

A R T I C L E S

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION: QUESTIONING THE WHO, WHAT, AND WHEN OF LEANING IN

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Lean In has started a worldwide conversation about the representation of women in senior leadership roles. However, the conversation has focused on individual factors that could assist women in their leadership journeys. In this paper, we draw on research about gender stereotypes in three streams (“think manager—think male,” the glass cliff, and childcare) to argue that the who, what, and when of leaning in as presented in this book are problematic. Our synthesis of the literature leads us to conclude that gender stereotypes form subtle systemic barriers to the advancement of significant numbers of women into these roles at the group level. To circumvent these stereotypes, increasing the representation of women in senior leadership roles is a necessary *first* step, not an eventual outcome. We illustrate our point with an example from the Canadian federal government. To change the numbers of women in top leadership roles, individuals in powerful positions in organizations (mainly men) need to make the proportional representation of women in senior leadership roles a priority—one that is enforced through measurement, tracking, and reinforcement.

In her book *Lean In*, Sheryl Sandberg (2013) starts a conversation about inequality in the number of men and women in leadership positions:

The blunt truth is that men still run the world. Of the 195 independent countries in the world, only 17 are led by women. Women hold just 20 percent of seats in parliament globally. In the United States, where we pride ourselves on liberty and justice for all, the gender division of leadership roles is not much better. (p. 5)

The central premise of Sandberg's book is that this inequity is driven by individual women who have not “lean[ed] in” to their careers as much as men have. *Lean In* focuses on strategies for women to remove their internal barriers to leadership roles. The logic of her argument is that once these internal

barriers are dismantled, women will take on more leadership roles. Although Sandberg (2013) recognizes that both structural and individual variables need to change before we will see more women in boardrooms, she lays the bulk of the responsibility for change at the feet of women. Sandberg wanted to start a conversation, and she has certainly achieved that goal.

Sandberg herself acknowledges that this is the ultimate “chicken or egg” problem (2013, p. 8). Which came first: women's internal barriers to taking on leadership roles, or the fact that there are so few women in these roles that society formed stereotypes that are incompatible with women in these roles? Whether we should focus on the chicken or the egg to increase the number of women in leadership roles is a key piece of the conversation missing from the book. Sandberg suggests that we start with the individual woman (the chicken). However, it is of some concern that her argument focuses on individual solutions to a combination of structural (Joshi, Neely, Emrich, Griffiths, & George, 2015) and individual

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barriers. This may well be a “chicken or egg” problem, but we believe the research shows that we will make more progress if we focus on the egg.

In terms of how women should behave *when* they get to the boardroom table, in many ways we agree with Sandberg (while acknowledging stereotypes that cannot be ignored). As the book suggests, women do need to feel empowered to take their place at the table, to not take themselves out of the running for leadership roles due to childbirth (or the wish to have children in the future), and to negotiate equality with their partners regarding childcare and home duties. However, these strategies are going to be most effective when women and men are on an even playing field. This is not typically the case.

In this paper, we discuss specific challenges for women (and men) in the form of gender and leader stereotypes (the eggs) that are barriers to individuals (chickens) creating significant change in gender equity in senior leadership roles at the group level. We make this argument based on role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), the lack of fit model (Heilman, 1983), and research into three key processes demonstrating the influence of gender and leadership stereotypes on women’s ascent up the organizational ladder when they do lean in. We review research on the “think manager—think male” phenomenon (Schein, 1973, 1975), outlining how the disconnect between feminine gender stereotypes (associated with women) and leadership stereotypes (associated with men) are barriers *when* women lean in to senior leadership roles. We also outline research showing that *what* women are leaning into is often a glass cliff (i.e., think crisis—think female; Ryan & Haslam, 2005, 2007). This puts women at a disadvantage compared to men when they are appointed to leadership roles. Third, the challenge that gender stereotypes present to the notion that women need to make their partners “full partners” is outlined (i.e., think caregiver—think female). These three lines of research converge on a common conclusion: Appointing more women to positions of senior leadership is a necessary first step to address the problematic mismatch between gender and leader stereotypes. This will require men (not women) to lean in for change—as they are typically the ones with the power to begin systemic change.

This is not to say that gender and leader stereotypes are the only barriers women face as they navigate the labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2007) to senior leadership roles. The journey that a woman faces on her way to the top of an organization can be challenging due to many issues, including lack of access to adequate and affordable childcare (Dishman, 2016) and lack of

family-friendly policies and practices (Powell, 2011), leading to stalled career development (Gupta, Smith, & Verner, 2008) due to less access to sponsors (Hewlett, Peraino, Sherbin, & Sumberg, 2010) and fewer mentoring and networking opportunities (Hopkins & O’Neil, 2007). In addition, there is some evidence that women may screen themselves out of being considered for management roles (in the context of recruiting agencies, see Fernandez-Mateo & Fernandez, 2016), with recent evidence suggesting that this may be due to lower “willingness to compete” for top jobs after having experienced previous rejection (Brands & Fernandez-Mateo, 2017, p.1). We acknowledge these important avenues of research. However, in this paper, we have chosen to center our discussion on the stifling effects of gender and leader stereotypes. Stereotypes are deeply engrained, subtle (e.g., Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000), and ubiquitous in their effects. They affect hiring, promotion, and career opportunities for women in fundamental ways, so it is here we want to focus.

