

Working Women: Perception and Reality

Marja- Liisa Payne
Maryville University

Author Note

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to **Marja-Liisa Payne**, John E. Simon School of Business, Maryville University, 650 Maryville University Drive, St. Louis, MO 63141, USA
E-mail: mpayne@maryville.edu

Abstract

This review article examines the stereotypes of female leadership and how culturally driven gender roles of women impact their career choices and professional advancement in organizations. A few women who have succeeded to reach an executive or other professional position pay a price for such a success with personal sacrifices including delaying motherhood or remaining childless. Female college students still adhere to traditional gender roles by believing they can have both - career and family. In industrialized nations, women students earn more college degrees than men, but their abilities in the workplace are undervalued. The effects of the gender bias on employee performance reviews show mixed results. Solutions to reaching gender equality in organizations are discussed.

Keywords: stereotype, female leadership, motherhood, gender role, bias

1. Stereotypes of Female Leadership

The trait theory of leadership of the 1920s established that effective leader characteristics are dominance, assertiveness, intelligence, and physical stature all of which became stereotypically associated with leadership (Goffee & Jones, 2000). As only a handful of women held such positions in the 1960s and beyond, leadership has been regarded as a masculine concept (Hollander & Yoder, 1980; Eagly & Johnson, 1990). The sparse representation of women in elite leadership roles lends support to the masculine perception of leadership that has not changed much since the early 1900s. Men's greater social power, as discussed by Eagly and Karau (2002), enhances the tendency for people to view men as more qualified than women for leader roles. Eagly and her colleagues concluded that men and women lead differently and that their leadership styles are dependent on the context (Eagly & Johnson; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992).

In the area of transformational leader behaviors including charismatic leadership, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation, female and male managers were rated equally by their subordinates within the banking industry (Carless, 1998). Male and female executive interviews also indicated that a majority of the executives rely on transformational rather than transactional approach to

leadership and only a small percentage of men reported using a results oriented, transactional style (Eisner, 2013). By contrast, a meta-analytic investigation by Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) yielded "small but significant sex differences" (p. 791) with female managers getting higher scores than their male counterparts on transformational dimensions of influence, motivation, and individualized consideration. Subordinates' (followers) association of female managers were motivated because they felt respected and proud, and more specifically, these managers were attentive to the subordinates' needs by developing and mentoring them and showed optimism and excitement about their future goals. Men, however, exceeded women on the transactional and laissez-faire style of leadership (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt). On the other hand, the effects of gender on perceived leadership did not suggest any differences in male and female leadership abilities and qualities (Sywensky, Madden, & Treadwell, 1996). Managers performing the same or similar functions in equivalent positions showed no differences according to their peers (Payne, 2010) and subordinates (Carless, 1998; Adams, Rice, & Instone, 1984).

In a study of leadership styles, male employees gave higher ratings to male bank managers than female bank managers, although their ratings of leadership effectiveness of the two groups were not significantly different (Kark, Waismel-Manor, & Shamir, 2012). The ratings were low if these managers failed to blend agentic characteristics associated with assertive, ambitious, controlling, self-confident, independent, and competitive behaviors and communal characteristics such as affectionate, sympathetic, helpful, gentle, and interpersonally sensitive or if they behaved in an androgynous way (i.e., mixing masculine and feminine characteristics). Another observation was that the employees perceived female managers as significantly more 'masculine' than male managers in the same roles, while male managers were more likely categorized as 'feminine' by female employees (Kark et al., 2012). Interestingly, in Finland where women are expected to be strong, female CEOs were described to have communal traits by business school students (Katila & Eriksson, 2013). In this societal context, managerial work is considered suitable for masculine types, male or female; the female CEOs were described almost entirely in masculine terms. With respect to the agentic and communal traits and organizational success, college students in another study related them more to top level female leader roles (Rosette & Tost, 2010).

Furthermore, male students had a low opinion of female managers, whereas female students were more likely to describe the female managers as ambitious, authoritative, direct, objective, and firm than their male counterparts (Deal & Stevenson, 1998). Likewise, in a meta-analytic review of multiple studies, male leaders were rated as more effective than female leaders, and the latter were regarded as less effective than male leaders in laboratory settings (Dobbins & Platz, 1986). But field studies showed no rating differences (Dobbins & Platz; van Engen, van der Leeden, & Willemsen, 2001). Nor did the meta-analytic study uncover any gender effect on subordinate satisfaction with their male and female leaders (Dobbins & Platz).

