

A R T I C L E S

LEAN IN VERSUS THE LITERATURE: AN EVIDENCE-BASED EXAMINATION

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In this article, we provide an evidence-based analysis of the main ideas put forth in Sheryl Sandberg’s immensely popular book *Lean In*. In doing so, we bring the management and psychology literatures to bear on her key pieces of advice and determine which assertions are supported, which are refuted, and which need additional management research. We use research on stereotype threat, psychological withdrawal, mentoring, leadership identity development, self-efficacy, and leadership styles to examine Sandberg’s key claims. Overall, our findings suggest that some of her arguments are supported by scientific evidence while others lack empirically based support. We discuss both gaps in the existing literature and practical implications that emerge as evidence-based strategies for both women and the organizations in which they work to combat gender-based stereotypes and discrimination.

The popularity of Sheryl Sandberg’s 2013 book, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, is indisputable: More than 2 million copies of the book have been sold. Sandberg’s TED Talk of the same name has garnered nearly 5 million views. To date more than 40,000 Lean In Circles have been created in 160 countries.¹ And six years after publication, women are still talking about *Lean In*. That being said, the book has its fair share of critics.

Some say that Sandberg places too much emphasis on women making changes to ourselves, when the real problem is not women’s attitudes and motivation but rather corporate practices and policies that continue to hold women back (Wittenberg-Cox, 2013). Others argue that not all women want to lean in and should not be made to feel guilty for opting out of the workplace or “downshifting” their careers (Stone, 2007). Our goal in this article is to provide an evidence-based analysis of many of Sandberg’s key ideas. While Sandberg’s book includes multitudinous references to quality sources of information, our aim

is to bring the management and psychology literatures to bear on her main pieces of advice, to determine which assertions are supported, which are refuted, and which need additional research support.

THE *LEAN IN* PREMISE

Sandberg begins her book with dismal statistics. She cites evidence that (in 2013) women earned 77 cents for every dollar a man earned, and women in the United States held about 14% of executive officer positions and just 18% of congressional offices. After profiling such data and sharing many of her own personal stories, she concludes that there are many significant barriers facing women that negatively affect our ability to progress into leadership roles; some barriers are external while others are internal. External barriers include organizational and societal policies, practices, and structures. Internal barriers, Sandberg writes, are those that exist within ourselves, such as a lack of self-confidence, the tendency to hold ourselves back, and the internalization of negative messages such as those that caution against

¹ See <https://leanin.org/circles>.

being outspoken or powerful (p. 8). She argues that we must work to eradicate both internal and external barriers. She goes on to say that although some would argue that we must tackle external barriers first, she is not interested in debating what she calls this chicken-and-egg situation: “The chicken: Women will tear down the external barriers once we achieve leadership roles. . . . The egg: We need to eliminate the external barriers to get women into these roles in the first place. Both sides are right. . . . They are equally important. I am encouraging women to address the chicken, but I fully support those who are focusing on the egg” (pp. 8–9). While she argues that women are held back and also hold themselves back, Sandberg is clear in stating that her intention in writing the book is to focus on those barriers that are internal. Her rationale is that less attention has been paid to these types of barriers and that they are to a large extent under our own control (p. 9).

In *Lean In*, Sandberg delivers several pieces of advice for career women related to internal barriers. In this paper, we focus on the following key arguments she puts forth: Women 1) are holding themselves back, 2) leave before they leave, 3) must change their mindset to ignore negative messages, 4) need to overcome their fears, 5) should seek support from others to achieve success, and 6) must be authentic. We consider each piece of advice in turn through the lens of published research and theory on management. In doing so, we follow an evidence-based management approach (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006a, 2006b).

