Jepson Studies in Leadership

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Conceptions of Leadership

Enduring Ideas and Emerging Insights

*Edited by*
George R. Goethals, Scott T. Allison, Roderick M. Kramer, and David M. Messick
CHAPTER FIVE

Social Identities and Leadership: The Case of Gender

CRYSTAL L. HOYT

Social identities matter in the leadership process. Renowned American politician Shirley Chisholm observed this first hand. She notes, “I was the first American citizen to be elected to Congress in spite of the double drawbacks of being female and having skin darkened by melanin. When you put it that way, it sounds like a foolish reason for fame. In a just and free society it would be foolish. That I am a national figure because I was the first person in 192 years to be at once a congressman, black and a woman proves, I think, that our society is not yet either just or free.” Members of society’s non-dominant social groups, such as women and minorities, experience greater difficulty in reaching elite leadership positions than dominant group members (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Taking a quick glimpse across the top influence wielding bodies in the United States we can see a disproportionate prevalence of white males in top leadership positions. For example, although white males account for only 34 percent of the electorate (US Census, 2012), 67 percent of the seats are occupied by white men in the 2013 US congress. However, women, who account for 52 percent of the electorate (US Census, 2012), hold only 18.3 percent of the congressional seats and women of color hold a mere 4.5 percent (Center for American Women and Politics, 2013). The numbers are not much different in the top echelons of the business world. For example, leadership on the boards of the Fortune 500 companies is dominated by white men; white men hold 95.5 percent of board chair positions with minority men (3.9%), white women (2.0%), and minority women (.6%) significantly underrepresented in these positions (Alliance for Board Diversity, 2011).

Why does this matter? Representation of women, minorities, and other non-traditional leaders in public office and leadership positions is a matter of justice and equity. As Susan B. Anthony said, “There never will be complete equality until women themselves help to make laws and elect lawmakers.”
Not only does increasing parity in representation show movement toward fulfilling democratic principles of equal opportunity to participate in the public sphere, but members from these marginalized groups can bring to office important perspectives and priorities that may be underrepresented. For example, increases in the empowerment of women as political leaders are associated with increases in policy making that represents the concerns of families, women, and ethnic and racial minorities (Markham, 2012; UNICEF, 2006). The greater empowerment of women in the political realm predicts increases in standards of living, education, infrastructure, and health (Beaman, Duflo, Pande, & Topalova, 2006; Markham, 2012). Furthermore, research suggests that when women hold political office there is an increased responsiveness to the needs of constituents, greater cooperation across party and ethnic groups, and when they are involved with peace negotiations and post-conflict governance and reconstruction there is a greater chance of lasting success (Cammis & Reingold, 2004; Chinkin, 2003; Markham, 2012; Rosenthal, 2001). Similarly, women have been shown to bring unique perspectives and priorities to the business world that are associated with a greater focus on corporate sustainability including environmental issues (e.g., investing in renewable energy), social issues (e.g., improving access to health care), and governance issues (e.g., demonstrating high levels of transparency; McElhaney & Mobasseri, 2012).

Many factors contribute to the underrepresentation of marginalized individuals in leadership and limit their access to power. Theoretical perspectives are vast, ranging from those focusing on economic disadvantage and resultant limited access to educational, social, and cultural opportunities, to those focusing on how members of the dominant group work to maintain their privileged status, to focusing on how members of marginalized groups justify the system and the status quo (Haines & Jost, 2000; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Focusing specifically on women, researchers have identified important factors contributing to women’s lesser access to power including their greater family responsibilities as well as organizational cultures and structures that are more amenable to men’s lives than women’s (Eagly, 2012). The perspective that I will take in this chapter is that social identities matter in large part because they shape expectations (Major, 2012). These expectancies influence the way we as observers respond toward others as well as the way we as actors think about ourselves and behave (Deaux, 2012). Finally, in this chapter I will focus primarily on gender with a particular emphasis on the social category of women. Furthermore, most of the research that I draw upon has been undertaken in Western contexts. Given that these social identity findings stem largely from the culturally defined roles of women in society, the Western perspective I take in this chapter may not generalize well to cultures in which the roles of women differ.

