Chapter 7

Evaluation of Female Leaders: Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination*

Susan A. Basow

In 1982, Ann Hopkins was denied partnership at Price Waterhouse, one of the top accounting firms in the United States, despite her stellar record, including having produced more billable hours than any other candidate up for partnership that year. Out of 88 candidates proposed for partner, she was the only woman; in fact, out of a total of 662 company partners, only 7 were women. Hopkins sued on the basis of sex discrimination and won at every level, including the Supreme Court (Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins, 1989). The sex discrimination argument rested on evidence that Hopkins had been denigrated for behavior that would have merited praise had it been evidenced by a man: she was evaluated as tough, aggressive, no-nonsense, and driven. One evaluator had suggested she could improve her chances of making partner if she would “walk more femininely, talk more femininely, dress more femininely, wear make-up” (Fiske, Bersoff, Borgida, Deaux, & Heilman, 1991, p. 1050). This landmark case relied on evidence that Hopkins had been treated differently based on her gender and the stereotypes associated with it.

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heavily on the amicus curiae brief submitted by the American Psychological Association, which documented how women being evaluated for leadership positions are frequently in a double bind: if they engage in the same behaviors as their male counterparts, they may be perceived negatively; if they don't engage in the same behaviors as their male counterparts, they also may be perceived negatively.

Women are underrepresented in leadership positions in all professions, including politics, despite evidence that they can be effective leaders (Eagly, 2007). Due to gender stereotypes, however, women leaders are often not thought of or perceived as effective. Cultural expectations of women (to be nurturant, sensitive, kind) only partially overlap with cultural expectations of leaders (to be assertive, dominant, competent); in contrast, cultural expectations of men overlap nearly completely with expectations of leaders. Women who display the traits expected of leaders are at risk for being considered unfeminine (Kanter's [1993] "Iron Maiden" role); this appears to be what happened to Ann Hopkins at Price Waterhouse. Yet, women who display the traits expected of women are at risk for not being perceived as leader-like (Kanter's Pet, Seductress, or Mother roles). Thus, to be seen positively as a leader, women must walk a fine line (the area of overlap): being assertive but not overly so; being dominant but still interpersonally sensitive; being competent but still likeable. As Catalyst (2007), the nonprofit organization working to build inclusive workplaces, aptly described the results of its research on executives' perception of women leaders, women in leadership positions are in a double bind: "Damned if you do [conform to female or leader stereotypes], doomed if you don't." The brief biographies of women in Congress that are presented in this volume illustrate the double bind women in political office face; they are evaluated both as women and as women trying to get into a man's domain. Most evaluations of women politicians are negative as a result.

EVALUATING LEADERS

Evaluations of leaders are built on basic psychological processes of interpersonal perception, interpretation, and judgments. As social psychologists have long demonstrated, what we perceive is based substantially on what we expect to perceive. If we expect someone to be kind to us and instead that person reminds us of something we haven't yet done, we may get offended and perceive that person as overly critical. However, if we expect a person to be a stern taskmaster and that person reminds us of the same unfinished task, we are likely to have a less negative reaction: indeed, we may even appreciate the reminder. It is same behavior but different reactions based on our expectations.

Gender (as well as other) stereotypes can be viewed as a set of expectations about how each gender does or should act. Stereotypes also serve as cognitive filters through which we perceive behavior. A strongly worded statement issued by a male politician might be viewed as a sign of his authority, confidence, or power. The same statement issued by a woman politician might be viewed as a sign of her high-handedness, demandingness, or coldness.

Because gender is confounded by status differences, with men as a group viewed as higher in status than women as a group, women leaders have to contend with perceptions of role incongruity based not only on gender but also on status. As role incongruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly & Koenig, 2008) suggests, people whose behaviors or traits match expectations (based on roles or status) tend to be perceived more positively than people whose behaviors or traits contradict expectations. High-status individual (e.g., men) are assumed to be competent; thus, it is harder for men to demonstrate incompetence than it is for a woman (Foschi, 2000). Conversely, because lower-status individuals (e.g., women) are expected not to be competent, it is harder for them to demonstrate excellence or competence than for higher-status individuals. For example, if a male leader makes an error of judgment, he's likely to be given the benefit of the doubt (e.g., "perhaps he was too busy to give the matter sufficient attention"). The same error by a female leader is likely to be viewed as confirmation that she is not a good leader. In contrast, an effective decision made by a male leader is likely to confirm his competence, whereas the same decision may be viewed as "lucky" if made by a female leader.