AN EVIDENCE-BASED MANAGEMENT APPROACH

Evidence-based management has been defined as a willingness to put aside conventional wisdom and instead gather and then act upon facts to make informed and intelligent management decisions (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006b). It involves gathering evidence and then facing the facts about what works and what does not, rather than relying on half-truths or simplistic advice. One of the dangers of popular leadership philosophies is that they may be based on what has implicit appeal—that is, they may appear to be sound advice yet lack empirical evidence. Pfeffer and Sutton (2006b) argued that many leaders fail to use sound evidence and fall prey to poor management practice because thinking is simply hard work. They contended, however, that leaders who are willing to engage in hard thinking and search for solid evidence can recognize their blind spots, biases, and problems. Finding and following the best data available will ultimately lead to greater

managerial success. We acknowledge that Sandberg was assisted in the research for her book by Dr. Marianne Cooper and other academics, and she makes use of many quality sources of information, but she writes on page 9, “I am not a scholar.” While the book is well referenced, many of her core tenets remain unexamined in the context of the existing managerial and psychological literature.

Therefore, in the sections that follow, we use an evidence-based approach to critically evaluate Sandberg’s key arguments, to clarify for both leadership scholars and practitioners which advice is based on sound facts and which is not. We pay particular attention to whether the advice Sandberg proffers extends to less privileged women of color and women of lower socioeconomic status. Following this analysis, we offer both practical implications for women’s leadership development that stem from the academic literature and ideas for needed future studies that may help guide the development of the next generation of female leaders.

THE EXAMINATION OF SIX KEY ARGUMENTS

#1: Women Are Holding Themselves Back

One of the major claims Sheryl Sandberg offers readers is that we as women are holding ourselves back in the workplace in various ways. These are the internal barriers that thwart women’s leadership progress. “We hold ourselves back in ways both big and small, by lacking self-confidence, by not raising our hands. . . . [W]e lower our own expectations of what we can achieve. . . . Fewer of us aspire to senior positions” (p. 8). Later she writes: “In my experience, more men look for stretch assignments . . . and women hang back” (p. 32). Interrogating these statements helps separate the anecdotal evidence for these barriers from the evidence-based arguments. First, she infers that women’s self-confidence is lower than men’s. What does research have to say about this?

Studies have suggested a significant gender gap in self-efficacy, a psychological construct first introduced by Bandura (1977). He defined self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1977, p. 3). Rather than a more objective belief in one’s skills and competence, self-efficacy is based on a subjective perception of one’s ability (Reichard, Walker, Putter, Middleton, & Johnson, 2017). A review of nearly 2,000 studies demonstrates that self-efficacy is an important predictor of performance (Bandura, 1977). That is, believing in one’s capabilities has a positive impact on

one's functioning. Self-efficacy has been examined in a wide variety of performance domains (Bandura, 1977), including leadership. Leadership self-efficacy has been defined as leaders' beliefs about their "perceived capabilities to organize the positive psychological capabilities, motivation, means, collective resources, and courses of action required to attain effective, sustainable performance across their various leadership roles, demands, and contexts" (Hannah, Avolio, Luthans, & Harms, 2008, p. 2).

Research studies consistently demonstrate gender differences in self-efficacy. Early on, in middle or junior high school, girls' self-efficacy declines, with no similar pattern found for boys (Wigfield, Eccles, & Pinrick, 1996). And, in general, these levels tend to persist through adulthood. Research examining self-efficacy in leaders shows that women report lower leadership self-efficacy than men of similar age and education (McCormick, Tanguma, & López-Forment, 2002). And researchers have documented findings that female managers report lower self-confidence than their male counterparts (Morris, 1998; Tsui, 1998).

Though gender differences in self-efficacy and confidence seem to be a consistent finding in the literature, research on a related construct, organization-based self-esteem (OBSE), has not been as conclusive. OBSE is defined as employees' beliefs about their value and competence as organization members (Bowling, Eschleman, Wang, Kirkendall, & Alarcon, 2010). A meta-analysis examining the antecedents and consequences of OBSE found that gender was essentially unrelated to OBSE (Bowling et al., 2010). A number of possible interpretations may help to explain this seemingly disparate finding. For example, the climate of particular workplaces may be helpful in understanding when and why gender differences in self-confidence may occur. Because men tend to have higher status than women in the workplace (Konrad & Gutek, 1987), when there are few women working in male-dominated work environments, women's OBSE can actually go up, due to their membership in a higher-status (more male) group (George & Chattopadhyay, 2002).