Leadership researchers largely ignored social identities as a focus of research until the 1970s when they turned their attention to one social identity in particular: gender (Chermers, 1997; Hoyt, 2013a). There is now a robust scholarly interest into questions surrounding gender and leadership, with much focus on the topics that occupied the earliest scholars: examining style and effectiveness differences between women and men. The governing questions have changed dramatically over the past decades; first, researchers asked “can women lead?” and now many are asking “are women superior leaders than men?” In short, decades of research reveals that there appears to be small sex-related differences in leadership style and effectiveness (see Eagly, Gartzia, & Carli, 2014 for a comprehensive review). For example, women are slightly more likely to use democratic or participatory as opposed to autocratic leadership styles (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; van Engen & Willemsen, 2004). Women are also more likely than men to engage in transformational leadership behaviors and these behaviors are associated with contemporary notions of effective leadership (Eagly, Johannesen-Smidt, & van Engen, 2003). Importantly, the leadership context can play an influential role in effectiveness. Women experience slight effectiveness disadvantages in masculine settings, whereas settings that are less masculine and male-dominated offer women some advantages.

Both pundits and researchers are now starting to focus on other ways in which female and male leaders may differ. For example, national journalists recently heralded the 20 female US Senators as the driving force behind the end to the government shutdown in 2013. According to the New York Times, “In a Senate still dominated by men, women on both sides of the partisan divide proved to be the driving forces that shaped a negotiated settlement.” TIME magazine further argued that “women are the only adults left in Washington” and that the 20 women are “setting new standards for civility and bipartisanship.” Focusing on exploring differences in values and attitudes, researchers have found that women are more likely than men to endorse social values that promote the welfare of others (Eagly et al., 2014; Schwartz & Rubel, 2005). Research focused on ethical decision making has shown that women are less likely to support unethical decisions than are men (Borkowski & Ugras, 1998; Franke, Crowne, & Spake, 1997). These differences in values and ethics can help explain important gender-linked differences in leadership outcomes. For example, female politicians are more likely to promote policies related to women, children, and families, are more focused on the public good, and are less involved in political corruption (Beaman, Chattopadhyay, Duflo, Pande, & Topalova, 2009; Dollar, Fisman, & Gatti, 2001; Eagly et al., 2014; Paxton, Kunovich, & Hughes, 2007; Swamy, Knack, Lee, & Azafr, 2001). Organizations with greater numbers of women at the top are associated with greater philanthropy,
fewer employee lay-offs, and fewer unethical business practices (Boulouta, 2013; Eagly et al., 2014; Williams, 2003). Recently, there has been considerable focus on the financial performance of companies with more or less gender diversity in their upper echelons. Although early research found that greater levels of female leadership promoted financial success, closer scrutiny of the data reveals that increasing numbers of women at the top do not necessarily promote firm success (see Eagly et al., 2014). However, research does point to a number of important society-levels effects of having more women in leadership positions including a reduced gender wage gap, greater national wealth, and greater levels of societal gender equality (Cohen & Huffman, 2007; Eagly et al., 2014; World Bank, 2012).

Scholars have also long been interested in the difficulties that women face in attaining positions of influence and leadership. As Madeleine Albright astutely noted, “The world is wasting a precious resource today. Tens of thousands of talented women stand ready to use their professional expertise in public life; at the same time, they are dramatically underrepresented in positions of leadership around the world.” The glass ceiling is a term originally coined by two Wall Street Journal reporters in 1986 (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986) to refer to the invisible barrier preventing women from ascending into top corporate leadership positions. Women even face this barrier in female-dominated occupations, professions where men ride a glass escalator up to the top positions (Maume, 1999). Although the glass ceiling metaphor served a useful purpose in placing this topic in the national spotlight, it has limitations and has recently been replaced with the image of a leadership labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The glass ceiling implies that women do not face barriers at lower-level positions and that they face one large, indiscernible, and impassable barrier higher up. This new metaphor conveys the image of a journey riddled with challenges throughout that can be, and has been, successfully navigated. Women encounter many obstacles on this journey, including those stemming from an often disabling division of domestic labor. In this chapter, however, I will focus primarily on those barriers that stem from gender stereotypes and that shape expectations thereby influencing our beliefs and behaviors.