Indeed, recent research confirms that white male trainees who make performance-related mistakes are less likely to have these noted in a formal performance log than are the same mistakes made by white female trainees (Biernat, Fuegen, & Kobrynowicz, 2010). The explanation is that since white men are expected to be competent, when they make mistakes, the mistakes are likely to be noted but not taken as signs of incompetence. However, because women (and blacks) are expected to be incompetent, when they make mistakes, the mistakes are taken as confirmation of their lower level of ability. Thus, it is easier for women leaders to be viewed as incompetent than it is for their male counterparts.

As these findings suggest, evaluators tend to use different standards when judging women and men (Biernat, 2003; Biernat et al., 2010). Because men leaders are the norm, their behaviors and styles set the standard. Employees who have a male supervisor typically talk about their "boss"; employees who have a female supervisor typically talk about their "female boss." People talk about "senators" and "congressmembers"; the same individuals often "mark" the occupation, referring to "woman senator" or "woman congressmember." Not surprisingly, then, when women leaders are evaluated, their gender is usually salient, and their behavior is judged against what is expected "for a woman."

Overall, women leaders often must work harder to be perceived as equally competent as their male counterparts, and it is far easier for them to "fall from grace" than their male counterparts as well. This is exactly
what the Catalyst (2007) study found regarding women executives: they are judged by higher competency standards than are men while receiving lower rewards and having to repeatedly prove themselves.

Two of the major dimensions that people use in evaluating others are competency and likeability/warmth. Gender stereotypes are directly related to these dimensions, with men in general being viewed as more competent than women and women in general being viewed as more warm and likeable than men (Cikara & Fiske, 2009; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Although these dimensions are orthogonal to each other (one can be high, or low, on both dimensions at the same time), gender stereotypes operate to make them seem like opposites. That is, when women are perceived as competent, they often are perceived as less likeable than when they are perceived as less competent. The reverse is true for men: when they are perceived as less competent, they are less liked. The Catalyst (2007) study found strong evidence of this pattern: women leaders could be perceived as competent or likeable, but they rarely were perceived as both.

Overall, although male leaders certainly can be evaluated negatively, they at least start from a position of role congruence. In contrast, female leaders typically start from a position of incongruence in their leader role. As we will see in the next section, additional factors related to role incongruence can further affect evaluations of women leaders.

**FACTORS AFFECTING EVALUATIONS OF WOMEN LEADERS**

There are many factors that affect evaluations of women leaders: gender-typed behaviors, interests, traits; the maternal "penalty"; contextual factors; and rater factors.

**Gender-Typed Attributes**

Women are expected to exhibit such "feminine" behaviors as nurturance, compassion, sensitivity, and "niceness," that is, to be communal—interpersonally oriented and interpersonally skilled. Yet leaders are expected to exhibit such "masculine" behaviors as dominance, agency, and competitiveness, that is, to be agentic—task oriented and focused. Numerous research studies have documented that women who display agentic behaviors may be denigrated unless they also show evidence of the expected communal behaviors (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). For example, although women who display strong agentic traits may be rated as highly competent, they also may be rated as socially deficient.

In addition to this backlash effect, women may have to deal with shifting evaluative criteria. For example, although a strong female applicant may be rated more favorably than a similarly qualified man, he still may be more likely to be hired for an executive position (Biemat & Kobrynowicz, 1997). It appears that raters tend to evaluate a woman against others of her gender (e.g., "she's really assertive for a woman"), whereas a man tends to be judged against a more absolute standard ("he's really assertive"). For hiring decisions, the absolute standard is more likely to be relied upon.

Another form of shifting evaluative criteria also occurs. As Phelan, Moss-Racusin, and Rudman (2008) found, women who display agentic qualities not only may be rated lower in social skills than an identically described man, but such ratings of women's (lower) social skills figure more prominently in decisions to hire the woman for a leadership position than the man. Thus, agentic women may be "doubly disadvantaged": they may be perceived as socially unskilled, and their competence may be deemphasized when employment-related decisions are made. Presenting oneself as primarily communal, however, won't necessarily help; women with a strong communal focus also are perceived as less competent than their more agentic sisters. Thus, the double bind for professional women is whether they are agentic or communal, they are less likely to be hired for a leadership position than their male counterpart.

Because women are expected to be kinder than men, the expression of anger, in particular, may be a challenge for women professionals, especially for women politicians and women candidates for political office. Brescoll and Uhlmann (2008) conducted a series of studies and found that when a male professional expressed anger in a videotaped interview, raters evaluated his status and his competence more highly (or the same), mainly because his anger typically was attributed to the situation (e.g., "his colleagues' behavior caused his anger"). In contrast, when a female professional expressed anger, her status and perceived competence decreased, mainly because raters attributed her emotional reactions to her personality (e.g., "she's an angry person"). Thus, women leaders need to take pains to provide objective external reasons for their negative emotions; otherwise, they run the risk of being perceived as a "witch."

