

WOMEN, LEADERSHIP, AND EMPOWERMENT

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This paper is a review of leadership research, focusing primarily on women as leaders. The more recent perspective of studying leaders by examining followers is included; but research is sparse as to how leaders are perceived as empowering by their subordinates. A study in progress, conducted by Denmark, Nielson, and Scholl, indicates that stereotypes were more typically held by women against female leaders. However, a leader's ability to be empowering varies with status. The higher the status, the more empowering that individual is perceived, whether female or male. Yet, more men than women held higher status positions. More women are needed in high-level positions to better assess leadership and empowerment.

Leadership has many definitions. There is no clearcut agreement on the meaning of leadership to include all circumstances, particularly because the emergence of leaders is often situational, sometimes temporary and sometimes permanent (Spotts, 1976). Leadership was defined by Michener, DeLamater, and Schwartz (1990) as a process that takes place in groups in which one member influences and controls the behavior of the other members toward some common goal. Key elements for successful group performance include the leader's ability to plan, organize, and control the activities of the group (Michener et al., 1990). Others have stated that leaders possess certain innate personality traits or particular skills that make them leaders. Despite the many attempts at definition, all leadership theories have one element in common, that is, a leader is one who exerts

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more influence within a group than does any other member of the group (Denmark, 1977).

The ways of achieving leadership are just as varied as are the definitions. A person perceived as having leadership potential may be nominated by the group. Sometimes the role may be inherited or assumed by default if no one else is willing or available to perform the function. The use of physical or economic force may also be used to achieve a desired leadership position (Lassey, 1976).

During the 18th and 19th centuries, philosophers proposed the "Great Man" theory, in which personal characteristics of great leaders determined the course of history (Spotts, 1976). Prior to the 1930s, it was generally believed that leadership was a property of the individual. Only a limited number of people could possess this ability, which was thought to be inherited rather than acquired. Wiggam proposed that superior genes make one an inherently capable leader (Stogdill, 1947). He used this reasoning to explain why ruling families continued to rule, that is, marriages among the aristocracy produced offspring who were biologically more capable to be leaders than those born of other classes.

Research during this time period was aimed at identifying these universal characteristics so that so-called potential leaders might be more easily discovered (McGregor, 1976). Endless lists of traits resulted; some overlapping and some completely different (Spotts, 1976). As more and more investigators came up with differing patterns of personality traits, it became increasingly difficult to locate any universal characteristics (Lassey, 1976). The most recent traits under investigation include motives, need for achievement, self-confidence, and self-monitoring (Ellis, 1988). Ellis posited that those who possess high self-monitoring ability are more sensitive to the behavior of others, as well as to their own, and are better able to modify their own actions to match social situations, thereby making them better leaders than those individuals with low self-monitoring ability. Today, successful leadership is not considered to be dependent upon universal, inborn traits and abilities; leadership potential is broadly defined rather than narrowly distributed (McGregor, 1976). And rather than being innate, skills and behaviors for success in leadership may be learned.

In contrast to individual characteristics, environmentalists proposed a situational theory of leadership in which the *Zeitgeist*, or the spirit of the times, determined leadership. According to this approach, the "Great Men" were doing nothing more than acting according to the needs of their times. If one of these Great Men had not been available to perform the function of leading others, another would have taken his place. Yet the environmental theories were likewise limited because they denied an individual's abilities to become a leader.

It was not until the 1930s that the interactive effects of individual plus situations were investigated. Westburgh (1931) was one of the first to suggest that to effectively research leadership, both individual traits and

specific environments should be studied simultaneously. The emergence of leaders, involving the individual traits of the person as well as the situation, was later supported by Hollander and Julian (1970). Fiedler advanced such a theory of contingency in 1968, whereby the effectiveness of a leader is contingent upon situational demands.

Fiedler (1968) further identified esteem for the least preferred co-worker (LPC) as a leader's most important characteristic. Those with high LPC are concerned with good relationships with co-workers, whereas those with low LPC are more task oriented. The low LPC leader would do best in situations that are either very easy (things run themselves) or very difficult (in which a "take charge" boss is required). The high LPC leader may be most effective in situations that impose a moderate amount of demands. Yet despite Fiedler's claims to this theory, others have suggested that it needs further refinement (Baron & Bryne, 1991).