Despite the differing findings and the assertion of the existence of female stereotypes, it is important to note that raters in natural settings can observe leaders' performance and make comparative analysis. Conversely, in laboratory experiments such as classrooms where typically undergraduate college students are the raters with little or no experience working with organizational leaders, they rely on implicit sex roles or use imaginary people as targets and mark appraisal instruments accordingly (e.g., Adams et al., 1984; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004; Kark et al., 2012). So, when the raters

have no interaction with those being evaluated, sex-role stereotypes along with gender stereotypic behaviors tend to emerge (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Hollander & Yoder, 1980). The sample composition is another factor to consider as in Kark et al.'s study with 67% female and 33% male participants between the ages of 21-65. A limitation of meta-analyses on leadership styles is that people's attitudes and preferences for either male or female leaders may change over time.

A 'glass ceiling' metaphor used to describe prejudice and discrimination against women as leaders seems to contribute to women's underrepresentation among those who reach the executive suite (Carli & Eagly, 2001; for multiple glass ceilings, see Russo & Hassink, 2012). Still, some women are able to reach the top echelon of organizations and appear to have "cracked the glass ceiling." They may be more qualified than male candidates applying for the same positions. In recent years, however, company performance has been found to predict an ideal leader choice. In times of crisis, feminine traits such as empathy, tact, and sympathy are preferred – named the *glass cliff* effect (Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, & Bongiorno, 2011), while stereotypic male attributes such as competitive, dynamic, and decisive are favored in times of company success (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010). Based on a meta-analysis, men's autocratic or directive leadership style appeared overall to be an advantage to organizations (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011).

Because of the predominant gender status beliefs, gender differences tend to result in unequal treatment for female employees who are viewed as less competent than male employees (Ridgeway, 2001). Therefore, women are unlikely to be selected for leader positions, as shown by a 2001 study of Fortune 100 organizations; 5% of the women held a CEO position compared to 13% of the men (Cappelli & Hamori, 2005).

In addition, 75% of women surveyed were subjected to sabotaging behavior by a woman at work, which may explain why women moving up the corporate hierarchy face an increased competition for the few available positions (Briles, 2003). It may lead to a "Catch-22" situation where women climbing the occupational ladder must be tough minded, while at the same time, it provokes resistance and hostility among peer women (Briles). In fact, one-third of the women preferred not to work with other women except in the male-dominated engineering field. The underlying resentment, jealousy, or envy felt among less successful women and expressed against strong women is labeled the *Queen Bee* syndrome. After reaching the top echelon through her hard work, the *Queen Bee* is territorial and unwilling to support other women. Similarly, the *Phantom Bee* makes it known that no other woman can do the job like she does, and subsequently, recommends a man for a promotion.

2. Gender Roles of Women

Occupational segregation by gender with jobs classified as "female" or "male" is reinforced by the social, legal, and economic advantages men enjoy (Joshi, 1998). Neoclassical economists attribute the occupational segregation to "women's preferences for female-typed occupations, which purportedly require less investment in formal education" (Charles, Buchmann, Halebsky, Powers, & Smith, 2001, p. 375). Contrary to this view, young women attend college in higher numbers than their male counterparts in the United States - 72% and 65%, respectively (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013). A comparison of the 2008 higher education completion rates of the 25-34 year-old age group in G-8 countries (i.e., Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, United Kingdom, and United States – except the Russian Federation) indicate that women surpassed men in all countries measured (Miller, Warren, & Owen, 2011).

Application of gender roles to a social context gives insight into why agentic characteristics are expected from male leaders, whereas communal traits are ascribed to female leaders (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Hence, a person's behavior pertains to socially shared gender roles that can lead to prejudice and gender-stereotypic expectations caused by the gender-role spillover effect carried over from home into the workplace (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt; Eagly & Karau; Eagly & Johnson, 1990).

Societies have a "long-standing distinction between the task role, associated with the father, and the socioemotional role, associated with the mother" (Hollander & Yoder, 1980, p. 268), and as such, these roles establish gender distinctions in occupations and reinforce role expectations. Mothers and fathers surveyed reported resentment that "their employers expected them to *choose* between work and family, and that responding to their parenting responsibilities brought into question their commitment to work, which they felt inhibited their ability to advance careers" (Hand & Lewis, 2002, p. 29). In an empirical study of the oil industry, it was found "that large... organizations are structured along lines consistent with a stereotypically masculine value system" (Miller, 2002, p. 145). This supports Eagly et al.'s (1992) meta-analysis concluding that gender roles restrict the options of female leaders in male-dominated positions. The same traditional gender role preferences by females emerged from an atypical experience base. Female college students exposed to atypical gender roles such as a female surgeon and a male nurse showed a significantly decreased interest in masculine occupations (Rudman & Phelan, 2010). This counterintuitive outcome may result from a belief that smart and ambitious women will be more successful in female dominated domains. A few women deviating from their traditional gender roles take risks including a possible career failure or peer rejection in an uncharted territory. One may conclude that both women and men operate and organize themselves at a workplace and in society at large in an implicit, rule-governed way.