Because of the backlash effect and the shifting standards of evaluation of female leaders, it is perhaps not surprising that women leaders often use different leadership styles than men leaders. In particular, compared to their male counterparts, women leaders are more likely to use a transformational leadership style (one in which the leader supports and empowers her followers, inspiring them to reach their potential) as well as provide contingent rewards for a subordinate's satisfactory performance (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Yoder, 2001). This transformational leadership style, combining both agentic and communal qualities, appears to fit the narrow area of overlap. Fortunately, this leadership style typically has been found to be very effective for both men and women (Eagly, 2007; Eagly et al., 2003), although perhaps more so for women (Ayman, Korabik, & Morris, 2009).
From the research literature, we can conclude that to be effective and evaluated positively, women leaders need to find a good way to balance authority and friendliness, that is, to demonstrate both strong agentic and communal qualities (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Basow, Phelan, & Capotosto, 2006; Carli, LaFleur, & Loeber, 1995; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Friedman & Yorio, 2006; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007). This is not an easy thing to do, because women who smile too much or who display too much emotion may also be seen as not leadership material (Friedman & Yorio, 2006; Phelan et al., 2008).

Overall, women leaders are evaluated through the lens of gender stereotypes. Although many women have found ways to be effective leaders, having to find the “right” balance represents an extra burden on women that men who aspire to, or who are in, leadership positions do not have.

Maternal Penalty

An additional factor that affects women leaders is motherhood. Besides the very real challenges of balancing work and family life for employed women who still typically carry the predominant burden of childcare responsibilities are the stereotypic perceptions of mothers. As research has documented (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004), when raters are asked to evaluate male and female managers or consultants who are equally qualified, a woman who also is portrayed as a mother is perceived as less competent and less promotable, and is paid less, than the same woman who is not a mother. For men, not only is being a parent not a strike against them, but in some cases they actually are paid more than their nonparent male counterpart. Indeed, the pay gap between mothers and non-mothers is larger than the pay gap between women and men (Avellar & Smock, 2003; Crittenden, 2001).

The explanation for this “motherhood penalty” rests on two related factors: the stereotypes of mothers as not being committed workers (Correll et al., 2007) and the lower status attributed to “mothers” compared to “employees” (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). For men, being a father does not signal a negative change in status; indeed, fathers may be viewed as even more responsible and committed to the job than their nonparent counterparts. Because of their lower status, employees who are mothers appear to be judged by a harsher standard than are employees who are non-mothers (Correll et al., 2007). This dynamic is identical to the harsher standard applied to women as a group compared to men as a group, as described earlier. In many ways, the difference in standards is more pronounced when based on employee parental status than it is when based on employee gender.

Pregnancy itself can also be a discriminatory cue, since it reminds observers of women’s traditional child-rearing role. Glick and Fiske (2007) review research that documents that women are more likely to be patronized and viewed as incompetent when pregnant than when not pregnant. They are particularly unlikely to be viewed as suited for a leadership position.

Given the earlier discussion, it is perhaps not surprising that female leaders are less likely to be married and/or to have children than are their male counterparts (Lyness & Thompson, 1997). Even when they are married or are mothers, women executives often take pains to keep their personal and professional identities separate.

In general, cues that trigger traditional female stereotypes (e.g., pregnancy and motherhood) are associated with more discriminatory evaluations of professional women since communal traits in women are seen as antithetical to the agentic traits expected in leadership positions.

Congresswoman Linda Sanchez once quipped:

You can’t be the perfect member of Congress and the perfect mother 100 percent of the time. (http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/l/lindasanch632587.html)

Only nine women have given birth while serving in the U.S. Congress (Keith, 2014).

Contextual Factors

As noted earlier, just by being in a leadership position, women are viewed as role incongruent and likely to be evaluated negatively. Two additional contextual factors affect evaluations as well: how gender-typical (or atypical) is the field and how many other women are present in the organization’s leadership positions.

Not surprisingly, most discrimination (including use of shifting criteria) occurs against individuals who are in contexts viewed as nontraditional for their gender (Basow, 1995, 1998; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Glick & Fiske, 2007). Eagly’s (2007) review of the research on female leadership found that favorable attitudes toward women as leaders have increased over the past 50 years except for workplace environments that are male dominated or are traditionally masculine, such as the military or high-status political office. It is only in such contexts that women’s leadership effectiveness is actually rated lower than men’s, probably because these environments are most inconsistent with stereotypes of women.

