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# Women and Leadership: History, Theories, and Case Studies

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# WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP

History, Theories, and  
Case Studies

Editors

George R. Goethals & Crystal L. Hoyt

*University of Richmond*



# Introduction

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Perhaps it was Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962) who most dramatically opened doors for women's leadership in American society. Married to one of the most dominating of all US presidents, Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR), Eleanor was an independent force that FDR had to reckon with. As one of his advisers recalled: "No one who ever saw Eleanor Roosevelt sit down facing her husband and holding his eyes firmly [and saying] to him, 'Franklin, I think that you should...' or 'Franklin, surely you will note...' will ever forget the experience" (Gardner 1995, 194).

Eleanor Roosevelt pressed the outer bounds of her role as first lady to achieve a great many of her own goals, even when they differed from the president's. She used one very public endeavor to earn money and therefore some degree of financial independence from her husband: she advertised Simmons' mattresses in national magazines. One result was songwriter Cole Porter poking fun at both Roosevelts in a seldom-heard version of his classic number "Anything Goes" from the Broadway musical. Porter sang: "So, Mrs. R with all her trimmin's, can broadcast a bed from Simmons, 'cause Franklin knows, anything goes!" It seemed then that indeed anything did go with the first lady. She fearlessly exerted leadership inside and outside the White House in ways that paved the way for active women leaders to change society's conception about who could lead and the ways they could do so. Eighty years later, Hillary Clinton followed the path that Eleanor Roosevelt blazed and won the nomination of the Democratic Party for president of the United States. Clinton won the popular vote by more than 2.5 million, but she was defeated in the Electoral College.

Eleanor Roosevelt provides just one example of women who have been leading around the world, throughout human history, in numerous and varied domains. Some have been as famous as Roosevelt, others have been far less prominent though equally important. *Women and Leadership* explores multiple facets of both women's leadership in general, and specific women leaders in particular. The articles here illuminate fundamental aspects of leadership itself, and expand our understanding of the varied and complex ways that women have contributed to communities, organizations, institutions, and nations in their efforts to get along and get things done. These are the things that leadership is all about.

## The Present Volume

*Women and Leadership* explores varied questions about women's leadership in four sections. Each section contains entries exploring a range of relevant questions, and the last three sections include biographical entries illustrating how those questions play out in individual lives. The biographical entries help us understand the general issues, and vice-versa.

**Part 1, Women in an Evolving Society**, considers changing family dynamics, women's values, and gender stereotypes. **Part 2, Women and Social Change**, includes articles on reproductive freedom, gay and lesbian equality, and struggles for women's rights. **Part 3, Women in Politics**, focuses on women in a range of political domains, and **Part 4, The Spectrum of Women's Leadership**, includes entries on women's leadership in business, the arts, literature and sports. Together, the four parts illustrate the rapid changes in how and where women lead, and the evolutions that women's leadership has been a central part of across time and place.

There are two big questions that cut across all four of our sections. Are there real differences between women's and men's leadership? And what are the barriers to women's leadership in the wide range of domains that our authors are considering, from sports and media to banking and politics? We want to examine these questions and the current state of research as an introduction to the more specific coverage in the twenty-two articles on women's leadership and sixteen associated biographies included in this volume.

## Differences between Women's and Men's Leadership

Changes in women's roles in leadership raise fundamental questions about both how women lead and how their leadership is perceived. Important dimensions of leadership identified in the very earliest research are relevant to understanding how women lead today. Studies in the 1930s, influenced by Hitler's authoritarian regime in Nazi Germany, examined differences in the effectiveness of democratic and participative leadership vs. autocratic (or directive) leadership (Lewin and Lip-pit 1938). It was clear that democratic leadership, in which leaders invite followers to participate and take responsibility, produced better outcomes than autocratic leadership. Much more recent research shows that women more than men lead in a participative manner, suggesting not only that women lead differently but also that they may lead more effectively.

Another possible difference in women's and men's leadership traces to a distinction drawn from research in the 1940s exploring the roles that people play in groups (Bales 1958). Some individuals tend to be focused on completing the group's tasks, while others spend more time addressing group members' feelings and emotional needs. Several studies suggest that women are more feeling-oriented and less task-oriented than men, but the preponderance of evidence does not support a difference. Research does show, however, that women tend to be more communal, that is, oriented toward the concerns and needs of others, and less agentic, that is, focused on individual achievement and advancement (Carli and Eagly 2011). In all of this research, the range of individual differences within the female and male populations is considerably larger than the average difference between the two genders.