Current research concentrates on viewing leadership in various contexts, which may include individual requirements for leadership as well as the circumstances in which leadership evolves (Lassey, 1976). Even the possession of so-called leadership personality characteristics is dependent upon the situation (McGregor, 1976). What makes one a successful politician may differ from what makes one successful in business or education. Even within a single institution, different circumstances require different leadership capabilities.

SOCIALIZATION AND LEADERSHIP

Most of the work that had been done over the years was carried out with men and male leaders. (Remember the "Great Man" theory.) Only during the last 10 years or so have investigators turned to studying females in positions of authority. By ignoring gender as a variable in studies on leadership, researchers created many blanks in theoretical and research designs. This exclusion of gender effects may have been due to the fact that in the real world women seldom occupied leadership positions, either through appointment or through group consensus. However, times have changed, and more women — but not nearly enough — are being given the opportunity to lead in business, academia, and a variety of other professional pursuits. Yet, despite the advances that women have made, they are still underrepresented in higher level positions as leaders. Most often, women remain part of a secondary labor force, having little visibility and mobility for upward advancement (Felmlee, 1982). Regarding socialization, traditional male occupational roles emphasize competitiveness and achievement-related skills (Denmark, Nielson, & Scholl, in press). Typical female socialization does less to promote leadership ability in the workforce, involving instead only preparation for domestic roles as wife and mother or lower level traditional jobs in the workforce.

The socialization of females and males is culturally transmitted with different role assignments and behaviors considered acceptable for each gender (Denmark et al., in press). Maccoby (1988) concluded that gender-differentiated play styles and modes of exerting peer influence are culturally learned. As such, they affect social relationships from preschool years through puberty. The play of boys is more concerned with dominance and hierarchies of dominance than is that of girls (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). Other investigators have studied how extracurricular school activities play a role in the cultural transmission of gender-role assignments. Because schooling reflects many of the values and beliefs of the larger society, it serves as a vehicle in which gender differences are learned and encouraged. Although athletics has long been a main activity in secondary schools in the United States for males, female athletic participation has not been similarly fostered. Male athletes are encouraged to be achievement oriented, competitive, and aggressive—traits that may later help them to achieve leadership status. Females, however, are also given a role in athletics, sometimes as a player but more often as a nonparticipant, such as a spectator or cheerleader. Characteristics considered essential for the cheerleading role, such as poise, attractiveness, and charm, are valued, but these traits do little to foster future feminist leaders (Eder & Parker, 1987).

Anastasi (1985) investigated the socialization of boys and girls in the United States with regard to expectations for each gender. She posited that it is not success that females fear, but the social consequences of deviating from prescribed gender-role standards. These learned tendencies remain in adulthood, and women are less likely than men to assume roles of leadership, either through appointment or by personal choice. Thus, women as leaders may be perceived differently than their male counterparts by both themselves and by men.

WOMEN AS LEADERS

Alice Eagly recently completed two meta-analytic studies that have contributed greatly to what is known about gender and how it relates to leadership style. In 1990, Eagly and Blair Johnson performed a systematic and quantitative integration of the existing research on gender and leadership style. A divergence of opinion exists concerning gender differences and leadership style, and Eagly and Johnson performed a thorough investigation of past and current literature to identify what, if any, differences could be found.

In conducting their meta-analysis, three types of studies were assessed: organizational, assessment of leader, and laboratory research. The organizational setting was chosen because the majority of leadership studies have been conducted in organizational work situations. Laboratory experimen-

tal research that uses college students as subjects was selected because it is most frequently employed by social psychologists. Assessment studies were chosen to identify and investigate styles of those who were not selected as leaders. The analysis of both experimental and assessment studies produced results indicating that women employed a more interpersonal style than did men, who were found to be more task oriented. These results, however, were not valid in the real world; the results obtained from the organizational studies showed no differences by gender in either of these two leadership styles. Similar results were found, however, in all three investigations with regard to a democratic versus an authoritarian leadership style. Women were more democratic than men, employing a more participative work style. Male leaders were identified as being more autocratic and directive.