We focus on what can be done to start changing gender and leader stereotypes and what this would mean for women in terms of reducing barriers to achieving senior leadership positions. This focus leads us to disagree with *Lean In* as to *who* should be doing the leaning. We provide an example from the Canadian federal government to support our view that effective change in the numbers of women in senior leadership roles can happen very quickly when those in power (mostly men) choose to “lean in” for change. *When* more women are in powerful positions, gender and leadership stereotypes will begin to change; individual women leaning in will be more effective, and *what* women are leaning in to will be more appealing. We therefore argue that individuals (mostly men, but sometimes women) in powerful roles, in both the private and public sectors, are the ones who need to be leaning in right now to effect changes in the number of women at the top. This is a first step on the long road to gender equality in organizations. Fortunately, this is a step that can be taken effectively in a very short period of time, if those in power deem it important.

GENDER AND LEADER STEREOTYPES

One robust yet often subtle structural force that holds women back from senior leadership roles is the influence of gender stereotypes about leadership (e.g., Gladwell, 2005; Heilman, 2001; Heilman & Eagly, 2008). There is a fundamental mismatch between the female gender stereotype and the leader stereotype (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This mismatch creates challenges for women seeking senior leadership

roles, challenges that are ubiquitous and therefore can be difficult to name (because they are often implicit) yet make a substantial contribution to the “labyrinth” that women must navigate to become leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Stereotypes are “attributes ascribed to a group and imputed to its individual members simply because they belong to that group” (Heilman, 1983, p. 271). Stereotypes of gender and leadership have been identified in the literature, tend to be consistent across time, and are resistant to change (Eagly & Heilman, 2016). This “stickiness” comes from both the “rigidity of people’s belief systems” and the slow pace of change in terms of the positions that women occupy in society (Eagly & Heilman, 2016, p. 351). Simply stated, social role theory (Eagly, 1987) suggests that because roles (both leadership and family) are still segregated by sex, gender role stereotypes continue to be reified (Eagly & Heilman, 2016).¹

Gender stereotypes suggest that women are viewed as communal, possessing attributes, traits, and behaviors such as caring about others and being kind and helpful. In contrast, men are viewed as agentic, possessing attributes, traits, and behaviors such as competing against others and being ambitious and dominant (Eagly, 1987; Heilman, 1983). Gender stereotypes are problematic not only because they are descriptive (how men and women *are*) but also because they are prescriptive: representing expectations about how men and women *should be* (Heilman, 2001). Prescriptive stereotypes are social norms, violations of which result in punishment by others (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). Because individuals tend to use a dichotomous (bipolar) model of gender when evaluating others (Biernat, 1991), when women succeed at work in roles requiring masculine behavior (such as leadership roles), they are perceived as having violated prescriptive feminine gender stereotypes (e.g., Heilman, 2012). This discrepancy typically results in the “backlash effect” (Rudman, 1998) and in employment discrimination (Rudman & Glick, 1999).

While less research has focused on men, the studies available suggest mixed outcomes. When a man occupies a role that is viewed as feminine, he may be viewed as “wimpy and undeserving of respect” rather than disliked (Heilman & Wallen, 2010, p. 664; Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999). However, unlike women, men have been shown to benefit from

violating gender stereotypes in terms of being more feminine when in leadership roles. For example, when behaving more communally/cooperatively (Gartzia & van Knippenberg, 2016) or more individually considerate (Loughlin, Arnold, & Bell Crawford, 2012), they are perceived as better leaders.

Think Manager—Think Male

Gender role stereotypes are not in and of themselves problematic. In fact, as Heilman and Eagly (2008) so eloquently argued, feminine gender stereotypes are actually quite positive in their content—who would suggest that being warm, caring, and compassionate is a bad thing? However, the problem comes about because these are not characteristics typically associated with descriptive stereotypes of leadership (prescriptive leader stereotypes have been shown to include more balanced masculine and feminine characteristics; see Sczesny, 2003). Research since the early 1970s (Schein, 1973, 1975) has demonstrated the positive association between leadership roles and male gender role stereotypes. Respondents in these studies perceived successful middle managers as more similar to men than to women in terms of their agentic qualities. Studies have replicated these findings across geographic boundaries (e.g., Brenner, Tomkiewicz, & Schein, 1989; Schein, 2001; Schein & Mueller, 1992; Schein, Mueller, Lituchy, & Liu, 1996).

Over time there has been a shift in how women view leadership roles, with several studies showing that females no longer stereotype managerial roles as masculine (e.g., Berkery, Morley, & Tiernan, 2013; Berkery, Tiernan, & Morley, 2014). However, with the exception of white males from South Africa (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010), “all males [in these published studies] . . . sex type the managerial role in favour of men” (Berkery et al., 2014, p. 18). Indeed, a recent meta-analytic investigation of three paradigms (of which think manager—think male was one) found that while this association had lessened over time, the leader stereotype was still masculine and was stronger with male respondents than with females (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011). Two theoretical perspectives explain the challenge this agentic descriptive stereotype of leadership creates for women: social role theory and role congruity theory.