That is, one man is likely to be very different than another, and the same is true for two women. Thus while this is a generalization with many exceptions, we can say that women are more communal and less agentic, and that is reflected in their leadership style.

It is important to note that while it might seem that if one is agentic, then one is not communal, and vice-versa, we now know that individuals can be both agentic and communal, or, of course, neither. People who manage to be both communal and agentic are said to be *androgynous*. This suggests a flexible set of interpersonal skills that can be deployed in situations calling for leadership. Both men and women can be communal or agentic or androgynous, or not particularly either communal or agentic. Again, we need to be more attuned to the fact that individuals differ rather than the ways men and women as groups differ.

Newer research has explored dimensions that are not so different from the ones we just discussed. There have been numerous studies of the impact of what is called *transformational* as opposed to *transactional* leadership (Bass 1998). Transactional leadership refers to the more mundane give and take between leaders and followers. Each party does something for the other. There is an exchange. Specifically, transactional leaders use “contingent reward,” meaning that they reward followers when they perform as expected, and “management by exception,” meaning that such leaders only address followers when the followers fail to do as expected, and then the leader points out errors and shortcomings. Women tend to use “contingent reward” more than men, while men more often use “management by exception.”

As noted above, transformational leadership stands in contrast to transactional leadership. In general, it is a more active and motivating form of leadership. It inspires more engagement and effort from followers than transactional leadership. Transformational leadership is composed of four categories of behavior, the so-called “4-I’s.” First is “idealized leadership” or charisma. Charismatic leaders set high goals, express confidence in followers, and are seen as worthy of emulation. Second is “inspirational motivation” whereby leaders use symbols and emotional appeals to arouse followers. Third is “intellectual stimulation” where leaders question conventional beliefs and challenge followers to think in novel and creative ways. Fourth is “individualized consideration” whereby leaders endeavor to address each individual’s needs. Followers are treated equally and fairly, but the leader shows sensitivity to the talents and concerns of different individuals. Women score higher than men on all four dimensions of transformational leadership, with the biggest difference being on the last one mentioned, the factor of individualized consideration. This important difference is consistent with women being more communal, more democratic and participative, and perhaps somewhat more socio-emotional in their orientation to group roles. As with the findings regarding democratic vs. autocratic forms of leadership, leaders who use the four forms of transformational leadership, and the “contingent reward” aspect of transactional leadership, are more effective than other leaders. That is, women more often use the forms of leadership that are more effective. Finally, it is noteworthy that behaving in an androgynous manner, which many women effectively do, can facilitate transformational leadership.

Beyond differences in style, women can bring to bear important and distinct perspectives, values, and priorities. Relative to men, women are more likely to demonstrate cooperation and endorse social values that promote the welfare

of others and are less likely to support unethical decisions (Borkowski and Ugras 1998; Eagly, Gartzia, and Carli 2014; Franke, Crowne, and Spake 1997; Schwartz and Rubel 2005). These differences in values and ethics can help explain important gender-linked differences in outcomes related to the public good. For example, greater gender diversity in the upper echelons of companies is associated with greater philanthropy, fewer employee lay-offs, and fewer unethical business practices (Boulouta 2013, Eagly et al. 2014, Williams 2003). Moreover, increased leadership empowerment of women is associated with greater policymaking that represents the concerns of families, women, and ethnic and racial minorities, as well as increases in standards of living, societal gender equality, and national wealth (Beaman et al. 2009; Cohen and Huffman 2007; Eagly et al. 2014; Paxton, Kunovich, and Hughes 2007; World Bank, 2012).

In sum, research suggests that female leaders are more likely than male leaders to focus on the welfare of others and, though the differences are small, as a broad generalization, we can say that research suggests that women have, overall, a leadership effectiveness advantage (Eagly, Karau, and Makhijani 1995). Does this mean that they can easily rise to leadership positions? Given people's expectations about leaders, and social norms about how men and women do behave, and also how they should behave, it turns out to be not so simple.

