and thus has achieved some success in affecting policy. It might seem that issues of discrimination, in all their complexity, could be solved if stereotyping of women that drives such prejudices would just disappear. Indeed, many programs designed to "break the gender bias habit" operate through attempting to change stereotypes in the minds of individuals (e.g., Carnes et al., 2015) through education and diversity training. Although such interventions, and diversity training programs in general, have shown some positive effects (Kalinoski et al., 2013), there is also evidence of ineffectiveness (Dobbin & Kalev, 2012).

In reality, gender stereotypes are not easy to erase. Their stickiness is a result not only of the rigidity of people's belief systems but also of the social position of women in society, which has changed, but only gradually. According to Koenig and Eagly's (2014) research, stereotypes of social groups reflect everyday observations of group members' behaviors in their typical roles. Stereotypic traits emerge by correspondent inference from observed role behaviors. Therefore, as long as women and men are differently distributed into social roles, gender stereotypes will continue to coalesce around the behaviors required for success in these male-typical and female-typical roles. The persistence of role segregation, despite women's greatly increased labor force participation, is illustrated by women's continuing concentration in occupational roles that are perceived as communally demanding but not especially agentically demanding. For example, the six most common occupations for women in the United States are secretary and administrative assistant; elementary and middle school teacher; registered nurse; nursing, psychiatric, and home health aide; first-line supervisor of retail salespersons, and customer service representative (U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau's, 2014). In addition, women still perform the majority of domestic work (e.g., U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Given such findings, it is not surprising that gender stereotyping has largely remained intact (e.g., Lueptow, Garovich-Szabo, & Lueptow, 2001; Pew Research Center, 2015). Role segregation in current environments continually reinvigorates stereotypical thinking, thereby working against efforts to deter people from prejudice and discrimination.

There have been multiple approaches to alleviating role segregation. In contrast to interventions that focus on changing individuals' thinking about potential role occupants, these interventions focus on directly altering the gender composition of the roles, often through organizational policies. The article by Kalysh et al. describes an evaluation of one such intervention, the formal institution of family-friendly work-life policies. This intervention, which aims to foster women's fulfillment of their family roles while simultaneously maintaining their work roles, is only one of the many different types of organizations' initiatives that are designed to alter the gender composition of their managerial and executive ranks. The effectiveness of such initiatives should be evaluated so that knowledge about what works and when and where it works can cumulate. This type of research is essential to illuminate why some organizational policies and practices promote women's career advancement, and others fail to do so. Such programs should not be trusted merely because they are well-intended.

Interventions directed to reducing role segregation sometimes take the form of government mandates to alter organizational selection and promotion procedures to increase the representation of women in traditionally male roles. Examples include affirmative action, goal-setting targets, reporting requirements, and the institution of quotas. The effects of some of these procedures, as described in the article by Sojo and his colleagues, testify to the complexity of the issues involved. Although such direct interventions into organizational processes can have positive effects, they also can promote resistance, with companies sometimes taking actions to avoid being included in the mandate. Such interventions also can have stigmatizing effects on women who are targeted to benefit from such policies, instill antagonism in those who think themselves unfairly bypassed, and foster stresses in work groups (e.g., Heilman & Haynes, 2006). As with organizational interventions, research can determine which of these broader mandates are most effective and under what conditions.

Yet another avenue for alleviating role segregation focuses on women themselves by working to eliminate common deficiencies in career capital. Perhaps for reasons of political correctness or fear of being seen as "blaming the victim," scant attention has been paid to women's loss of leadership potential well before they are employed. For example, girls gain less experience than boys with the complexities of group processes in competitive environments such as team sports (Chalabaev, Sarrazin, Fontayne, Boiché, & Clément-Guillotin, 2013), high school and collegiate debate teams (Women's Debate Institute's, n.d.), and chess competitions (Blanch, Aluja, & Cornadó, 2015).). Young women also lose out on opportunities to gain leadership experience in university student government (e.g., American Student Government Association, 2016). Despite women's gains in educational capital through attaining college degrees, they lose leadership capital relative to men in many ways, as discussed by Fitzsimmons and Callan. These issues deserve greater attention as does the potential for remedial action.

Some final thoughts

Interventions to increase women's representation as leaders are more likely to be effective if they are guided by sound social science. As Adams demonstrates, scientific evidence is not necessarily in line with the beliefs that advocates and policy makers currently hold about gender diversity. Instead, optimistic myths about the positive effects of women's leadership have gained

considerable currency, especially the "business case" that women's participation in high-level corporate leadership enhances corporate performance. This claim is simply not in line with existing social science evidence.

Such inconsistencies between social science and the claims of advocates and policy makers suggest that scientists are not necessarily in good communication with these stakeholders (Eagly, 2016). Instead, scientific research appears to emerge piecemeal with attention given mainly to studies that fit prevailing cultural themes—in this case, the idea that good consequences follow seamlessly from women rising. This simplistic message is problematic for at least two reasons: it discourages research that can reveal the true complexity of the antecedents and consequences of gender diversity, and it leads to disappointment and the discounting of the scientific enterprise when the imagined desirable outcomes of women's presence fail to emerge. It therefore is the responsibility of researchers to accurately convey the facts of their findings, even if they are not exactly what policy-makers want to hear.

Within this Special Issue are many high-quality, informative summaries of research topics as well as examples of new research that enlarges understanding of gender and leadership. These articles should reach advocates and policy makers who are interested in evidence-based policies that promote women's more equitable representation among leaders. This new scholarship should also motivate researchers to tackle the complexities that they reveal about the phenomena of gender and leadership. We are grateful to the authors of these articles for creating movement toward these goals.

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