Why Women Don’t Fit the Idea of What a Leader Is Like

Social role theory argues that individual perceptions of social groups within a society come about

¹ Although sex refers to biology, and gender to identity, these terms are often used interchangeably. In addition, the current literature is not developed in terms of investigating stereotypes related to gender identities other than male and female.

because individuals experience these group members in specific social roles (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Women are associated with communal traits *because* they have tended to be overrepresented in roles requiring communal traits; men are associated with agentic traits *because* they have tended to be overrepresented in roles requiring agency (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Jobs or roles also become gender-typed; when these jobs have typically been held by one gender they come to be viewed as better suited to that gender, or gender-typed (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004). The assumption is that to be successful in a job, one must possess the traits attributed to its gender-type. The lack of fit model explains how gender stereotypes interact with beliefs about the gender-type of work to produce judgments about performance (Heilman, 1983). Expectations about future success in a job are determined by the perceived fit of the person's attributes and the traits and abilities believed to be necessary to perform the job. The better the perceived fit, the more likely it is that an individual is expected to be successful in the role. These expectations in turn influence how performance is evaluated and rewarded (Heilman, 1983).

Role congruity theory extends social role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000) to the leadership arena, and similarly predicts that prejudice arises when stereotypic traits of a particular group are incongruent with the attributes believed to be necessary to be successful in the leader role (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Simply put, our beliefs about women and leadership are discrepant; our beliefs about men and leadership are congruent (Eagly & Karau, 2002). In addition, this incongruity is dependent on context. When leadership roles are construed in more feminine terms, women should experience less prejudice. However, leadership roles at the highest organizational levels are perceived to require highly agentic behavior (e.g., the act of laying off numerous employees or reorganizing divisions). Consequently, the prediction is that women will experience greater challenges the higher they rise in an organizational hierarchy—a prediction that would appear to be supported, given the very low percentage of CEOs of S&P 500 companies who are women (4.6%; Catalyst, 2016).

Same Leader Behavior, Different Outcomes for Women and Men

Given the theory and empirical evidence discussed in the previous section, perhaps not surprisingly perceptions and evaluations of the same behavior differ depending on the sex of the actor (a finding in both

interview and experimental studies; e.g., Archer, 2012; Heilman & Chen, 2005). For example, Heilman and Chen (2005) found that when women and men enact the same altruistic citizenship behaviors at work, men benefit but women do not. In fact, these authors found that these behaviors are considered “less optional for women than for men” (2005, p. 431). Second, when women demonstrate leadership potential, they are likely to be perceived as less likable and more interpersonally hostile due to violation of the communality (feminine gender role) stereotype (e.g., Heilman et al., 2004; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007). Raters are also less willing to provide recognition in terms of rewards influencing career progression (e.g., Loughlin et al., 2012; Mercer, Loughlin, & Arnold, 2014) for women who enact leadership behavior. Further, differences in competence ratings are more likely when gender stereotypes are violated and when performance success is ambiguous or unstructured, as is typical in many leadership roles (Heilman, 1997). Often, performance at the highest levels of leadership within an organization is not easily rated in objective terms. Even when performance success is explicitly high and competence ratings do not suffer, female employees are perceived as less likable when successful in a traditionally male role (Heilman et al., 2004).

Some recent research has found that assertive women in leadership roles may not always pay this penalty. Bongiorno, Bain, and David (2014) conducted two experimental studies with students and found that assertive women were as likely as assertive men to receive positive liking and influence ratings, but when women were tentative (in speaking about an issue) they suffered penalties that men did not. While we might interpret this as potential shifting of the double bind, the women in these two studies *were still seen as communal* (Bongiorno et al., 2014). This study demonstrates another subtle form of discrimination against female leaders: If they are not assertive in their speech about important issues they may be penalized, whereas males are not. As Catalyst (2007) put it, women are truly “damned if [they] do, and doomed if [they] don't” (p. 1).

Another line of work on negotiation corroborates these findings. When women negotiate assertively they tend to experience backlash (in terms of likability and not reaching outcomes). However, recent studies have found that for women with high status and women who negotiate on behalf of others (i.e., for communal benefits) this backlash effect is attenuated (e.g., Amanatullah & Morris, 2010; Amanatullah & Tinsley, 2013a, 2013b). Therefore, while agentic behavior may be necessary in the workplace, and may not

always result in penalties for women, this behavior *must* be accompanied by sufficient evidence of communality or it can still be a problem for women. Men simply do not face these challenges.

Gender stereotypes of emotion also appear to provide evidence for the double bind women in leadership face. Fischbach, Lichtenthaler, and Horstmann (2015) offered empirical evidence of the lack of fit between perceptions of women and managers regarding emotional expression. They found that while men were perceived as expressing emotion consistent with successful managers, women were not. This result was attenuated when women were described as managers or successful managers (p. 158). Brescoll (2016) suggested that women in leadership roles (or those wanting to ascend to leadership roles) face challenges regarding both the amount and the type of emotions they should display. Expressions of emotion that signal dominance (i.e., agency)—such as anger—are likely to result in penalties. Yet if women are not expressing enough emotion the communal stereotype is violated, resulting in harsh penalties (Brescoll, 2016). Another experimental study on emotion in leadership roles showed that the expression of pride can elevate ratings of agency for women without producing negative ratings of interpersonal hostility (Brosi, Spörrle, Welpel, & Heilman, 2016). However, the expression of pride also lowered ratings of competence on people-oriented leadership skills and communality for both women and men.