Eagly went on to complete a second meta-analysis with Mona Makhijani and Bruce Klonsky (1992), this time investigating gender and the evaluation of leaders. Two types of studies were assessed in investigating the evaluation of leaders; the written vignette and the confederate study. In the written vignette, participants were given descriptions of managerial behavior that were evaluated for leadership effectiveness. In confederate studies, members of the experimental team were taught to lead in a particular style, which was then evaluated by respondents who were unaware that their leaders were trained confederates. Again, Eagly performed a comprehensive investigation of the existing literature in this area, most of which employed male and female college undergraduates as participants.

Results of this meta-analysis found that female leaders were evaluated slightly more negatively than were male leaders. Although the differences in overall evaluation were small, bias against female leaders was greater under specific circumstances. When leaders chose typically masculine styles, such as being autocratic and nonparticipative, female leaders were evaluated more negatively than were their male counterparts. This finding is consistent with Eagly and Johnson's earlier analysis (1990), in which women in real-world leadership positions adopted more democratic and participative styles. Women were also more devalued when they occupied typically male positions and when their evaluators were primarily men. Thus, the female manager must often contend with an initial negative evaluation once she has intruded upon a traditionally masculine domain or has adopted a typically masculine leadership style. To compensate for such negative evaluations, female leaders may feel compelled to work harder to gain acceptance and to gain advantages, such as pay raises and promotions. Although small but consistent differences in the evaluations of female and male leaders were found, caution must be used in generalizing from such experimental studies to what is found in the organizational work setting. These findings have merit, however, because biased and therefore unfavorable expectations are often powerful influences in real-world social interactions.

Most leadership research, including that on women, has been targeted primarily on understanding leaders. Two recent books, one by Dorothy Cantor and Toni Bernay (1992) entitled, *Women in Power, The Secrets of Leadership*, and the other, *Women of Influence, Women of Vision*, written by Helen Astin and Carole Leland (1991), are concerned with the investigation of the dynamics of women and leadership. Cantor and Bernay, two psychodynamic practitioners, interviewed 25 prominent women politicians in the United States. Expecting to hear how difficult it had been for these women to achieve their political positions in a predominantly male arena, the authors were surprised when the interviewees reported having faced no obstacles hindering their progress but rather related how their confidence in their own abilities had enabled them to succeed. This book also tells what forces helped these women to become leaders. The authors hope to pass this information on to other women. As a result of their interviews, the authors arrived at the following leadership equation:

Leadership = Competent Self + Creative Aggression + Woman Power.

The *Competent Self* implies a strong sense of self and the ability to see possibilities instead of obstacles. Knowing who one is at all times allows one to not be defined by situations, other people, and events. *Creative Aggression* includes initiative, leading others, and speaking out. Although seen as apparently exclusive, *WomanPower* does combine the best of both masculine and feminine qualities—combining strength and force with nurturance. It encompasses the ability to make a difference in society for the greater good. When asked, the interviewees themselves defined power as “the ability to get things done.”

Cantor and Bernay further impart a message of empowerment to all females, both children and adults, who aspire to leadership. Their five basic secrets of leadership include these messages: (a) you are loved and are special, (b) you can do anything you want, (c) you can be courageous and take risks, (d) you can use and enjoy your Creative Aggression, and (e) you are entitled to dream of greatness. The empowering message mothers should impart to their daughter is inclusive of these five secrets, “. . . girls are entitled to dream of greatness, that nurturance and aggression are both legitimate parts of our feminine and cohesive Competent Self, and that feeling forced to choose one self over another is not necessary” (p. 229).

Cantor and Bernay’s study is most certainly a worthwhile investigation and exciting to read. However, the authors dealt only with American women in politics and not leaders in the other fields, and they did not touch upon voters’ perceptions of their female representatives.

Nita Lowey, Congresswoman from New York, defined what leadership

meant to her: "The thing about this job that's so gratifying is that it gives you the power to really set an agenda and to get things done. Power in itself means nothing" (Cantor & Bernay, 1992, p. 58). Cantor and Bernay agreed. They suggested that real strength lies in the capacity to lead others to achieve a meaningful agenda, that is, to empower others. However, they did not develop this theme of using leadership specifically to empower others.