Social Identities: Shaping Expectations of Perceivers

Leadership Is in the Eye of the Beholder

I think the important thing about my appointment is not that I will decide cases as a woman, but that I am a woman who will get to decide cases.
—Sandra Day O’Connor

Social identities influence who we see as “fitting” the preconceived notion of a leader. To the extent that leadership begins with “the process of being perceived by others as a leader” (Lord & Maher, 1991, p. 11), nontraditional leaders are at a distinct disadvantage. Ample research indicates that people evaluate their leaders and potential leaders in reference to their intuitive notion of an ideal leader (Forsyth & Nye, 2008; Kenney, Schwartz-Kenney, & Blascovich, 1996; Lord & Maher, 1991). These lay conceptions of what it means to be a leader are called implicit leadership theories and they commonly revolve around task-oriented and people-oriented traits and behaviors, such as being determined and influential as well as being caring and open to others’ ideas (Forsyth & Nye, 2008). These implicit leadership theories often reflect characteristics associated with traditional leaders and can result in biased perceptions and evaluations of people who do not fit the image of a leader, such as women (Hoyt & Chemers, 2008). For example, during Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor’s confirmation hearing there was considerable apprehension about how her experiences and background, as a Latina woman, might bias her ability to be impartial. Building on the inherent assumptions in these concerns that white men are uniquely impartial and immune to having life experiences shape their own views and biases, Stephen Colbert cleverly observed:

In America, white is neutral … The personal backgrounds [of Supreme Court justices] had nothing to do with the all neutral [white] court’s decision that it was legal to send Japanese Americans to internment camps in 1942. Imagine how the life experiences of an Asian judge would have sullied that neutrality.

People’s implicit leadership theories often reflect the masculinity standard that is associated with leadership. Ample research demonstrates that these intuitive notions of leaders are culturally masculine (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011). Historically, positions of power and influence in society have traditionally been occupied by men whereas women have held lower status positions and have been more likely to work in the home. This division of labor has brought about gender roles, or consensus shared beliefs about what women and men usually do and what they should do (Eagly, 1987). According to role congruity theory, bias against female leaders emerges from the conflicting expectations between the female gender role and the leader role (Eagly, 2004; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001). Significant research demonstrates that people have less favorable attitudes toward female than male leaders and women experience a greater difficulty than men in attaining top leadership roles and to being viewed as effective in these roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Gender stereotypes both describe beliefs about the attributes of women and men and prescribe how women and men ought to be (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Glick & Fiske, 1999). These stereotypes are activated easily and can result in biased perceptions and evaluations of others (Fiske, 1998; Kunda & Spencer, 2003). A vivid illustration of gender-based prejudice can be seen in the selection processes for members of symphony orchestras. In the 1970s and 1980s, male-dominated symphony orchestras made one simple change that resulted in a radical change in the proportion of
women in symphony orchestras: applicants were asked to audition while hidden behind a screen (Goldin & Rouse, 2000). Although the content of gender stereotypes is vast, the particular stereotypes that influence the perception and evaluation of individuals in leadership are those maintaining that “women take care” and “men take charge” (Dodge, Gilroy & Fenzel, 1995; Heilman, 2001; Hoyt, 2010). Women are associated with communal characteristics that highlight a concern for others, whereas men are viewed as possessing agentic characteristics that emphasize confidence, self-reliance, and dominance (Deaux & Kite, 1993; Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000; Williams & Best, 1990). Thus, descriptive gender stereotypes make it such that men are more likely than women to be seen as possessing traits that “fit” with the leadership role because the qualities used to describe men are similar to those used to describe effective leaders (Koenig et al., 2011).

The stereotype-based discrimination that women face in the leadership domain often comes in subtle forms and can be difficult to detect. In one clever experimental approach to illuminating this bias, termed the Goldberg paradigm (Goldberg, 1968), identical information, such as resumes or vignettes, are given to participants for evaluation with only one change across conditions: the name attached is either male or female. In a meta-analytic review of studies using this paradigm for leadership selection, researchers found a strong bias toward selecting men for masculine positions, including leadership positions, and gender-neutral positions and a preference for selecting women for feminine jobs, such as nurse (Davison & Burke, 2000).