Another problematic aspect of this leadership/gender paradox is that certain leadership behaviors are perceived as more important for the advancement of women than men (Vinkenburg, van Engen, Eagly, & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2011). However, these behaviors do not necessarily highlight the individual leader, and they may even detract from a leader's focus on climbing the ladder of success (e.g., Arnold & Loughlin, 2010a, 2010b; Fletcher, 2004). If behavior is not visible (Fletcher, 2004) and is not linked specifically to the female leader, it can be easily discounted (e.g., Heilman & Hayes, 2005). For example, in one study of descriptive and prescriptive leadership stereotypes, individual consideration (one dimension of transformational leadership that involves treating followers as individuals and spending time coaching and teaching; e.g., Bass & Riggio, 2006) was rated as more important for women than for men in promotion to senior leadership roles (Vinkenburg et al., 2011). However, when women do engage in individual consideration, they don't appear to get credit for these behaviors, whereas men are evaluated more positively and gain increased reward allocation decisions for engaging in the same behavior (Loughlin et al., 2012).

Clearly, women walk a challenging tightrope to strike just the right balance between communality and agency in leadership roles (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007). Some of the strategies that Sandberg (2013) suggests may actually result in some of the violations described above and affect perceptions of the women seeking these leadership roles. For example, demonstrating confidence and seizing opportunity (Chapter 2) can be taken as arrogance much more easily from a woman than from a man. Women need to carefully consider how they "lean in," as having leadership potential and being likable enough to rise to the next level depend to a large extent on the perceptions of those doing the promoting. The next issue we consider is *what* type of senior leadership roles women are more likely to be offered to "lean in" to—a phenomenon identified as the glass cliff (Ryan & Haslam, 2005, 2007).

Think Crisis—Think Female

While leadership roles have traditionally been stereotyped as masculine, one line of research shows that under certain conditions feminine traits may be important for success. When a company is in crisis or in need of a moral compass (Adams, 2016) to improve performance, women are more likely to be perceived as a good fit for leadership roles. The "glass cliff" is a term coined to describe the conditions under which women are more likely than men to be chosen for senior leadership roles—conditions of crisis when the likelihood of failure is high (Ryan & Haslam, 2005, 2007). A claim that appointing women to boards led to poor performance (Judge, 2003) caused Ryan and Haslam (2005) to examine the data from the London Stock Exchange, analyzing it and isolating the timing of events. They found that companies were actually more likely to appoint women to their boards when they were performing poorly. The causal connection in this relationship—that organizations doing poorly are more likely to appoint a woman versus the other way around—has also been demonstrated in studies using experimental designs (e.g., Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Haslam & Ryan, 2008).

Why does this occur? Studies have investigated reasons for this phenomenon, such as women feeling that they must take any position that is offered or women taking these jobs because they want a challenge. Little support has been found for these explanations (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Bruckmüller, Ryan, Rink, & Haslam, 2014; Ryan et al., 2016). However, one study in a legal context found that taking a position as lead counsel of a

high-risk case was seen as a better opportunity for a woman than for a man, despite the fact that participants did not see the high-risk case in general as more desirable (Ashby, Ryan, & Haslam, 2007).

There has been some evidence implicating stereotypes about leadership and gender as an explanation for the glass cliff. Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, and Bongiorno (2011) outlined three studies that demonstrate a reversal of the think manager–think male stereotype when examining stereotypes of managers in unsuccessful companies. Women were perceived as being especially suitable for leadership roles in failing organizations when the tasks required taking on a passive role and taking the blame for the organizational failure, and when managing people was necessary. Bruckmüller and Branscombe (2010, Study 2) also found that gender stereotypes of leadership explained this effect. In an experimental study, they manipulated the success of the company (successful or in crisis), and then had participants rate male and female candidates for CEO on feminine and masculine attributes (both equivalent on qualifications) and on perceptions of suitability for the position, and then make a choice of person to fill the CEO role. When the company was doing poorly, both feminine and masculine attributes predicted who would be chosen as CEO, and feminine attributes were more important than masculine attributes, but when the company was doing well only masculine attributes predicted choice of candidate. In addition, findings showed that for the male candidate, the perception that he lacked feminine attributes mediated the relationship between company performance and his perceived suitability for the job in the company in crisis. It may be that the glass cliff arises not necessarily because women are presumed to possess more feminine characteristics needed for leadership in crisis, but that men are presumed *not* to possess these characteristics. Indeed, one recent study showed that while there was a preference for female leaders in times of crisis, this preference was also demonstrated for candidates who showed stereotypical feminine characteristics, regardless of whether the candidate was male or female (Gartzia, Ryan, Balluerka, & Aritzeta, 2012).

This being said, the type of financial outcome considered, reasons for the poor company performance, and the context of the appointment all appear to attenuate the glass cliff phenomenon. The glass cliff has been demonstrated mainly when using stock-based measures of company performance, not accountancy measures (see Ryan et al., 2016, for a summary). One explanation for this is that

stock-based measures are more likely to be based on perceptions, and the glass cliff is a perception-based phenomenon (Ryan et al., 2016). In a different study, the reasons given for the poor performance of the organization were found to attenuate the “think crisis–think female” relationship (Kulich, Lorenzi-Cioldi, Iacoviello, Faniko, & Ryan, 2015). In an experimental study, when the company was presented as doing poorly due to past leadership, the glass cliff phenomenon was observed. However, when the company was presented as doing poorly due to economic circumstances, it did not occur. It appears that when the reasons for poor past performance are under the company’s control, appointing a woman is more likely. This study further demonstrated that the key factor driving the appointment of the woman was the perception that she signaled change.