### **Barriers to Women's Leadership**

Women's increased representation in top leadership roles, from heads of state to CEO positions, begets the question: does gender matter in leadership anymore? At first blush, it appears that the difficulties women have faced on their way to reaching elite leadership positions have vanished. For example, in 1937, less than half of Americans polled by Gallup said they would support a qualified woman for president; today, over 90 percent say they would. Indeed, the number of women occupying leadership roles globally is at the highest it's ever been. That said, women remain starkly underrepresented in senior political and corporate leadership positions (Carli 2015). So, does gender matter in leadership? In short, yes. Regardless of whether it *ought* to matter, gender *does* matter for both how people respond to leaders and what leaders can bring to their roles.

### ***Traversing the Labyrinth***

Women navigate a more complicated maze of challenges that men do along their leadership journeys. Originally termed the *glass ceiling*, the new metaphor of a *leadership labyrinth* does not imply that everyone has equal access to lower positions until they hit the unforeseen barrier, but rather it suggests a journey riddled with challenges that can be successfully navigated. Within the leadership labyrinth, women encounter multifaceted barriers that not only result in lack of numerical parity between women and men in leadership, but also critical gender differences in the nature of leadership positions. For example, research into the *glass cliff* shows that women, relative to men, are preferentially appointed to precarious leadership positions coupled with greater risks and criticism (Ryan et al. 2016).

Many obstacles that women encounter stem from often inequitable divisions of domestic labor and the structure and culture of contemporary organizations (Eagly and Carli 2007). Domestic and child-rearing expectations impose an added burden on women climbing the leadership ladder. Women's participation in the paid labor force has increased dramatically since the 1960s; however, women continue to do the majority, though not all, of the second shift of unpaid domestic labor (Khazan 2016; Milkie, Raley, and Bianchi 2009). Similarly, organizational factors can present key barriers to women in leadership. For example, women are less likely than men to hold line, as opposed to staff, roles that are more visible, have more responsibility, and often feed into senior leadership positions. Even when women are in similar positions to men, they often have fewer responsibilities, are less likely to receive formal job training, and are less likely to be included in important networks. Moreover, women confront greater barriers to establishing critical mentor relationships than men do (Powell and Graves 2003).

Some of the most malignant hurdles women face stem from prejudice and stereotypical thinking. Explicit biases against women in elite leadership positions have decreased dramatically over the last half-decade. However, there remain powerful, and perhaps even more pernicious, subtle biases that work to undermine the tenets of meritocracy and limit women's access to power (Hoyt 2015). The deeply ingrained stereotypic beliefs that women *take care* and men *take charge* give rise to crafty biases against female leaders (Eagly and Carli 2007). Abundant research demonstrates that people's intuitive notions of leaders are culturally masculine (Koenig et al. 2011). According to the role congruity theory and the lack of fit model, bias against female leaders emerges from the conflicting expectations between the female gender role and the leader role (Eagly and Karau 2002, Heilman 2001). This bias results in less favorable attitudes toward female than male leaders and women experiencing greater difficulty than men in attaining top leadership roles and being viewed as effective in these roles.

Though these prejudices are hard for many of us to detect, both in ourselves and in others, social scientists have devised tools to do just that. In one clever experimental approach to illuminating gender bias, people are asked to evaluate identical information, such as resumes, with one catch: Half the people are told it is a man's resume, the other half, a woman's (Goldberg 1968). Overwhelmingly, when evaluating candidates for leadership positions, identical qualifications are deemed "better" or "more meritorious" when there is a male name attached (Davison and Burke 2000). Moreover, people are nimble rationalizers—justifying prejudices in the way criteria for merit are both defined and evaluated. For example, when hiring for a traditionally masculine leadership position, such as police chief, people malleably define merit in a way that matches the strength of male, versus female, candidates (Uhlmann and Cohen 2005).