Female leaders often find themselves in a double bind: highly communal women are criticized for being deficient leaders and highly agentic women experience backlash for not being female enough (Eagly et al., 2014; Heilman, 2001; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004). That is, successful female leaders can engender hostility in terms of not being liked and being personally derogated (Heilman et al., 2004; Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001). Relative to men, women are more likely to be penalized for expressing anger, talking more than others, and negotiating for their salary (Bowl, Babcock, & Lal, 2007; Brescoll, 2011; Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008). This hostility women encounter for being successful at leadership stems from the perceived violation of the communal gender role. As Shirley Chisholm once noted, “One distressing thing is the way men react to women who assert their equality: their ultimate weapon is to call them unfeminine. They think she is anti-male; they even whisper that she’s probably a lesbian.” This backlash experienced by effective female leaders who are perceived to be disregarding the prescription of femininity is exemplified in the 1989 Supreme Court case Price Waterhouse v. Ann Hopkins (Fiske, Bersoff, Borgida, Deaux, & Heilman, 1991). Hopkins was told by Price Waterhouse that she would not make partner because she was too masculine and that she should “walk more femininely, talk more femininely, dress more femininely, wear make-up, have her hair styled, and wear jewelry.” Thanks in part to the empirical and theoretical literature on gender stereotyping, the court ruled that Price Waterhouse was discriminating against Hopkins based on gender stereotypes.

### Gender-Based Preferences in Leadership Are Changing

Although women have more difficulty than men in attaining positions of authority from the boardroom to the senate floor, there has been an enormous shift toward accepting women as leaders over the last half century (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Hoyt, 2010). For example, when Gallup asked Americans in 1995 whether they would prefer to work for a man or woman, 46 percent indicated preference for a male boss, only 19 percent preferred a female boss, and 33 percent indicated no preference. However, when asked the same question in 2011, the most popular response was no preference (44%), followed by preference for a male boss (32%), and then preference for a female boss (22%). Thus, even though there is still a preference for male over female bosses, this preference has decreased over the years and preference for a female boss and no preference have increased. Research has shown that there has been a cultural change such that leadership is increasingly being thought of as an androgynous endeavor requiring both agency as well as communal relational skills (Koenig et al., 2010).

Not only have biases against female leaders decreased considerably over the years but there is great variability in how people respond to women in leadership positions. There is ample evidence demonstrating that people’s expectations about the roles of men and women in society and their attitudes toward women in positions of authority can be important predictors of gender-biased leader evaluations. Research has shown that more traditional attitudes toward women in positions of authority predict bias against women in positions of power (Rudman & Kilian, 2000; Simon & Hoyt, 2008). Although the majority of the research focuses on anti-women bias, recent research has highlighted the bias in favor of women that can emerge when people hold progressive attitudes toward women in authority (Hoyt & Burnette, 2013). Similarly, Hoyt (2012) demonstrated that whereas individuals who support the gender role status quo, conservatives, discriminate against women in employment decisions, individuals who actively reject the status quo, liberals show favor toward female candidates. Finally, recent research has shown that the extent to which people rely on their gender attitudes when making leader evaluations depends on the extent to which they believe human attributes are malleable. Consistent with past research showing that those who believe attributes are fixed, as opposed to malleable, pay greater attention to stereotype-consistent information and rely more on social group and trait-related information when perceiving others, those who believe attributes are fixed are more likely to rely on their gender role attitudes when evaluating female and male leaders (Hoyt & Burnette, 2013).
The findings that progressive, as opposed to traditional, gender role attitudes predict bias in favor of female leaders contributes to a relatively new and growing literature demonstrating a shift in gender-based preferences in leadership. For example, across both experimental and archival studies, researchers have shown that women are preferred over men to lead organizations during times of organizational failure (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Thus, women are more likely than men to be appointed to glass cliffs: precarious situations associated with greater risk and criticism (Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, Kulich, & Atkins, 2008). Women who are put in these risky positions are often highly criticized and used as scapegoats when the struggling organizations fail. Examples of women who have found themselves on glass cliffs include Carly Fiorina when she took over as CEO at Hewlett-Packard and Katie Couric when she took over as evening news anchor at CBS. In related research, Brown, Diekman, and Schneider (2011) have shown that under conditions of threat people prefer a change in leadership and they favor female leaders. These findings are consistent with a role congruity perspective in that the preference for female leaders ensues from the congruency between qualities deemed necessary in that leader role (change) and gender-stereotypic characteristics associating females, more so than males, with change.