The context of the appointment must also be considered. For example, support available to the leader appears to moderate the glass cliff phenomenon. If the scenario presented to a participant describes conditions such that the leader can count on the support of stakeholders and the organization, the glass cliff (preference for a woman) did not appear (Rink, Ryan, & Stoker, 2013). It was only when the individual leader was going to be facing these organizational challenges without support that the woman was preferred (Ryan et al., 2016). In addition, Bruckmüller and Branscombe (2010) examined whether a male-dominated context moderates the glass cliff relationship. They found that when the context of leadership was female dominated (i.e., past CEOs were female), the glass cliff phenomenon did not occur. One of the implications of this finding is that if more women are in leadership roles in organizations (thereby increasing the diversity at the top), there are likely to be changes in implicit associations between leadership and maleness (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010). In other words, changes in leader and gender stereotypes result. This interpretation of this finding rests on the tenets of social role theory (Eagly, 1987) and the notion that putting more women in senior leadership roles will help alleviate gender bias in leadership through changes in stereotypes.

It should be noted that we are not arguing that the presence of more women at the top means that these women will necessarily promote more women. The literature on the queen-bee phenomenon challenges this assumption (e.g., due to social identity threats to high-ranking women; Derks, Van Laar, & Ellemers, 2016). Rather, we are arguing that seeing women do jobs typically reserved for men changes basic perceptions and assumptions about leadership (i.e., leadership

stereotypes) for everyone, and hence this is one way we can begin to dismantle structural barriers. While multiple determinants result in glass cliffs and they are dependent on the context (Ryan et al., 2016), this appears to be quite a pervasive phenomenon overall. The key point from this line of research is that women seeking leadership roles are more likely than men to be perceived as a good fit, and to be chosen for, roles that are risky and come with a high probability of failure (e.g., Ryan et al., 2016). As a woman, it is important to be aware of this, and to closely examine the type of position you are “leaning in” to. Men tend to be chosen for those leadership roles that are “cushy . . . glass cushions,” which is an issue that Ryan et al. (2016, p. 453) suggested requires research attention.

Think Caregiver—Think Female

Even where generous family-friendly policies are in place (such as in the Nordic countries) and people are afforded the opportunity to take long breaks from their careers to raise children, this can have a detrimental effect on women’s wages and gender equity (e.g., Gupta et al., 2008). Sandberg talks about women needing to “make [their] partner[s] . . . real partner[s]” (Sandberg, 2013, p. 104). While making your partner a full contributor to the household is good advice, it may also be challenging for men to be full contributing partners in childcare and household duties if they are penalized for doing so.² Women are also penalized for this behavior (potentially to a greater extent than men; Fuegen, Biernat, Haines, & Deaux, 2004), but this does not negate the negative impact on men of taking time out of their careers to care for children. Men are also judged harshly for violating stereotypes, although the effects may be somewhat different than for women (Heilman & Wallen, 2010). Traditional societal stereotypes focus on fathers providing for their families financially. Riggs (1998) tested the perceptions of social roles of fathers and mothers and found that approval ratings were reduced significantly when a father sacrificed financial security for caregiving, yet the same behavior by mothers met with high approval. Other studies have also found that men who take on caregiving roles at home instead of focusing on work roles are perceived negatively (e.g., Allard, Haas, & Hwang, 2011; Vinkenburg, van Engen, Coffeng, & Dijkers, 2012). Indeed, some empirical research in Denmark has found that men (and not women) suffer lower

chances of being promoted if they take paternity leave (Smith, Smith, & Verner, 2013).

It does not appear that men are necessarily against taking on fuller roles in the home. For example, a recent news article in a Canadian national paper described examples of men who want to “lean out” (i.e., be more involved with raising their children; Anderssen, 2014). But organizational support is necessary to encourage this “leaning,” and it is rarely forthcoming (e.g., Park & Arnold, 2010). When men take an active role in the home and this is visible at work, they are likely to be subject to negative perceptions, due to violation of stereotypes of what men are “supposed” to be like. These negative perceptions and outcomes translate into fewer numbers of fathers taking paternity leave, even in countries where this is a benefit provided by government. Recent data from the United Kingdom, where fathers have access to dedicated paternity leave and where parental leave can be shared between mothers and fathers, show the effects of these negative perceptions: Despite the legal right to paternity leave, 40% of fathers do not take it (Williams, 2013). Indeed, data across 23 countries in the European Union shows that on average only 10.1% of fathers take parental leave (Schulze & Gergoric, 2015). This low rate of paternal and parental leave-taking is unfortunate because it is exactly the type of leaning in that fathers will need to do to change the number of women in senior leadership roles.

If it is challenging for individual women to lean in to leadership roles and it is challenging for individual men to lean into childcare and household duties, who else might play a role in accelerating change? What about those in power (typically men)?

WHO ELSE COULD LEAN IN? A CANADIAN EXAMPLE

When Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau proclaims that he is a feminist, or says that he is going to keep repeating this until the “Twitterverse stops exploding” every time he says it, he would appear to be leaning in (Women in the World, 2016). When he appoints the first gender-balanced cabinet in the history of the country, or nominates women for 10 of his first 15 judicial appointments and for 13 of 26 of his new diplomatic appointments, he would appear to be leaning in (Chartrand, 2016; Ditchburn, 2015; Murphy, 2015; Proudfoot, 2016; U.N. Women, 2016). Why is this important? According to his government, it’s because citizens should see themselves represented in the most influential groups in society.