On the other hand, Betz's (1993) research looked at attributions for success, which tend to inform levels of self-efficacy, finding that women's successes (but men's failures) tend to be attributed by others to external or environmental, rather than internal, factors. In this way, past experiences of success do not necessarily serve to build women's confidence levels. Thus we conclude that the research on women's self-efficacy and -confidence as compared to men's seems to be mixed. On a positive note, Mednick and Thomas (2008) inferred that the

past three decades of women's "significant strides" in the social, economic, and political spheres may serve to alter gender-based socialization in relation to women's self-confidence in future generations.

Sandberg suggests that women also hold themselves back because women do not "raise our hands" as often as men do. This statement might be related to several areas of research, but from a management perspective, we examined the research on impression management and gendered communication patterns. Impression management is the extent to which people seek to control and influence the impressions others form about them (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). One type of impression management is self-promotion, the active means by which an employee influences how he or she appears to others by directing the observer's attention to complimentary aspects of oneself (Rosenfeld, Giacalone, & Riordan, 1995), including one's skills, abilities, and willingness to participate in various job tasks. What research evidence is there that women do this less than men?

Social psychology research has consistently shown that women underrepresent their accomplishments to others, whereas men are consistent in self-promoting their successes (Budworth & Mann, 2010). For many women, modesty of this sort has been a part of their gender role socialization process. Research has demonstrated that when women enact agentic behaviors such as promoting their own human capital, they may be perceived as competent (Rudman, 1998), but at the same time, they are viewed as less socially skilled and less likable than males who engage in the same behavior (Rudman & Glick, 2001). Guadagno and Cialdini (2007) found evidence that men and women differ in self-promotion in ways consistent with gender role expectations: While men tend to use more assertive tactics, women, in line with the modesty idea above, use tactics that are more passive and cooperative, such as conforming to others' opinions and supplication (i.e., making it known that they need help or advice).

This has been called the normative "male hubris-female humility divide" (e.g., Furnham, Hosoe, & Tang, 2001). For example, Furnham's (2001) review of 50 years of estimated intelligence research found that men tend to overrate their own IQ while women underrate. So "not raising one's hand" is likely a product of gender role socialization. As Heilman (2012) argued, disapproval awaits women who choose to cross prescriptive gender stereotype boundaries by doing what they have learned not to do, and women know this well. In fact, research has shown that women do not advocate for themselves in a variety of ways at work (e.g., contesting heavy

workloads and unfair treatment) if they believe this behavior will reflect poorly on them (Battle, 2008).

From a communication perspective, it may be that women are speaking up for discretionary assignments but are not being heard. Hancock and Rubin's (2015) experiments showed that both genders interrupt women more often than men. And Karpowitz, Mendelberg, and Shaker (2012) found that when an issue is being deliberated, women tend to have unequal voice and authority compared to male counterparts, depending on the structure and gender makeup of the group. Yet even with less voice and authority, women speaking in mixed-gender groups are overestimated by both male and female listeners to have spoken more than males (Cutler & Scott, 1990). So it seems that there may be some truth in young women's socialization to "not talk so much" (Brown, 1999) as a way of combating gender bias and getting along in the world. Taken together, this research on gendered communication suggests that women may be seen as overcontributing when volunteering as often as their male counterparts, and for this reason and others may not be noticed when they do "raise their hands."

Also in regard to women holding themselves back, Sandberg infers that women have lower achievement expectations or that these self-expectations decline over time for women. Here too context likely plays a role. Hyde (2004) argued that gendered achievement expectations are contextual in nature. Her experimental research found that given a simple test in a neutral or relaxed situation, women show higher levels of achievement motivation than men do. However, in situations when achievement is "aroused" (e.g., when participants are told they are being scored on intelligence or their capacity to be a leader), males' achievement motivation displays a sharp increase, whereas women's does not. Nevertheless, Hyde concluded that despite such differences, gender similarities rather than differences in achievement motivation are the rule (Kite, Deaux, & Haines, 2008; Mednick & Thomas, 2008). So what does this research have to say about women at work? Perhaps we are overplaying the influence of gender in achievement motivation across work contexts, but it may be that in high-stakes industries such as technology and trading, women may indeed be holding themselves back from competing with colleagues.