As the percentage of women in an occupation rises, it tends to result in oversupply or the "crowding" phenomenon as demonstrated in typical "women's jobs" such as clerical and child care workers, nurses, and teachers. So, female professionals are likely to be health care workers and educators as opposed to working in computer science and engineering fields (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013). In the advanced technology sector, women cited considerable career challenges including perceived lack of credentials, a lack of networking opportunities, and organizational issues (Orser, Riding, & Stanley, 2012) all of which may act as barriers to women's desire to select the technical and engineering domains.

Moreover, women tend to change jobs more frequently than men, and their job interruptions are mostly due to maternity leave (Kirchmeyer, 2002). Although career progression is expected to occur in an orderly sequence from lower to higher levels of responsibility, women with small children are likely to lag behind such expectations. After all, "career building at its most intense occurs precisely during childbearing years" (Deutsch, 2001, p. 27).

In developed Western nations, it is now socially acceptable to extend the age of motherhood in order to keep pace with career goals and personal autonomy (Wu & MacNeill, 2002). In the United States, 33% of successful female doctors, lawyers, and academics are childless at the ages of 41 to 55 (Hewlett, 2002). Clifford Wittekind and Wilke (2000) speculated that women with children may be less committed to the labor market and less motivated to work while raising children. In the United States, a general view holds that society forces two choices on women: Either to have children and no career or to have no children and a career. In fact, child-free senior level women executives expressed the difficulty

of having career while raising a family; 45% of them were childless and more than half of the women who had children had given birth to their first child when they were over 30 years old (Gallagher, 2001).

According to Hewlett (2002), the American feminist movement dating back to the mid- 19th century is at fault to some degree for not stressing problems related to maternal employment. In line with this opinion, a working woman with a high level of education was found less likely to become a mother (Wu & MacNeill, 2002). By contrast, no relationship was identified between education and employment of women with small children in earlier research (Gordon & Kammeyer, 1980). But interviews with dual-earner couples with a wife holding a professional or managerial position uncovered that "the principal factor determining the wife's occupational achievement is the amount of education she has [and that] husbands' own [occupational] achievement becomes a precondition for the [occupational] achievement of their wives" (Philliber & Vannoy-Hiller, 1990, p. 326). Still, female college students' attitudes toward balancing family and career echo traditional female roles; they "almost uniformly anticipated marriage and childbearing" but had unrealistic expectations about their future career and earnings (Fetterolf & Eagly, 2011, p. 90). Both Canadian and Finnish women in high positions (55% of the Canadians and 71% of the Finnish women had children) reported stereotypical attitudes that interfered with their career development (Yewchuk, Äystö, & Schlosser, 2001).

Social democratic states of Finland and Sweden have adopted gender equality and women's empowerment as a conscious national policy (Rosenthal, 1994; Yewchuk et al., 2001). In these countries, parents' maternal leave is job-protected, and they may choose to work part-time. In contrast, the United States lags behind most industrialized nations in high-quality child care. So, mothers in the United States have no formal incentive to be employed, as is the case for example in Sweden with its most financially generous and flexible parental leave and child care programs in the world (Starrels, 1993; Grönlund, 2012). The country's social programs such as child allowances, child support payments, and housing subsidies target specifically women with children, married or single mothers, to participate in the labor force (Rosenthal).

Overall, many mothers in the United States become marginalized economically when trying to balance success in the roles of a "good, nurturing mother" and an achievement-oriented employee. The drop in the birth rate and postponing motherhood indicate difficulties in embracing the balanced work-family arrangements (Deutsch, 2001; Morrison, White, Van Velsor, & The Center for Creative Leadership, 1987; Wu & MacNeill, 2002). "Where quality child care is unavailable or prohibitively costly..., more women will be forced to discontinue their occupational careers when they become mothers" (Charles et al., 2001, p. 373). Yet, in 2011, the percentage of married women with children under the age of six reached over 64% in the United States, although 25% of them usually worked part-time meaning fewer than 35 hours a week (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013).

According to human- capital theory, skills, training, experience, and education are assumed to determine people's productivity level and marketability in the labor market. Furchtgott-Roth and Stolba (2001) pointed out that "80 percent of women bear children at some point in their lives" (p. 69), and therefore, they do not reach the same length of tenure and uninterrupted experience compared to non-maternal and male employees. The cumulative effect of motherhood is, thus, likely to produce experience as well as earnings differentials between working mothers and other groups.