² This discussion assumes male/female partners out of necessity given the current literature at hand.

In other words, if all parts of the population are not represented in the judiciary (for example), it diminishes the legitimacy of the courts in the eyes of many.³ Given the power and influence corporations now wield, the number of lives they affect globally, and society's increasing mistrust of them in general (Adams, Highhouse, & Zickar, 2010; Darke & Ritchie, 2007), perhaps it is time they be held to similar levels of accountability as our public sectors.

With the changes made by Trudeau, Canada now has twice as much female representation in its cabinet as the United States (the U.S. currently has 25% women; Smith, 2015). This happened because men in power decided it would. Men leaning in can be a powerful force for change (Metz & Kulik, 2016). We have seen this in other movements, such as the United Nations' HeForShe campaign (U.N. Women, 2016). Senior leadership positions in government and private companies are typically by invitation only, and those in power have to give you a key to the door before you can "sit at the table; don't leave before you leave; or make your partner a real partner" (Sandberg, 2013, Table of Contents). Or as the U.N. Women executive director put it: "Those with authority and power, especially, they must lead from the front. . . . The Prime Minister (of Canada) had the authority to appoint a 50-50 cabinet. Leaders must use the authority that they have" (U.N. Women, 2016).

When men in power decide to lean in for change they can redefine who sits at the table virtually overnight. When asked why they are doing it, they can give responses like "Because it's 2015" (Trudeau, cited in Ditchburn, 2015). They can say things like "Men should be lucky that I only made it a 50% women cabinet. . . . Parental leave shouldn't only be divided; there should be weeks that can only be taken by the father. . . . If you make companies report on gender-balance, it incentivizes positive behavior" (Trudeau cited in Women in the World, 2016). According to Trudeau, Canada's government will now work toward making Parliament more family-friendly (e.g., reconsidering parliamentary travel requirements and sitting hours perceived as barriers for women—and men—with young children) and updating an institution "designed for old, white guys" (U.N. Women, 2016). Justin Trudeau

may be a unique example, but other "men who get it" are being documented by Catalyst⁴ and others (e.g., Metz & Kulik, 2016).

That being said, it is hard to visualize a female leader being given the same latitude as Justin Trudeau. However, some female leaders may no longer care how they will be judged for taking action to alleviate gender inequality in their organizations. These women may increasingly be willing to act forcefully to be effective in driving change. Perhaps these are senior female leaders in studies of "queen bees" who have strong gender identification, have experienced sexist work environments, and are therefore more likely to be supportive of the career advancement of junior females (Derks et al., 2016; Ellemers, Rink, Derks, & Ryan, 2012). In the United States, for example, when Hillary Clinton was asked if she would follow the Canadian prime minister's lead if elected, she responded that she would "have a cabinet that looks like America, and 50% of America is women, right?" (Proudfoot, 2016). Had the 2016 U.S. election turned out differently, it would have been quite interesting to see how leaders of both sexes on both sides of the Canada–U.S. border might have been able to lean in for change.

Who Has the Right to Be Represented at the Table?

While one has to be careful in comparing social justice movements, consider for a moment the fairly dramatic changes made during the civil rights movement. During this massive social change, the majority of white people did not just suddenly decide to give up their seats to black people (although no doubt some did). Rather, powerful members of the black community decided that it was time to occupy those seats in the public domain and members of the white community supported them, advocating for changing the rules about who gets to sit where on the bus in the future (e.g., Clark, 2009).

This is not to say that such changes will go unchallenged. Backlash is inevitable when anyone takes bold steps to ensure gender (or racial) representation in a given realm. However, as witnessed in the Canadian government example, backlash can be quelled rather quickly in at least three ways that are instructive to this conversation. First, the women appointed were highly qualified. Few critics could dispute the women's credentials, with a former Rhodes scholar, U.N. legal adviser, crown

³ Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, the Canadian government is also working to address issues around minority and indigenous representation, which are particularly pressing problems given the overrepresentation of these populations in the judicial system.

⁴ <http://www.catalyst.org/zing/men-who-get-it-want-equal-pay-eliminate-unequal-perception>

prosecutor, and First Nations chief among the ranks (Commisso, 2015). This is critical because some research has suggested that women (and men of color) will pay a price if merit is not front and center when such changes are being implemented (Harrison et al., 2006; Heilman & Welle, 2006). Second, many commentators were quick to remind people that doing nothing toward gender equality is a virtual default quota to about 75% white men in government and about 95% white men at the top of industry—are these numbers justified based on merit/leadership ability? They also noted the lack of qualifications among many former male ministers using the previous default system, which amounted to a white male quota system with a “white male hegemony that defines merit solely in terms of the privileged qualities that its male commentators see in the mirror” (Laxer, 2015). This is supported by research finding that implicit quotas on women seem to emerge where there is no active intervention, and a small number of women in positions of leadership is considered good enough (Dezso, Ross, & Uribe, 2016). These implicit quotas are quite like the tokenism effect (e.g., Kanter, 1977), whereby small numbers of women in these positions are considered sufficient to demonstrate a commitment to gender equity. Finally, it is common in some countries to legislate “representation” (e.g., across states/provinces, languages etc.). Even commentators who disliked this new push for gender equality openly admitted that having a diversity of opinions means that better decisions are reached (Kheiriddin, 2015). As Trudeau pointed out, his new cabinet simply looks a lot more like Canada (Murphy, 2015). The Canadian government still has a way to go, though: Only 26% of MPs in the House of Commons are women, and the Canadian Senate is still dominated by men (Proudfoot, 2016; Taber, 2016), but this is incredible progress in a rather short time frame because a man in power decided to change the rules; he “leaned in” for change.