Astin and Leland's (1991) book targeted women as leaders, particularly 75 women who have emerged as influential figures since the 1960s. They identified three groups of women: "instigators," "predecessors," and "inheritors." The Instigators are those women who began the modern women's movement, influencing thought and helping to bring about change in education and social justice. The Predecessors are identified as those women in leadership roles in the 1940s and 1950s, most of whom were institutional administrators. The Inheritors are those women who have more recently assumed and continue to assume leadership positions as the women's movement evolves. This book was not designed as a comparative study between female and male leaders but focuses instead on examining how prominent women leaders were able to realize their achievements. As such, it is a descriptive study intended to stimulate research about women as leaders and to inspire other women to continue working toward equality. It examines the women's movement from a social and historical context and discusses how early female leaders were influenced by family, mentors, role models, and early personal experiences. The outcomes of early leadership efforts by women are outlined, as are the specific skills, strategies, and accomplishments of these women.

Astin and Leland stressed the importance of leadership through empowerment and collective action, defining the power of empowerment as it "treats power as an expandable resource that is produced and shared through interaction by leader and followers alike" (1991, p. 1). Power is thus defined as a unit of exchange rather than as domination and control as traditionally perceived. Although those influences and strategies that helped to shape and propel early female Instigators (i.e., capacity to be inventive, ability to take risks, acceptance of challenges, interpersonal and communication skills, self-awareness, the sense of common enterprise, etc.) are discussed, the book includes only a very brief discussion of how one can work to empower others. Astin and Leland suggested strategies for empowerment, such as communicating with others on their own level and listening, employing strong people and not being defensive about or intimidated by their strengths, offering positive feedback and visibility, and working through consensus and collegiality. They further professed empowering others through scholarship with a commitment toward mentoring.

FOLLOWERS AND LEADERSHIP

In the past 10 years, organizational research has shifted its focus from a leader-dominated view to a broader one of follower involvement, utilizing concepts of power sharing (Hollander, 1992a). This shift may be due in part to the greater attention now being given to groups and team efforts. One of the current trends in organizational psychology is to encourage participative leadership and quality circles in which employees gather together regularly to solve work problems jointly.

Bass (1961) posited a theory of reciprocal reinforcement in which individuals who have successfully led earlier are most likely to be chosen to lead again. That person may at some point be succeeded by another previously effective member, who is identified as the person who is most capable of handling the current concerns of the group. Thus, successful leadership is dependent upon others' perceptions. Followers are not passive but are active respondents to the situation and to the leader (Hollander, 1961). Although leaders may command greater attention and exert more influence, followers in turn exert their own influence by making it clear what they expect from their leaders and by how they perceive the behavior of their leaders. As such, behaviors of dependency and responsiveness can be considered attributes of both effective leaders and followers (Hollander, 1992a).

Leadership is clearly dependent on responsive followers in the direction and maintenance of collective activity (Hollander, 1992a; Hollander & Offerman, 1990). This system of relationships has constraints as well as opportunities, because no one person can be expected to be singlehandedly successful at all things (Hollander, 1992a; Spotts, 1976). Leaders derive their status from their followers, who may choose to grant it or take it away. Group consent is a central feature in the leader-follower dyad. The leader's behavior is matched by the other group members against a set of expectations. These members subordinate themselves to an individual whom they perceive as superior yet, at the same time, much like themselves (Hollander, 1961). Although leaders may possess certain skills or characteristics that set them apart from other group members, they cannot be too different from their counterparts. A leader who was an extremist would undoubtedly be given less social support.

Leaders must be sensitive to the demands of their followers as situations and circumstances vary. They must be aware of the responsiveness of their followers—their needs, expectations, and perceptions (Hollander, 1992a). Hollander (1992a) further stressed an increased attention to the accountability and evaluation of leaders by followers, positing that followers themselves take on leadership functions in their decision making, goal setting, and maintenance of the leader-follower relationship. Thus, leadership is dependent upon followership. Leaders who are unable to fulfill the expectancies of the group may soon find themselves in the position of

follower. The follower who is competent at performing a specific task that may be needed at a particular time could emerge as the leader should the situation present itself. Thus, the state of leader or follower is not fixed. As time passes and circumstances change, it is possible that roles may become reversed (Hollander, 1961). As a leader makes history, so too does history and the type of leadership called for make a leader. Perhaps there have been fewer women leaders because history has been constructed by men.