**Intersecting Identities**

There are other important social identities besides gender that influence who we see as “fitting” the preconceived notion of a leader. In addition to imposing a masculinity standard, our lay theories about the traits and qualities of leaders also impose a white standard. That is, being white has been shown to be a central component of the leader prototype in America (Rosette, Leonardelli, & Phillips, 2008). In reality we all have many various identities that interrelate and are not independent. Our experiences and perceptions of others are overwhelmingly shaped by the simultaneous influences of these various identities. The importance of intersecting identities can be traced back to Sojourner Truth’s (African-American abolitionist and women’s rights activist) famous 1851 speech *Ain’t I a Woman?* In this speech Truth interrogates the intersections of race and sex, implying that all too often the category woman refers to white women.

*That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain’t I a woman?*

—Sojourner Truth

Much social science research, however, examines people’s various social identities in isolation. An intersectionality perspective considers and accounts for the intersection of multiple categories of social group membership (Cole, 2009). Researchers are starting to take the importance of intersecting identities seriously and in doing so we discover important new findings that may counter and expand our established wisdom.

Recent research has shown that the backlash that female leaders can experience when they demonstrate agency is moderated by race (Livingston, Rosette, & Washington, 2012). This research shows that black female leaders do not experience the same backlash for expressing dominance that white women experience. The authors argue that black women can be rendered “invisible” as they are neither a prototypical black person (who is male) nor a prototypical female (who is white). Thus, they may be buffered from some of the hostilities encountered by members of these non-dominant social groups. In this research they also found that black men are penalized for expressing dominance, unlike white men. These findings regarding black men are consistent with research showing that black male leaders, unlike white males, benefit from having a nonthreatening baby-faced appearance (Livingston & Pearce, 2009). These findings are complemented by recent research examining the role of gender and race in leader selection. In their research, Galinsky, Hall, and Cuddy (2013) showed that when asked to assign leader candidates to either a masculine leadership role (requiring the candidate to be competitive and contentious) or a feminine position (requiring collaboration and relationship building), participants were more likely to assign black women and white men to the masculine position than they were to assign white women or black men.

Although research shows that black women do not seem to experience the same negative repercussions for exhibiting agency as white women and black men do, black women do appear to experience double jeopardy, or a heightened disadvantage due to their dual-subordinate identities, under conditions of organizational failure (Rossette & Livingston, 2012). Under conditions of organizational success black women are evaluated similarly positive as white women and black men, all of whom are evaluated somewhat less positively than white men. Things change, however, when people evaluate leaders of failing organizations. In short, white men receive somewhat of a pass, black men and white women are evaluated more negatively than white men, and black women are evaluated the most negatively. One thing that is abundantly clear from this nascent literature examining both race and gender in leadership: to gain a better understanding of the role of social identities in leadership, it is imperative for social scientists to incorporate intersectionality into their theoretical and methodological approaches.

**Social Identities: Shaping Our Own Behaviors and Beliefs**

The expectancies associated with social categories not only influence how we perceive and act toward others, but they also shape the way we
think about ourselves and the way we behave. Later in her life Eleanor Roosevelt acknowledged both the gendered expectations she faced as well as her inability to quietly abide these boundaries when she wrote, “I could not, at any age, really be contented to take my place in a warm corner by the fireside and simply look on.” Regardless of whether the culturally dominant stereotypes are endorsed or not, members of marginalized social groups are keenly aware of the pervasive stereotypes surrounding their social group and are aware that others may treat them accordingly. How people respond to these stereotypes are varied but one thing is clear: successful leaders are able to successfully navigate these biases.

Social identity threat occurs when one’s social identity is at risk of being devalued in a specific context (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). Experiencing threat in the face of negative stereotypes, termed stereotype threat, is a pervasive form of social identity threat. Stereotype-based expectations of inferiority can place a large psychological burden on individuals (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Steele et al., 2002). Researchers have shown that leaders who experience stereotype threat may perform less well, be less likely to take on leadership roles, and experience lower levels of well-being when they think they are being evaluated through the lens of negative stereotypes (Bergeron, Block, & Echtenkamp, 2006; Davies, Spencer, & Steele, 2005; Hoyt & Blascovich, 2007, 2010). For women in leadership positions, stereotype threat can come in many forms including a blatant threat, such as explicit exposure to stereotypes, or a more subtle threat, such as having solo status as the lone woman leading a group of men. For example, exposure to gender stereotypic commercials has been shown to undermine women’s leadership aspirations (Davies et al., 2005), when gender stereotypes are activated implicitly women perform less well than men on a masculine sex role–type managerial task (Bergeron et al., 2006) and on a negotiation task (Kray, Thompson, & Galinsky, 2001), and explicit stereotype activation adversely impacts leadership performance, self-perceptions, and the well-being of women who do not have high levels of leadership self-efficacy (Hoyt & Blascovich, 2007). Stereotype threat, however, does not always result in detrimental responses. For example, there are situational factors, such as telling women there are no gender differences in the leadership task (Davies et al., 2005) or presenting them with a feminine sex role–type leadership task (Bergeron et al., 2006), that can nullify the detrimental impact of stereotype threat.