Representation

Many countries have had targets around female representation in government for some time. At least 112 countries have voluntary quotas for selecting nominees, and 54 nations legislate candidate quotas (Proudfoot, 2016). Quotas get results because what gets measured gets done, particularly if enforced (Sojo, Wood, Wood, & Wheeler, 2016). In Canada, even before this more dramatic change, most provinces had begun to adopt “comply or explain” policies for publicly traded companies. In general, these

policies require firms to either demonstrate gender diversity on their boards or account for the lack of it. These policies have been seen as necessary due to the slow rate of progress regarding female representation (Proudfoot, 2016).

France offers an interesting example of how public opinion can follow changes due to mandating equal gender representation. After the introduction of a “parity law” requiring political parties to run as many women as men or face financial penalties, many political parties initially just paid the fines. However, within 15 years, the number of women in the national assembly went from 11% to 26%. What is interesting in this example is that what supposedly drove this change was that it “just became more publicly shameful for parties to not have a reasonable number of women,” and that this happened in a country typically opposed to such measures (Proudfoot, 2016). On a final note, one should carefully consider the terms used for these changes; references to “quotas” seem to provoke much more hostility than references to “representation,” particularly in countries that have not traditionally mandated such behavior (Wiersema & Mors, 2016). In fact, Harrison et al. (2006) wrote that “if one wishes to fan the flames of AAP [affirmative action program] resistance, positioning them as quotas would be an effective strategy” (p. 1028). Consequently, we are deliberately using the term *representation*, and we argue that this must be made mandatory for change to occur. We also note (as we did in the previous section) that in any discussions about representation one must be crystal clear that these measures are designed to address prior discrimination, are based on merit, and will leverage the value of diversity (Harrison, et al., 2006). Encouraging broad participation in designing these systems is also critical for acceptance by nonbeneficiaries (Hideg, Michela, & Ferris, 2011).

WOULD CHANGING WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION AT THE TOP CHANGE STEREOTYPES?

A recent meta-analysis of studies conducted in the field shows that even if women are narrowing the gap in performance, they are not necessarily narrowing the gap in organizational rewards (Joshi, Son, & Roh, 2015). In fact, “sex differences in organizational rewards were almost 14 times larger than sex differences in performance evaluations” (Joshi, Son et al., 2015, p. 1532). This meta-analysis showed that the only factor to narrow the gap between rewards and

performance evaluations between men and women was an industry environment with more women in executive positions. This would appear to bolster our argument and previous empirical research showing that putting more women into senior leadership roles will have some of the intended effects (e.g., Kulik & Metz, 2017). While Joshi, Son et al. (2015) suggested that the implications of their findings are that industry-wide mentoring programs would be beneficial, another implication could be that having equal representation of women in senior leadership roles will be an effective strategy to lessen bias against women seeking more senior roles.

The perceived incongruence between women's gender and leadership roles would be lessened via two types of changes: changes to the female gender role stereotype and/or changes to the leadership stereotype. Despite the "stickiness" of stereotypes (Eagly & Heilman, 2016, p. 352; Haines, Deaux, & Lofaro, 2016), social role theory predicts that the female gender role stereotype could shift given changes in the number of women in leadership roles, with women being perceived as increasingly agentic (Bosak & Sczesny, 2011). One paper outlined four studies that tested the tenets of social role theory and found that stereotype content was indeed related to role occupancy (Koenig & Eagly, 2014).

Societal changes could also prompt changes in how leadership is viewed. With good leaders increasingly being seen as requiring communal attributes, the leadership role stereotype may also shift, becoming more feminine and thereby conducive to women in such roles (Bosak & Sczesny, 2011). Empirical work demonstrates that increasing the number of women in management is an effective way of changing leader stereotypes and creating more acceptance of female leaders, particularly among male employees (Stoker, Van der Velde, & Lammers, 2012). One recent experimental study investigated whether stereotypes of women or leaders would show change comparing perceptions of the past (1950), today, and into the future (2050). Findings demonstrated that women have been perceived to have increased in masculine traits over time, and that the "perceived change in women's roles mediated the impact of context year [past (1950), today, or future (2050)] on beliefs about masculine traits in women" (Bosak & Sczesny, 2011, p. 261). However, given that other recent work has found gender stereotypes to be quite enduring over the period of time from 1983 to 2014 (Haines et al., 2016), the task of shifting gender stereotypes may be more formidable than shifting leader stereotypes.

In either case, shifting stereotypes is necessary to open doors for women and to provide equal access to senior leadership roles. Mandating an increase in the number of women in leadership roles is a promising strategy to change gender and/or leader stereotypes, and while research should investigate the effectiveness of this strategy, it does appear that "quota-mandated changes can cause attitudes and stereotypes to change in directions favorable to women's continued occupancy of leader roles" (Koenig & Eagly, 2014, p. 385). The evidence from the research literature suggests that these changes can be made by introducing mandatory representation of women in leadership roles, while focusing on the past discrimination that makes this necessary, the qualifications of the women being promoted to these roles, and the benefits of doing so.