Sandberg cites a 2011 Bentley University Center for Women and Business study² of Millennials

as evidence that women have lower managerial/leadership aspirations than men do. This study found that 36% of men and 25% of women said this statement applied to them very well: "I aspire to a leadership role in whatever field I ultimately work." While that finding is indeed troubling, the relatively similar scores on this statement are not exceedingly convincing. And evidence for arguments to the contrary can also be found. Studies have found that women and men demonstrate similar leadership skills, in both task- and interpersonal-related (Eagly & Karau, 2002) forms, and have quite similar career aspirations (Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1994). A meta-analysis by Eagly, Karau, Miner, and Johnson (1994) found that men had a slightly higher overall motivation to manage others in a business organization, but that women scored higher than men on several managerial task subscales such as the desire to be an authority figure and the desire to perform certain administrative tasks.

Sandberg acknowledges that her assertion that more men than women look for stretch assignments comes from her own anecdotal experience. So what is the research evidence for this idea? In consulting with the Center for Creative Leadership and from our own literature review, we found little research that has directly tested this question, but there are two related streams of research that can add information. First, a study done in a U.S. Fortune 500 company (Hoobler, Lemmon, & Wayne, 2014) found no direct correlation between gender and having engaged in challenging work assignments. However, in this study, women were less likely to be seen as career-motivated by their supervisors (who were both men and women), and career motivation positively predicted whether supervisors bestowed job resources on their subordinates, including the assignment of challenging work. Other research by King and colleagues (2012) demonstrated that women and men were equally likely to demonstrate interest in challenging work, but likely out of benevolent sexism ("women deserve protection") women received fewer challenging work assignments. So it may not be that women are not raising their hands for job challenges at the same rate that their male counterparts are; instead, it could be that managers' perceptions of women are holding women back from getting challenging assignments.

The other related stream of research is on women's career paths and how they may follow less linear trajectories than men's—for example, kaleidoscope careers (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005) and zig-zag careers (O'Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2008). Women's

² See p. 22, https://www.scribd.com/doc/158258672/CWB-Millennial-Report?secret_password=2191s8a7d6j7shshcctt.

desire for less linear, perhaps more boundaryless (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) career paths suggests that women raising their hands for the next in-role job challenge may not be an effective way of achieving their personal career aspirations. Finally, a recent study by Brands and Fernandez-Mateo (2017) found that women's decisions to "lean out" when considering leadership roles may very well be caused by previous rejections. In their study, recruitment rejection triggered uncertainty for women about their general belonging in executive positions. This then caused women to place greater weight than men on fair treatment, which the authors surmised has a cumulative impact and contributes to gender inequality in leadership positions over time. Overall, then, the literature suggests that perhaps women do at times hold themselves back. However, reasons for this are complex and rarely seem to be the result of a lack of desire to engage in leadership roles.

#2: Women Leave Before They Leave

Another piece of advice Sandberg devotes a whole chapter to is counseling women not to "leave before they leave." She presents a classic scenario where a woman does not aim for a high position because she someday hopes to have a family. In the extreme, the management research might approach the study of this topic from a *psychological withdrawal* point of view. Psychological withdrawal is akin to lower levels of involvement at work (Beehr & Gupta, 1978). We see this as the crux of the *Lean In* argument—that women should continue to say yes to work opportunities despite other current or future external roles and commitments.

The research on women withdrawing while still working is a nascent area of study. We are aware of no meta-analytic work that examines gender differences in psychological withdrawal. However, Laura Little's recent work on pregnant mothers in the workplace shows the opposite of what Sandberg describes. Little and her colleagues (Little, Major, Hinojosa, & Nelson, 2015) found that when professional women became pregnant they actually tended to work harder in an effort to maintain their professional image and prove their value and commitment. Unfortunately, these women also tended to experience burnout, which eventually was related to job dissatisfaction and disengagement, based on attempts to minimize the devalued work identity that pregnancy brings. Reconciling this with Sandberg's statement that women leave before they leave, maybe women are not purposefully disengaging/withdrawing due to anticipated family roles, but

instead their extra effort to preserve their work image in light of family responsibilities makes for unreasonable demands that unintendedly result in burnout and withdrawal. That is, perhaps "leaving before they leave" is not so much a conscious strategy for women, but a result of untenable, self-imposed role demands. As far as actual leaving, meta-analytic (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000) and longitudinal (Pelled & Xin, 1999) evidence finds little difference with regard to rates of turnover between men and women.