Female leaders are often placed in a *double bind*: highly feminine women are criticized for being decent leaders and highly masculine women experience backlash for not being female enough (Eagly et al 2014, Heilman and Okimoto 2007, Heilman et al 2004). Indeed, women are often disliked and vilified for violating the prescription for feminine niceness—for example, they are often penalized for expressing anger, talking more than others, and negotiating their salary. The 2016 US presidential election revealed the animosity that many Americans harbor toward women who seek power. There has been no greater lightening rod for gender-based

hostility than Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton. Throughout her career in public office many have demonized her as a woman, wife, and mother, and labeled her a “radical feminist,” and, in a notable moment during a presidential debate, as a “nasty woman.” This backlash against female power-seeking was epitomized in the choice campaign slogan “Trump that Bitch.” Remarkably, Americans’ hostility toward women and feminism predicted support for Republican candidate Donald Trump almost as strongly as their political party affiliation.

Moreover, the biases that influence who people see as “fitting” our notions of a leader, also shape the way female leaders behave and think about themselves. Regardless of whether they endorse them or not, women are keenly aware of these gender stereotypes and these stereotype-based expectations of inferiority can be psychologically burdensome and threatening (Steele 1997; Steele, Spencer, and Aronson 2002). The consequences of experiencing stereotype threat are multidimensional (for a review, see Hoyt and Murphy 2016). Gender stereotype-based expectations of inferiority can lead to deleterious responses including underperformance across many important tasks relevant to leadership and they can undermine women’s sense of belonging in a field and their motivation and desire to pursue leadership success. At times, however, women are able to react to these negative stereotype-based expectations with more favorable responses such as engaging in constructive, counter-stereotypical behaviors. Whether women meet threats to their identity with more deleterious or constructive responses depends on a variety of factors including their beliefs regarding their ability to be a successful leader and the presence of effective role models.

## Women as Twenty-first Century Leaders

The twenty-two articles on women’s leadership and sixteen associated biographies included here provide insight into the issues surrounding women and leadership. At the same time, they raise numerous questions. Some of the most central are: how do women lead, what are the obstacles to their leading, how has their leadership changed the world, and how has women’s leadership helped us deepen our understanding of leadership theory and leadership in general.

In **Part 1, Women in an Evolving Society**, we consider how in recent years family dynamics have evolved, and how they have been shaped by gender stereotypes and important women’s values. We are reminded that change continues, and that the arc of change toward gender equality is moving, slowly perhaps, in the right direction. In **Part 2, Women and Social Change**, we consider specific examples of the change that has come about in evolving societies worldwide. Such changes include progress, however vexed, toward reproductive freedom and movement toward gay, lesbian and transgender equality. At the same time, we see in the history of struggles for women’s rights that some aspirations for gender justice remain unfulfilled. The biographies of Ida Wells-Barnett, Susan B. Anthony, Emma Goldman, Margaret Sanger, and Betty Friedan in this section showcase the range of social change that women have initiated. **Part 3, Women in Politics**, focuses on women’s struggles to play more prominent roles in politics, the obstacles that they encounter and the many pathways individual women have taken to play increasingly significant roles. The case of Catherine the Great, who



lived at almost the exact time as US President George Washington, shows that women have been prominent throughout history, although it has seldom been easy. Eleanor Roosevelt is discussed here, as are Asian political pioneers Cixi, Wu Zeitan, and Soong Meiling. Finally, **Part 4, The Spectrum of Women's Leadership**, explores the achievements of women leading in business, film, literature, athletics, academics, international development, utopian societies, and elsewhere. The impressive range of advances in women's leadership is well-illustrated here, especially with the case study biographies of Oprah Winfrey, Coco Chanel, Margaret Mead, Mother Teresa, and Song Qingling.

Throughout this collection, the interplay of leaders and leadership is underlined. In order to understand leadership in general, we have to understand specific leaders. At the same time, individual leaders help clarify the dimensions of leadership theory and research. There are many leadership domains in complex societies, and individual women have effectively stepped into all of them. The achievements of the women we have considered, such as Eleanor Roosevelt, help us understand the opportunities that recent history has opened for other women such as Angela Merkel, Hillary Clinton, Tsai Ing-wen, and Theresa May.

While we can only sample the kinds of leadership initiated by women throughout human history, the biographies in this volume detail the extraordinary accomplishments that so many women around the world have achieved, and make clear that women's leadership will have much greater impact in the future, as we face unprecedented global and national challenges. *Women and Leadership* provides historical background and theoretical context that will be helpful to students and scholars, business professionals, and to any woman whose goal is to lead.

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