Sandberg Notes the Power of Structural Change

Read *Lean In* carefully, and you will realize that the author gives several examples of structural change. In fact, some of Sandberg's (2013) most powerful stories involve interventions intended to change the system. For example, she tells the story of what happened at Harvard Business School when the dean decided to directly address the unfair advantage given to white men in classrooms (p. 156). First, the dean appointed the first female senior associate dean of the MBA program and created a position for a gender and diversity expert. They then rigorously examined the school's culture and began to make adjustments to language used in classrooms. They promoted a new communal definition of leadership (and held students accountable when they violated this definition) and began having students work on projects that required collaboration with those with whom they would not normally collaborate. By the second year, the performance gap was closed.

Sandberg (2013) also explicitly states that social gains are never handed out but rather must be seized (p. 157) and that men of all ages must commit to changing the leadership ratios (p. 166). However, we suspect that some will not read the book carefully, and will use her arguments to support the notion that women could be successful in the quest for senior leadership roles if only they were motivated and confident enough. The extent to which any author should be held accountable for people's misapplication of his or her work is beyond the scope of this paper. However, in this case, it does seem to be a lost opportunity, because this could have been a

chance for a woman in power to educate all of us on *how* the system could be changed from within if those in powerful positions (typically men) in corporate North America decided to do so.

CONCLUSIONS

We started this paper seeking to continue the conversation about the *who*, *what*, and *when* of leaning in. We argued that perhaps *who* should be leaning in is not only women but men, particularly those in power. In this regard, we offered a practical example of how the will to change on the part of those in power can make change happen with record speed (as in Canada). We also discussed *what* women are leaning into, and noted the downside of some of the opportunities senior women may be offered (in terms of glass cliffs). Finally, we outlined what happens *when* women do lean in despite violating feminine stereotypes. To some extent, it would seem as though Sandberg's advice is of most use to women who are already at the table. However, getting them to the table to begin with may require a more direct and systematic approach.

We are arguing that interrupting the influence of stereotypes on perceptions and judgments of women in leadership positions, or their competence to fill them, is of great importance to remedying the low number of women in senior leadership roles. With support from research on gender and leader stereotypes, we have suggested that putting more women in leadership roles is an essential *first* step to changing the stereotypes that hold them back from these positions. In addition, enabling more men to occupy family caregiving roles will also enable male stereotypes to shift, further supporting women holding senior leadership positions. We suggest that corporations need goals to increase the number of women in leadership roles, and they need incentives to track progress on these goals, much as they would track any other metric of importance. Quite likely representation will need to be mandatory to be effective. Through increases in representation, stereotypes will change, thereby changing a very strong structural barrier for women in leadership. Once women have achieved gender parity at senior organizational levels through concerted and targeted efforts, there will still be work to be done to ensure that the environments they lead in are equitable and that gender bias is minimized (Ellemers et al., 2012). Nonetheless, theory and empirical research suggest that changing the number of women in these roles is a crucial *first* step to changing leader, and eventually gender, stereotypes.

For argument's sake think of the parallels to the civil rights movement. Could telling people of color to "lean in" have worked without changing the rules? Hoffman (2016) noted that "things will change for women in the workplace when politicians believe that it is important enough to legislate, [and] when judges are representative of the true population. . . . The real change needed is not how women behave, but how they are perceived and valued by society" (p. 29). New gender-neutral stereotypes of leadership need to be embedded into societal consciousness. This can be accomplished through mandating equal representation of women in senior leadership roles. This will put us on a path toward enabling leader stereotypes to be gender-neutral and more conducive to effectiveness as defined by the success, health, and well-being of employees, companies, and communities.

Women are beginning to demand this change. An example of this made global headlines when women in Iceland walked off the job in midafternoon to protest the 30% lower average wage of women in that country (Friedman, 2016). Iceland also became the first country to mandate that companies (both public and private) prove they pay men and women in their employ equally (Kilpatrick, 2017). Granted, Iceland is a country known for progressive views on women's political empowerment and educational attainment, but the point is that women (perhaps much like African Americans) are resisting being treated inequitably, and some governments are leaning in for change accordingly. Yes, it will take time for implicit leader/gender biases to shift, but it won't happen at all if we don't start to act. The chicken-or-egg problem is probably never going to be answered satisfactorily. To design a study that would ascertain the relative influence, over time, of internal confidence compared to external factors (such as the subtle role of stereotypes in the judgments that are made about suitability for leadership roles) in women's ascent to senior leadership positions would be challenging indeed. But these are exactly the kinds of studies needed to determine the importance and effectiveness of leaning in as compared to structural issues such as gender and leader stereotypes and the mismatch that women face when ascending to senior roles in organizations.

In the meantime, what if those in power in the private sector decided to do what Canada's political leaders have begun to do in the public sector? This kind of leaning in could change things in very short order. To take a chapter from Sandberg's book, perhaps we could "start talking about" how to increase

women's representation in corporate leadership roles as opposed to talking about changing women so they can get there. As Warren Buffett reminds us, it is natural to resist change when it is not in our self-interest (cited in Hathaway, 2013). Perhaps we could draw on corporate slogans like Nike's famous "Just do it" campaign to get people thinking about *how* to move equal representation forward by changing the egg; we think the chicken has done enough.

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