#3: Women Must Change Their Mindset to Ignore Negative Messages

Throughout her book, Sandberg argues that women must do their best to dismiss criticism and negative feedback (e.g., p. 50). Though she acknowledges that this is not an easy thing to do, she is quite convincing when she calls for forward movement despite the bias and stereotypes women face. For example, Sandberg says, "We can reignite the revolution by internalizing the revolution. The shift to a more equal world will happen person by person. We move closer to the larger goal of true equality with each woman who leans in" (p. 11).

In essence, she is challenging women to internalize the revolution by changing their mindset and tuning out the negative messages they often hear. In other words, maintaining positive attitudes toward work roles despite the external barriers women face is critical to success. To evaluate evidence for this assertion, we consider the theory of reasoned action (TRA). TRA is a cognitive model of human behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and is the predominant model used by psychologists interested in predicting behavioral intentions and behavior (Ajzen, 2001). The TRA model has been applied in many research settings to provide empirical support for the link between attitudes and behavior. The premise of the theory is that intentions to behave in a certain way have a direct impact on actual behavior and that intentions are predicted by both attitudes toward the behavior and subjective norms, or perceptions of how others desire us to behave. An important component of TRA is that subjective norms are directly proportional to beliefs about how others expect us to behave and the motivation to comply with these expectations.

On one hand then, empirical support for TRA seems to bolster Sandberg's argument that women's leadership intentions and positive attitudes play a significant role in driving leadership behavior. However, the robust findings on "stereotype threat"

(performance decrements caused by the threat of fulfilling a stereotype) suggest that maintaining positive attitudes is likely not enough to prevent gender discrimination from having a negative impact on women's behavior and ultimately their professional success. Recall that TRA theorizes that our intended behavior is predicted by two psychological constructs: 1) our own attitudes toward the behavior and 2) subjective norms or our perceptions of how others expect us to behave. In regard to the second part, research on stereotype threat suggests that stereotypical subjective norms negatively impact women's intent to lead in the workplace.

The vast literature on stereotype threat (for a recent review see Spencer, Logel, & Davies, 2016) has shown that gender stereotypes are psychologically harmful and do indeed negatively affect women's behavior. Stereotype threat has been studied in a variety of laboratory settings. When individuals are primed in such a way that a stereotype about their group is invoked, their performance declines as a result of the threat of fulfilling this stereotype. Research has shown that cues can come from a variety of sources and vary from blatant to subtle. Examples include telling participants that their experimenter is sexist or having them interact with a sexist man (Adams, Garcia, Purdie-Vaughns, & Steele, 2006; Logel, Iserman, Davies, Quinn, & Spencer, 2009); being in the numerical minority, such as having token or solo status as a woman leading a group of men; and being reminded of how few women are employed within a firm (Hoyt, Johnson, Murphy, & Skinnell, 2010; Kanter, 1977; Von Hippel, Walsh, & Zouroudis, 2011). Because women may be exposed to many different types of cues or multiple cues at once, researchers reference the fact that such stereotypes seem to linger "in the air" (Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999) and can be highly detrimental to performance. A number of studies have shown that stereotypes against women impair their performance on engineering (Bell, Spencer, Iserman, & Logel, 2003; Logel et al., 2009) and math tasks (Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev, 2000; Nguyen & Ryan, 2008; Schmader, 2002; Spencer et al., 1999).