At times, however, people are able to react to negative stereotype-based expectations with constructive responses. US Supreme Court justice Sonia Sotomayor acknowledges that one of her biggest challenges is dealing with others’ expectations of her. She has faced a number of negative stereotypic expectations including those associated with being an “affirmative action admittee,” an “emotional Latina,” or a “poor Latina from New York.” Sotomayor, the third-ever female and first Latina justice on the highest court in the United States, has admitted to having fun proving her doubters wrong. In an early research demonstration of stereotype reactance, Kray and colleagues showed that when blatantly presented with the gender and bargaining stereotype women react against it by increasing their negotiation performance and out-negotiating men, but they can only do so if they possess sufficient power to do so (Kray et al., 2001; Kray, Reb, Galinsky, & Thompson, 2004). Women who are highly confident of their leadership ability respond positively (by performing better on leadership tasks, identifying more with leadership, and reporting greater levels of well-being) when put in a position to confirm the gender—leadership stereotype, demonstrating an I'll Show You response (Hoyt & Blascovich, 2007, 2010). Although women have been shown to demonstrate reactance to certain solitary identity threats in the domain of leadership, when they experience identity threat from multiple sources they are likely to demonstrate deleterious vulnerability responses (Hoyt, Johnson, Murphy, & Skinnell, 2010). In sum, whether women meet threats to their identity with vulnerability or reactance responses depends on various factors including the leader’s self-efficacy, the explicitness of the stereotype, the group sex—composition, and the power that the leader holds.

In addition to individual and situational factors, interpersonal relations can help buffer marginalized individuals from potential threats to their identities. Humans are, in large part, socially constructed beings—molded through powerful interpersonal processes (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Cooley, 1902; Ruschel, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009). Indeed, research highlights the important role of others in individuals’ pursuit and attainment of goals (Finkel & Fitzsimons, 2011). Chief among these affiliations are friends, family members, mentors, and role models. Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice credits her family in large part for helping her navigate the race and gender—based biases she encountered. Rice grew up in Birmingham, Alabama, during racial segregation and was fully aware of racial hostility. Rice’s success as a leader depended in part on her responses to the deeply ingrained racism in her childhood: “My parents had me absolutely convinced that, well, you may not be able to have a hamburger at Woolworth’s, but you can be President of the United States.”

Increasingly, researchers are examining the impact of exposure to positive role models on individuals who are underrepresented in leadership in part due to negative stereotypic expectations. Recent research has shown that the implementation of gender quotas for women that increased their representation on Indian village councils resulted in greater numbers of women subsequently vying for office, greater career and educational aspirations for local girls, and decreases in the educational gender gap (Beeman, Duflo, Pande, & Topalova, 2012). These role models can be effective, in part, because they demonstrate that success is indeed attainable and they can increase a sense of social belonging and inoculate people’s sense of self against identity threats (Dasgupta, 2011; Marx, Ko, & Friedman, 2009; Marx & Roman, 2002; McGlone, Aronson, & Kobrynowicz, 2006). As Sonia Sotomayor acknowledges, “. . . a role model in the flesh provides more
than inspiration; his or her very existence is confirmation of possibilities one may have every reason to doubt, saying, “Yes, someone like me can do this.”"