Hollander and Kelly (1990) gathered ratings of good and bad leadership from participants who had 2 or more years of organizational work experience. Sensitivity to followers and the ability to support and praise subordinates were identified as attributes of good leaders. They further reported that good leaders were able to increase participation and productivity and instilled a sense of satisfaction and value in their workers.

In comparing female to male leaders, Hollander (1992a) acknowledged that women face an initial hurdle in attaining legitimacy. He saw no difference in the effectiveness of either gender and instead viewed leaders' styles as a function of the exchange between leaders and their followers.

EMPOWERMENT

Although Hollander has done extensive in-depth investigations of the reciprocal relationship between leaders and their followers, he has not discussed how leaders can work to empower their subordinates. His focus has been more on how followers influence their leaders: "Empowerment in some sectors of activity would be another instance of giving followership a more proactive role, as an accompaniment to leadership in the traditional directive mode" (1992b, p. 46). Hollander (1992b) discussed a relationship between leader and follower, as well as the situation and task to be accomplished. He viewed leaders' perceptions of their social selves relative to those of their followers as part of the leadership process.

Effective feminist leaders must empower others. The most effective leader is able to empower those who are least empowered themselves, namely women and members of ethnic minority groups. A good definition of empowerment was offered by Astin and Leland (1991) as spoken by an instigator in their study:

As an empowerer, I really think that the highs for me have been making people do things they could never do before. Giving them the confidence and the criticism and the help and the ideas, and sharing my chutzpah, the chutzpah I was born with, and making them have it, too. So that's the empowerment. (1991, p. 107)

To assess how subordinates perceive their leaders, Karen Nielson, Kristin Scholl, and myself are conducting our own study on leaders and em-

Table 1
High- and mid-status supervisors by gender

	<i>Status</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>High</i>	<i>Mid</i>	
Women	9	19	28
Men	21	43	64
Total	30	62	92

powerment (unpublished raw data). This study focuses on the perceptions of male and female leaders. To identify traits and qualities of effective as well as ineffective empowering leaders by gender, we distributed a questionnaire that allowed respondents to offer both their preconceived perceptions and their reports of actual life experiences with both female and male leaders and/or supervisors. The following are some of the results.

Forty respondents (25 women, 15 men) completed the questionnaire, which provided space for up to three work experiences. The respondents ranged in age from 18 to 76, with a mean age of 31 years. Their occupations varied from part-time summer employment when they were college students to positions in middle management. Respondents were ethnically diverse but were predominantly White. Women reported a total of 64 work experiences; men reported 37. Of the 64 work experiences provided by women, 45 reported their experience under male supervision, and 19 reported having had female supervision. Male respondents reported having been under the leadership of 11 female and 26 male supervisors. Several respondents reported having been under female supervision yet chose not to report on those experiences.

Results of our study were in line with the meta-analytic study of Eagly and Johnson (1990). The results were also similar to the earlier investigation conducted by Diggory and myself (Denmark & Diggory, 1966), in which authoritarian behavior was reported more for male leaders than for female leaders, especially in their exertion of power to establish conformity toward group goals and to control the behavior of group members. Women leaders, however, used authoritarian behavior in the passive sense, to demonstrate correct rules for group activity. Thus, men are more likely to influence group goals and aspire to leadership in the functional sense. Women leaders were working toward maintaining the status quo.

We divided the supervisors into high and medium status, based on their employment positions and the person to whom they reported (Table 1). The division was arbitrary. Few of the supervisors held extremely high-status positions. However, agreement in terms of independent interrater judgement of status was high. Overall, there were 28 female and 64 male supervisors. This ratio parallels other findings. We categorized 30 supervi-

Table 2
 Perceptions of empowering attributes of supervisors by their supervisees

Attribute	Status			
	High		Mid	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Encouraging		F M	F	
Supportive	F M	F M	M	
Acts as advocate	F	M		
Acts as role model	M	F M	F	F
Promotes growth	F M	F M		
Nurtures	M			
Gives positive feedback	F M	F M		
Gives negative feedback	M			
Serves as mentor	F M	F M		

Note: F and M refer to female and male supervisees, respectively.

sors as holding high-status positions, 9 women and 21 men. Sixty-two supervisors were in mid-level positions, 19 women and 43 men. Few supervisors were in low-status positions and were not included in this report.