A related contextual factor is how isolated a particular woman leader is in her organization. When fewer than 20% of leadership positions are held by a woman (as is typically the case in the top positions in business, education, and politics), her gender becomes a salient characteristic (Fiske et al., 1991; Glick & Fiske, 2007; Kanter, 1993; Yoder, 2001).
Moss Kantor's (1993) study of women in corporations found that gender stereotyping is most likely to occur when women are so numerically in the minority that they are viewed as "token" hires. In such cases, coworkers and supervisors, who are unused to working with women in positions of authority, are likely to try to typecast the woman into one of four female stereotypes: the Pet (liked but incompetent; child-like; naïve); the Mom (nurturant but not viewed as competent); the Seducress (the sex object; desirable but not competent); or the Iron Maiden (competent but unfeeling and unlikeable). None of these roles facilitate positive leadership evaluations. These reactions to women aspiring to traditionally male positions were evident in the 2009 U.S. presidential campaign. Hillary Clinton, a contender for the Democratic nomination, was typically typecast as the Iron Maiden and criticized for wearing pantsuits and lack of warmth. Sarah Palin, the Republican vice-presidential candidate, was typically typecast variously in the other three roles: the Pet (cute but not very smart), the Seducress (emphasis on her beauty pageant experience and looks), or the Mom (emphasis on her family role and children). Gender stereotyping thus affected evaluations of women leaders for these traditionally masculine positions in politics, positions never held by a woman.

Another contextual factor relevant for evaluations of women leaders is the "glass cliff" phenomenon (Ryan & Haslam, 2005; Ryan, Haslam, & Kulich, 2010). Archival research of 100 major corporations in the United Kingdom documented that women were most likely to attain leadership positions (in this case, be appointed a member of the board of directors) when the organization had already been experiencing declining performance in the preceding five months. In contrast, when an organization was doing very well, women were less likely to be put in leadership positions than were men. A similar pattern has been found in politics. Women are more likely to be put forward as political candidates when the contest is viewed as risky, while men are more likely to be candidates for contests that are viewed as safe. Such risky high-profile positions put women leaders under more scrutiny and more stress, and it's likely that they subsequently get more blame for "failure" (e.g., not being able to reverse a company's declining performance; losing an election) than their male counterparts.

Overall, gender stereotyping and negative evaluations of women leaders are most marked in traditionally male or masculine contexts. Furthermore, women leaders are more likely than men to be in risky leadership positions that may further intensify how they get evaluated.

Rater Characteristics

There are several rater characteristics that contribute to an individual's likelihood of discriminating against women leaders: rater gender and rater attitudes toward women and gender roles. These, of course, are related since men compared to women tend to hold more traditional attitudes toward women and gender roles, and to ascribe to higher levels of hostile sexism (Glick & Fiske, 2007; Twenge, 1997). Because men tend to hold more prescriptive stereotypes regarding what women should and should not do than do women, men are more likely to commit many forms of hostile discrimination, including sexual harassment. Although many studies find that both men and women discriminate against women (Glick & Fiske, 2007), male raters appear to be particularly likely to use gender stereotypes when rating female professionals (Carli, 2001; Eagly, 2007; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Men also appear to be particularly sensitive to the previously described variables that affect leadership evaluation: gender-related attributes of the leader and the gendered aspects of the work context. In other words, men are particularly likely to discriminate against women leaders who do not display traditionally feminine qualities, especially when the work environment is traditionally male/masculine.

Male subordinates may have a particularly challenging time when they receive a negative evaluation from a female superior (Sinclair & Kunda, 2000). Although no one likes to receive a negative evaluation, men who do so from a woman tend to devalue her competence significantly more than they do from a man who provides the identical evaluation. The reasons for this pattern are likely to be two-fold: the woman supervisor is violating gender stereotypes of being nurturant and kind; she also is demonstrating power and status over the man, thereby violating her ascribed lower status. His devaluation of her is one way for him to regain some power and control.

Not only might men be more likely than women to apply gender stereotypes to women leaders who are nontraditional in some way, but their views can affect those of others, even when the form this discrimination takes is very subtle. As Glick and Fiske (2001) documented, sexism can take two forms: hostile sexism, which reflects negative attitudes toward women who challenge traditional gender norms; and benevolent sexism, which reflects a paternalistic view of women as "wonderful but weak." These attitudes are correlated with each other, although many people have difficulty recognizing benevolent sexism as a form of discrimination against women since it seems to be associated with "positive" views of women. Its discriminatory aspect is mainly apparent when women step out of traditional female roles and behaviors.