Research on the impact of role models, however, has been equivocal. Upward social comparisons with successful role models have the potential to be inspiring and offer hope particularly when people focus on similarities with the role model (Collins, 1996, 2000; Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2002; Wood, 1989). However, exposure to superior others can also result in self-deflating contrast effects by demonstrating how relatively deficient one is compared to the superior other (Lockwood & Kunda, 1999; Suls et al., 2002). Exposure to highly successful business leaders has been shown to negatively influence women’s self-rating of competence (Parks-Stamm, Heilman, & Hears, 2008). Similarly, Rudman and Phelan (2010) found that exposure to counterstereotypical role models (e.g., a female surgeon or a female business executive) decreased women’s leadership self-concept and lowered their interest in traditionally masculine occupations. One factor that can influence whether leader role models will be injurious or inspiring to women is the extent to which individuals are able to identify with them and deem their success as attainable. Hoyt and Simon (2011) found that exposure to elite female leaders had self-deflating effects on female participants’ leadership aspirations and self-perceptions following a leadership task, whereas similar exposure to less elite role models, whom the women could identify with more, did not have this negative impact.

Other research has shown, however, that elite female leader role models can have inspiring effects on women. Latu, Schmid Mast, Lammers, and Bombari (2013) have recently shown that subtle, implicit exposure to a picture of elite female role models was effective in positively influencing women’s behavior and self-appraisals during stressful leadership tasks. Other researchers have examined factors associated with women that influence how they respond to explicit and intentional exposure to role models. Recent research has shown that, compared to those with lower efficacy, women with high levels of leadership efficacy were more inspired by the elite role models and subsequently showed heightened levels of leadership aspiration, leader self-identification, and performance (Hoyt, 2013b). Finally, recent research has shown that the more people endorse the idea that leadership abilities are malleable and can be cultivated, as opposed to believing they are fixed, the more positive they respond to leader role models (Hoyt, Burnette, & Innella, 2012).

**Hillary Clinton: America’s Exhibit A**

Hillary Rodham Clinton’s tenure as former US Secretary of State, US Democratic presidential candidate, US Senator from New York, and First Lady vividly demonstrates many of the ways in which social identities can shape expectations and experiences of leaders. Social identities matter in part because members from marginalized groups may bring to office important and distinct perspectives, values, and priorities. Coming of age during a time of great social change offered Clinton opportunities women before her did not have and instilled in her a commitment to social justice. In 1998 Clinton gave a speech in Seneca Falls at the 150th anniversary of the campaign for women’s suffrage led by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, remarking:

> The future, like the past and present, will not and cannot be perfect. Our daughters and granddaughters will face new challenges, which we today cannot even imagine. But each of us can help prepare for that future by doing what we can to speak out for justice and equality, for women’s rights and human rights, to be on the right side of history, no matter the risk or cost.

Clinton has worked tirelessly both in her early years as First Lady and her more recent days as an elected official to improve the status and dignity of women and children in the United States and around the world. During her term as First Lady, Clinton began to actively shape domestic policy related to women, children, and families. For example, Clinton was instrumental in passing the State Children’s Health Insurance Program, creating the Office on Violence Against Women at the Department of Justice, and creating and passing the Adoption and Safe Families Act. Her focus on empowering women reaches well beyond the United States. In 1995 Clinton made headlines at the Beijing women’s conference proclaiming “Let it be that human rights are women’s rights, and women’s rights are human rights, once and for all.” As Secretary of State, Clinton was able to enact these values on an international stage and she did just this by crafting an American foreign policy that, in her own words, “put women on the agenda and made it a centerpiece” of all that the United States did globally (Baker, 2013).

Throughout her various leadership experiences Clinton has faced many obstacles that stem from both the descriptive and prescriptive nature of gender stereotypes. Clinton confronted gender role-based limitations early on; for example, as a young girl her interest in space exploration was met with a letter from NASA telling her they were not accepting girls into the program. Morphing over the years, various forms of gender-based restrictions have followed Clinton throughout her life. During her days as First Lady, Clinton confronted head on the ambivalence stemming from the incongruity between the female gender role and the leadership role. As she remarked in her autobiography *Living History* (2003):