Respondents were asked to rate their supervisors on the characteristics we considered indicative of empowerment or showing leadership (Table 2).

In general, female leaders were perceived as empowering as were male leaders. The higher the status, the more empowering the supervisor, whether female or male. None of the supervisors were seen as exploitative or as taking credit for the work of their subordinates.

Several female respondents addressed empowerment as follows.

I've had experiences with both good and bad leaders, some of whom were male, some female. However, I do believe women assisting women is very empowering, encouraging, and motivating for those who hope to achieve high positions themselves. This gives women positive role models of their own gender – what could be more motivating?

They're [women] usually more aware of others feelings and are more supportive of good work.

Most women are more sensitive than men.

Women take time to think about other people and help them achieve.

However, when reporting globally on empowerment, most women did not report that they felt their female supervisors were empowering. In fact, over 33% of the female respondents did not find female leaders helpful to other women.

There was a significant gender difference in how respondents judged

women and men in terms of better leadership ability, despite the high marks women supervisors received on other qualities. Men rated women supervisors higher in leadership ability than did women. Only one male respondent felt that men made better leaders. The others either felt women were better leaders or saw no gender difference. The following are several quotes by men concerning their experience with female and male supervisors.

Women by far make better leaders. Men allow their egos to dominate – women are much better bosses to work for. They are good listeners. They are democratic. They are more mentoring. Men tend to bluff their way into positions of leadership, in my opinion. Women have to work three times harder just to be accepted as intellectual peers. Things are changing for the better, but men are having to deal with roles they've never had to play before, whereas women are finding that life at the top is not that bad/tough. I wish men could loosen up a bit and not let their egos and pride cloud the contributions of their women partners.

Men make better leaders. The women that I work with seem to be not as confident as the men, and this affects the respect that they get.

I don't believe that gender is responsible for how good a leader is or can be.

Sixty percent of female respondents, however, felt that men make better leaders.

Men are better leaders. Women tend to become too dominant and try to prove they are better or equal to men. This is because women are usually not taken as seriously as men are.

As a woman, I prefer to work with men. I have a better understanding of their position . . . [which is] straightforward.

Women seem to often have a chip on their shoulders, always wary of someone trying to undermine her authority, [and are] extremely competitive and suspicious, and threatened by those that are new and/or younger.

The men I've worked for have been better leaders – but then, again, it's expected of them by virtue of their being men.

I have always been more comfortable with men at work than with women. Things have changed, but frankly . . . when men are good leaders, they are excellent. Women always have to try harder, why?

Of course, some women felt differently in terms of their views on leadership.

I believe it depends on the situation and the workers involved . . . different circumstances require different personality types.

Women are easier to talk to and are less dominating. They make the workplace less stressful and more productive.

Women make better leaders for women. Men are not interested in helping women in their careers.

What does all this mean? Is the glass half full or half empty? There is room for both optimism and pessimism. One quarter of the management positions in the Denmark, Nielson, and Scholl study were held by women. The glass ceiling has been cracked, but the artificial barriers of ceilings and walls still remain. Well over 50% the workplace is made up of Anglo women, women of color, and men of color, but only 25% have achieved management positions—and not top management at that. There are still gender stereotypes that view men as better leaders. Unfortunately, these views are more often held by women—at least in the Denmark, Nielson, and Scholl study. Fortunately, in this study, women, as well as men, were perceived as having empowering characteristics and as using empowering behavior. This perception was true of both female and male subordinates. But, the ability to be empowering varies with status, and not enough women have reached the top—yet.

Women must be brought into top leadership positions, in politics, in business, in psychological associations, and in academia. It is even more important that these women be feminists. Women can empower other women, but only feminist leaders can further our feminist agenda and share leadership with other feminists.

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