A shortcoming in much of the research on women's careers is that it largely covers Caucasian working mothers, and therefore, greater attention needs to be paid to studying racial and ethnic minorities. Whether or not women have children, they are at times grouped together in statistics, which calls into a question the generalizations of some of the research findings (e.g., Yewchuk et al., 2001). The findings may further be skewed if people of different ages and working in different fields and geographic locations are compared.

3. Effects of Gender Bias on Employee Performance Reviews

It is said that managerial advancement in organizations depends on positive appraisal ratings given by one's superior (Carless, 1998) and that it is important to be a member of informal social networks in organizations as a way to advance one's career. Given the relatively small number of women in influential leader roles, aspiring career-oriented women have only a few female role models, which is a natural deficit in their access to support networks. One of the most publicized gender bias or sex discrimination rulings of the U.S. Supreme Court involving Ann Hopkins and her employer, Price Waterhouse, highlights this phenomenon (Hart, 2008). Despite Hopkins' outstanding performance record that in terms of revenue generated exceeded all the 86 male applicants for the same position, the firm's admissions committee rejected her candidacy to partnership based on 32 male partners' negative comments about her (Eagly et al., 1992).

Competent women like Hopkins occupying male gender-typed jobs were judged based on cultural norms rather than their competence both by male and female subjects (Heilman et al., 2004). Because of the women's norm violation, the raters enforced social penalties in their evaluations. In another study, male students showed a lack of confidence in women's competence, which manifested in their subtle, stereotypical, discriminatory attitudes toward women (Farmer & Waugh, 1999). Such culturally held gender bias may have contributed to male managers' significantly higher evaluations of the competencies of male human resource (HR) managers compared to female HR managers, whereas no significant differences were found among the ratings of female managers (Payne, 2011). It was unknown how well the raters knew the actual competencies of the HR managers or if they relied on their perceived assumptions. Aligned with these findings, interviews of professional women indicated that mothers with a feminine orientation are considered as less committed to work, and their contributions are devalued (Trethewey, 1999). Consistent with this perception, undergraduate students holding traditional gender stereotypes of women (i.e., associate femaleness with ineffectiveness) rated female professors' performance less favorably than students with nontraditional stereotypes of women (i.e., do not associate femaleness with ineffectiveness) (Dobbins, Cardy, & Truxillo, 1988; Bauer & Baltes, 2002).

An examination of gender effects among financial analysts showed no evidence of discrimination against female analysts; on the contrary, women were more likely to get recognized for their star performance than their male counterparts (Li, Sullivan, Xu, & Gao, 2013). Likewise, there were no significant performance appraisal differences between male and female supervisors' ratings in cross-gender dyads in an industrial work setting (Shore & Thornton, 1986). The supervisors had advanced from similar roles held by the current subordinates and, thus, they likely had in-depth knowledge of the work quality and quantity expected of the subordinates. In another study, coworkers' perceptions of male and female managers did not result in statistically significant differences either (Hare, Koenigs, & Hare, 1997). Several coworkers rated each manager, but their gender was not recorded, which limits

generalizing the findings regarding the gender dimension.

A paucity of empirical literature on actual, rather than experimental, employee performance evaluations makes it difficult to understand the effects of gender on ratings. Organizational appraisal systems studied in the 1960s and 1970s exclude the consideration of gender as do more recent studies on subordinate satisfaction with performance reviews conducted by their supervisors. A lack of studies analyzing the impact of gender underscores the complexity of such research as several variables, subjective and objective, affect the assessment of human behavior. More research is warranted to fill this gap in the literature. It is, however, commonly known that performance reviews are done poorly and focus on negative assessment (University of Pennsylvania, 2011).

4. Solutions to Gender Inequality in Organizations

In the past, for women to "fit in" and to secure professional success, they were advised to mimic their successful male counterparts or to use male leadership traits (Trethewey, 1999; Kirchmeyer, 1998). Findings support the idea that women exposed to a technical field should adopt an 'anti-woman' approach by distancing themselves from their gender identity and, hence, reject femaleness to better fit into a dominant, masculine culture (Powell, Bagilhole, & Daitny, 2009). In order to eradicate gender typing prevalent among senior engineers, Male, Bush, and Murray (2009) recommended programs designed to recruit and retain higher numbers of female engineering students and to investigate engineering cultures rather than trying to change women to fit in.