> People could perceive me only as one thing or the other—either a hardworking professional woman or a conscientious and caring hostess... It was becoming clear to me that people who wanted me to fit into a certain box, traditionalist or feminist, would never be entirely satisfied with... my many different, and sometimes paradoxical, roles... We were living in an era in which some people still felt deeply ambivalent about women in positions of public leadership and power. In this era of changing gender roles, I was America’s Exhibit A. (pp. 140–141)
America's exhibit found herself walking on a precarious tightrope when running for the US democratic presidential nomination. The contradictory expectations associated with being both a proper woman and an effective leader complicated many things from deciding what to wear to navigating the proper emotional expression. Like many female leaders, Clinton's appearance was scrutinized by the media and general public. Here too female leaders find themselves trying to balance proper femininity with adequate masculinity. For example, Margaret Thatcher, arguably, "struck this balance, in part, by always dressing stylishly, carrying a handbag, and wearing her signature pearls. She consciously adopted a very feminine appearance to complement her very masculine political behavior" (Carroll, 2009, p. 6). Clinton understood this balancing act; however, although she tried to soften her appearance, she was often seen as looking very masculine. Indeed, her signature pantsuit took on a life all its own. At one point Clinton herself jokingly referring to her presidential campaign staff as "The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pantsuits."

Navigating these contradictory expectations becomes particularly important and tricky for female leaders when it comes to emotional expression. When Clinton's eyes welled up talking at a campaign rally a number of pundits opined that those tears were proof she is not fit to be president. Never mind that a male republican party hopeful, Mitt Romney, teared up twice on the campaign trail with little notice. In response, Clinton astutely observed that male politicians get emotional at times as well: "We have gone through years of male political figures who have done everything from cry to scream who have been our presidents." Clinton, however, was not too worried about being seen as too weak for the office of US President. Indeed, these apprehensions that Clinton would not be "man" enough to be commander-in-chief were overshadowed with concerns that she wasn't "woman" enough. As she noted, "They know that I can make decisions. But I also want them to know I'm a real person."

The prescriptive nature of gender stereotypes can result in women being disliked and vilified if they are seen as engaging in dominant behaviors and violating the prescription for feminine niceness. Clinton has been no stranger to this gender-based backlash; in fact, on this front she is certainly America's exhibit A. Clinton has been demonized as a woman, wife, and mother, having been labeled a "radical feminist," "militant feminist lawyer," and, most notably, "bitch." The backlash phenomenon was on clear display in the media coverage of the 2008 US presidential primaries. As Katie Couric noted after Clinton bowed out of contention, "One of the great lessons of that campaign is the continued and accepted role of sexism in American life, particularly the media...if Senator Obama had to confront the racist equivalent of an 'Iron My Shirt' poster at campaign rallies or a Hillary nutcracker sold at airports...the outrage would not be a footnote, it would be front page news" (Couric & Co., 2008). Of course, Clinton is far from the first or only woman taking a leading role in public life to experience this backlash. In a private meeting with Clinton in 1995, then prime minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto told Clinton, "Women who take on tough issues and stake out new territory are often on the receiving end of ignorance" (Clinton, 2003, p. 272).

Clinton is well aware that success does not happen in isolation but rather, it takes a village (1996). Although there is intuitive appeal to locate the cause of great leadership success in the individual leaders themselves, as social beings our success is inextricably intertwined with others. Clinton gained inspiration from many others all along her journey. As an undergraduate student at Wellesley College she looked to upper-level students for mentorship and in later years she turned to Eleanor Roosevelt for inspiration and guidance. Clinton has learned firsthand how role models can contribute to successful leadership experiences and the development of a healthy sense of self-confidence. Clinton's confidence in her leadership abilities undoubtedly contributed to her unwavering resilience and helped her navigate her journey through the leadership labyrinth. Now Clinton serves as a role model for many women and girls worldwide. She has been identified by Americans as the most admired woman alive for an historic 17 times (Newport, 2012). Indeed, the current First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama, identifies Clinton as a personal role model. Clinton has served as a model First Lady, Senator, and Secretary of State. The big question left to ponder: will Hillary Rodham Clinton serve as the first role model Americans call Madam President?

In conclusion, social group memberships matter in the leadership process. Social identities can both influence the way we respond toward others as well as the way we think about ourselves. These various and subtle processes can work in conjunction with the collective to sway evaluations of marginalized individuals in positions of power and influence. Importantly, a greater understanding of these challenges can help draw on tools necessary to encourage and enable women and other underrepresented individuals to participate fully in the political, civil, social, economic, and cultural lives of our societies. By bringing distinctive perspectives and priorities, the increased representation of marginalized individuals in leadership positions can contribute to the development and prosperity of our communities and nations. As Clinton recently noted (2013), "When women participate in peacemaking and peacekeeping, we are all safer and more secure. And when women participate in politics, the effects ripple across the entire society."

References