Good and Rudman (2010) recently found that when a female job applicant for a traditionally male position (a managerial job at a large warehouse-style retail store that required masculine skills and behaviors, such as locking up late at night) was interviewed by a male interviewer, the ratings of evaluators who read the interview transcript were strongly affected by the interviewer's sexist attitudes as well as their own.
In particular, when the male interviewer displayed either hostile sexism (e.g., stating that most women are not qualified for such a job) or benevolent sexism (e.g., stating that male coworkers could help the "nice young lady"), the female job applicant's competence was evaluated negatively and she was less likely to be hired than if the interviewer was nonsexist, at least when the male interviewer himself was viewed favorably. Because benevolent sexism is often unrecognized as such, male interviewers who exhibited such behaviors often were viewed quite favorably. This meant that the female job applicant who had a benevolently sexist interviewer was very likely to be rated poorly, especially when the evaluators themselves scored high in hostile sexism. It appears that the kind of protective paternalism exhibited by the interviewer's benevolent sexism "unleashed" the evaluator's own negative attitudes toward aspiring career women. Thus, both kinds of sexism can negatively affect women leaders either directly or indirectly.

As suggested by the previous findings, evaluators' attitudes toward women and gender roles may be a key factor in evaluating women leaders, more important than evaluator gender per se. Thus, women with traditional attitudes toward women and gender roles also tend to show negative attitudes toward women leaders, especially if such leaders are nontraditional (i.e., have strong agentic qualities, or are in a field that is traditionally masculine) (Cooper, 1997; Forsyth, Heiney, & Wright, 1997). Other rater attitudes that may contribute to negative evaluations of women leaders are high social dominance orientation, as well as strong beliefs in a just world (Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2007). People who are high in these two beliefs, both of which serve to justify social inequalities, are more likely to link low-status groups (e.g., women) with incompetence than are people who are low in such beliefs. Thus, it may be harder for individuals with such attitudes toward inequality to evaluate women leaders positively.

Overall, evaluators with traditional attitudes toward gender roles, who are most likely to be men, are most likely to negatively evaluate women leaders, especially if the leader appears nontraditional.

**SUMMARY**

Women in leadership position face unique obstacles due to gender stereotypes. First, they are placed in a double bind due to their perceived role incongruence: if they conform to expectations of femininity, they are unlikely to be viewed as leadership material; however if they conform to expectations of (agentic) leaders, they are likely to be viewed as unfeminine. In either case, they may be perceived negatively. Women leaders must walk a fine line, combining both communal and agentic behaviors, warmth and competence, in strategic ways, in order to be perceived positively.

Some women leaders face more obstacles than others when it comes to being evaluated fairly. Women who are nontraditional in some way (personal style, traits, appearance), or who are in positions not traditionally held by women, face added scrutiny. Such women leaders are likely to experience backlash whereby their competence is both under-recognized and devalued. They may be held to higher standards, as well as put in riskier leadership positions, than their male counterparts. Any behavior that signals traditional female roles, such as pregnancy and motherhood, increases the likelihood of negative ratings of competence and leadership. Those most likely to engage in such discriminatory evaluations are those with traditional attitudes toward women and gender roles, as well as those with a strong belief in the need for social hierarchies and a just world. Women and men both can possess such beliefs, but men tend to do so more than women.

The Catalyst (2007) study of executives' attitudes toward women leaders also explored how women executives coped with some of the challenges. Four main strategies were employed, representing a wide range of styles: confronting the inequitable situation quickly and directly, demonstrating openly that you have the skills and competence needed for the job, utilizing clear and effective communication, and minimizing the salience of gender. Of course, organizational strategies are needed as well, to ensure gender equity in the workplace.

Although the factors affecting evaluations of women leaders discussed in this chapter clearly are challenging, there is room for optimism. As more women attain positions of leadership, their "token" status will be eliminated and the salience of gender stereotypes will be reduced (see Introduction to this volume with respect to the impact of having more women elected to the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives). Furthermore, the most negative attitudes toward women leaders are expressed by those who have not actually had a woman leader. For example, employees who have actual experience with women leaders tend to rate them similarly to men leaders (Eagly, 2007). Thus, as more people have experience with women in positions of power, some of the negative expectations should be modified. Finally, women leaders have been found to be as effective (or even more effective than) their male counterparts. This is addressed in the Introduction to this volume: women do as well as or better than men in both Houses of Congress. As our understanding of effective leadership expands to include transformational leadership, expectations of leaders will come to include empowerment and communication skills, and, hopefully, expectations of women will come to include competence. Indeed, favorable attitudes toward women as leaders have increased over the past 50 years; it is likely that this trend will continue. Given the strength of gender stereotypes, however, it is unlikely that gender will ever be a non-issue.
REFERENCES