Vinnicombe and Singh (2003) took a more radical approach believing that business schools should offer women-only classes in their MBA programs. Agreeably, a business degree - ideally in finance - and an MBA as well as a record of overseeing profit and loss statements are increasingly important for reaching high-level corporate jobs (Cappelli & Hamori, 2005). But feminists and others may reject these recommendations because of a possible backlash that could result in women being regarded as deficient to tackle the traditional male dominated programs designed around the male model of leadership (see Ridgeway, 2001). Yet, leadership development programs and awareness building of perceived stereotypes that may overshadow objective judgments of women's leadership style are likely to reduce the influence of stereotypes about female leaders' performance (Adams et al., 1984).

As part of employee development, employers should ensure that on-the-job training is offered to men and women equally. In an empirical study, women had about four months less initial on-the-job training than men working in the same occupation (Grönlund, 2012). As an extension of the training, a formal mentoring program can be another solution for men and women to compete on equal terms for promotions. Female executives reported a lack of mentors as one of the obstacles to advance their careers (Galinsky et al., 2003). Only 19% of the female executives had been helped by a woman, whereas 87% of the male executives had been guided by a man. In another study, 58% of executive women and 48% of executive men had worked with a mentor or coach in their careers (Eisner, 2013), which underscores the importance of talent development. On the other hand, most of the executive women interviewed (61%) did not want "to be seen as separatists who surround themselves only with other women" and felt pressure to be fair in the development of both men and women (Morrison et al., 1987, p. 163).

Gender inequality is largely imbedded and maintained in each culture, where the dominant gender is idealized and worthy of a higher role; the inequality is then manifested in organizations (see Cohen & Huffman, 2003). Be that as it may, scholars have examined other contributing factors for the male-female distinction in the workplace. One such factor is masculinely worded job vacancy advertisements. Women, although qualified for male-dominated fields, find such advertisements less appealing than when feminine words are used in them (Gaucher, Friesen, & Kay, 2011). So, self-selection may reinforce the gendered distinction in job positions.

Grammatically genderized languages (e.g., French and German) and genderless languages (e.g., Finnish and Hungarian) can also shape the distinction between the genders leading to the perceptions of 'male' versus 'female' (for this topic, see Prewitt-Freilino, Caswell, & Laakso, 2012). Moreover, exposure to gender-stereotypic television commercials was found to elicit the female stereotype among the women who were vulnerable to stereotype threat to such a degree that they were negatively affected in terms of their leadership aspirations (Davies, Spencer, & Steele, 2005). Such a threat may occur in a situation in which an individual experiences anxiety, because he or she does not want to confirm the negative stereotype.

Educating the workforce about the benefits of diversity, training supervisors on the importance of cultural inclusiveness and requiring their commitment to diversity may lead to higher acceptance of women leaders (Galinsky et al., 2003). Several worldwide organizations including Society for Human Resource Management, Center for Creative Leadership, and Catalyst provide training programs on female leadership development, diversity awareness, and best practices, among others. Their researchers conduct workplace surveys to uncover trends in hiring practices, biases, discrimination, and employee satisfaction to name a few.

As discussed, balancing the domains of building career and raising children without affordable assistance in children's care limits mothers' employment opportunities. Morrison et al. (1987) proposed a "solution for women who want to demonstrate their commitment to the corporation and thereby earn a chance for advancement into the executive suite is to give up everything else, including a family" (p. 114). In Hewlett's (2002) view, women are being forced to give up their careers for children, which is "an extraordinary waste of expensively educated talent" (p. 9) and added that corporations with diverse family-friendly policies (e.g., daycare sites) "are much more likely to hang on to their professional women than companies that don't" (p. 10). This highlights a well-documented problem of industrialized nations like the United States and Germany where the school systems lack afterschool care making it necessary for working parents, typically mothers, to give up work in exchange for child care (Boston College, 2013). Almost every one of the executive mothers interviewed relied on a housekeeper, a nanny, or a supportive spouse to provide logistical and emotional support for child rearing and household tasks (Gallagher, 2001). In Germany, mothers' employment after the child turns one year old may increase due to a legal mandate (effective 2013) giving every child over one year of age a chance to apply for a spot in a child care facility (Boston College, 2013).

In order to achieve economic equality in the United States, for example, the current Family and Medical Leave Act with 12 weeks of unpaid leave a year may need to be extended to include firms with less than 50 employees and to offer it at least as a partially paid leave. Rosenthal (1994), however, pointed out that the Swedish welfare system known for its generous, guaranteed and largely state

subsidized child care is a model not easily transferred to the United States with its emphasis on individualism and self-sufficiency (see Tomlinson, 2011). Finally, it could be argued that women's participation in the paid labor market may have to do with their own desires, rather than with other factors. But their higher educational achievement rates in industrial nations highlight the need to fully benefit from their knowledge acquisition.

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