In addition to performance decrements, other negative consequences of stereotype threat have been identified in the literature. One example is the reduction of women's motivation to pursue certain professions. In one study, women primed to pay attention to their female identity expressed a greater interest in art-oriented domains as compared to mathematics, whereas those in the control condition did not experience the same preference (Steele &

Ambady, 2006). In another study, stereotypic gender commercials affected women's visions of their future: Those shown stereotypical images emphasized homemaking rather than personal achievement themes when describing their future lives (Geis, Brown, Jennings, & Porter, 1984). Similarly, Davies and colleagues found that gender-stereotypic commercials undermined women's leadership aspirations (Davies, Spencer, & Steele, 2005) as well as their interest in quantitative (relative to verbal) majors and career paths (Davies, Spencer, Quinn, & Gerhardstein, 2002).

Although findings of stereotype threat and its negative implications for women have unfortunately proven to be quite robust, there is also research evidence to support strategies to mitigate these effects. In this vein, we find merit in Sandberg's suggestion to ignore negative messages and foster a different internal mindset. In support of this, Spencer and colleagues (1999) were able to reduce the impact of stereotype threat by instructing experimental subjects that there were no gender differences in achievement on a math test. The women who read these instructions performed equally to men, whereas women who read instructions that the test showed gender differences underperformed. Relatedly, Burnette, Pollack, and Hoyt (2010) reported that the belief that leadership abilities can be cultivated has been shown to play an important role in buffering against deleterious stereotype threat effects in a leadership context. In one example, Kray and colleagues demonstrated that only women who were led to believe that negotiating skills can be developed (versus these skills being innate) were capable of countering the stereotype that women are inferior negotiators, as evidenced by their higher negotiation performance (Kray, Locke, & Haselhuhn, 2010).

Overall, research on stereotype threat illustrates how difficult it may be for women to maintain positive work and achievement attitudes in the face of negative messages, gender bias, and discrimination. Decades of research on stereotype threat suggest that it is probably unrealistic to ask women to simply ignore negative messages. Yet there does seem to be merit in the argument that women may benefit from developing a self-affirming mindset and controlling their reactions to gender stereotypes (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). That being said, Hoyt and Murphy (2016) were also clear in highlighting the need for identity-safe contexts for women at work, thus supporting the importance of both internal and external factors in mitigating the negative impact of stereotypes on women's performance.

#4: Women Need to Overcome Their Fears

Sandberg argues that fear is at the root of many barriers women face: “Fear of not being liked. Fear of making the wrong choice. Fear of drawing negative attention. Fear of overreaching. Fear of being judged. Fear of failure. And the holy trinity of fear: the fear of being a bad mother/wife/daughter” (p. 24). Thus, Sandberg advises women to put their fears aside. On page 25 she asks, “What would you do if you weren’t afraid?” Sandberg provides an extensive treatment of gender stereotypes women face, including stereotype threat, where women act in ways that confirm stereotypes of themselves, as discussed above. Instead of embracing fear, she asks women to “sit at the table,” a suggestion we tie to the management literature on the importance of “trying on” and developing a leadership identity. One way leadership has been defined is as a socially constructed process of claiming and being granted a leadership identity (DeRue & Ashford, 2010).

The process of claiming a leadership identity begins with a comparison of oneself to one’s cognitive schema of leadership (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009). Each individual holds a schema of leadership in which certain characteristics and attributes define one’s view of an effective leader. If an individual decides that she embodies the same characteristics and attributes that she believes leaders possess, then she easily sees herself as a leader and begins to claim leadership in both verbal and nonverbal acts. Examples of claiming behaviors include taking the seat at the head of a meeting table, making statements consistent with being a leader, managing one’s appearance or dress, demonstrating closeness with authority figures, and asserting one’s expertise in a particular domain (DeRue et al., 2009). If a woman decides that her personal attributes are compatible with those of an effective leader, she may try out or experiment with possible renditions of the self. She will take small steps to act like a leader.

Ibarra’s (1999) work on managers in transition to leadership roles found that it is important to experiment with what she called provisional or possible selves. In other words, aspiring leaders observe other leaders, experiment with different leadership styles, solicit feedback, and then modify their behavior to create a leadership identity that is genuine and works well for them. Similarly, Lord and Hall (2005) suggested that new leaders’ key concern is whether they are recognized and accepted as leaders. Social feedback can serve to either validate stereotypes or validate a new self-view as a leader. Zheng and Muir

(2015) suggested that women may resist self-identification as leaders because it is incongruent with current views of self. In their study of aspiring leaders enrolled in a ministry leadership program, many participants initially described leaders using negative terms such as *pushy*, *bossy*, and *on a pedestal* (Zheng & Muir, 2015). (A provocative story Sandberg tells of her early years also involves a bossy narrative about herself.) This view of leaders as asserting authority over others and striving to gain power was inconsistent with the respondents’ self-concept documented in Zheng and Muir’s study. Over time, though, as the participants’ views of leadership broadened beyond just authority to leadership defined in other ways, such as serving a higher purpose, undesirable definitions of leaders gave way to more positive definitions, allowing participants to view the role of a leader as consistent with their personal identities (see also Day & Harrison, 2007, and Lord & Hall, 2005). Therefore, trying on leadership roles is a way that women can begin to put their fears aside.

Research also suggests that identification of oneself as a leader enhances motivation to lead, engagement in the leadership process, and opportunity seeking for leadership skill development (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009; Kark & van Dijk, 2007). Yeager and Callahan (2016) demonstrated that the relationship between motivation to lead and identity is reciprocal in nature. This suggests that developing a leader identity positively influences one’s motivation to lead. Furthermore, as one becomes motivated to lead, one’s leader identity becomes more strongly validated. When a person claims a leader identity and others validate this by granting the individual a leader identity, the individual comes to see the leader identity as reflective of his or her true self and internalizes it (DeRue et al., 2009). In this sense, the process of leader identity development is iterative over time.

Developing a leader identity is closely linked to leadership self-efficacy (McCormick et al., 2002). Leadership self-efficacy has been shown to predict leadership behavior and distinguish leaders from nonleaders. Hoyt and Blascovich (2007, 2010) demonstrated that women with higher levels of leadership self-efficacy perform better on a simulated hiring task, identify more strongly with the domain of leadership, and report greater psychological well-being. Self-efficacy has also been shown to act as a buffer against the deleterious effects of stereotype threat (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). In a number of studies, researchers have demonstrated that

women in leadership and negotiation scenarios respond positively to gender stereotype activation (e.g., Hoyt & Blascovich, 2010; Kray, Reb, Galinsky, & Thompson, 2004). Women with higher self-efficacy and positive mindsets respond to explicit gender stereotypes with an “I’ll show you” response (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). Last, research by Hoyt (2012) has demonstrated that women with higher self-efficacy benefit more from exposure to highly successful female role models. Unfortunately, however, as discussed earlier, women have been shown to report lower leadership self-efficacy than men (McCormick et al., 2002). Taken together, the literature suggests that women may indeed need to push aside or work through their fears to try on various leadership roles and develop greater leadership self-efficacy over time. Developing a leadership identity and leadership self-efficacy seem to go hand in hand, and those women who are able to develop both benefit significantly in the work domain.

#5: Women Should Seek Support From Others to Achieve Success

Ask almost anyone why women fail to reach the top of organizations, and they might mention a lack of mentors. Sandberg conveys that she believes women, more so than men, tend to seek out advice/mentorship from multiple others to manage their own careers, while men tend to seek advice on how to manage a business. She is skeptical that asking a relative stranger whom one admires to be a mentor ever works, and instead provides both evidence-based and anecdotal evidence for how best to seek support from others. From the management literature, the job demands–resources theory of job stress (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) is quite clear that support of various kinds, including social support from a mentor, can buffer job demands and help employees navigate their careers. But our research corroborates Sandberg’s skepticism that mentoring and social support are routinely good for women, and also that more is better. Blake-Beard’s (2001) research showed that participation in mentoring can signal that a woman is not a high-potential person. In fact, the signal may be that the mentee “needs help.” And the research shows that, to be beneficial to a woman’s career, mentoring needs to focus on task-related support. While mentoring helps women’s advancement more than men’s, psychosocial (i.e., emotional, work–family balance) support reduces women’s advancement more than men’s (Tharenou, 2005). Men are more likely to use informal social networks

to obtain opportunities for promotions, but women are more reliant on traditional routes to advancement (Cannings & Montmarquette, 1991; Tharenou, 2001, in Hoobler et al., 2014).

Recent research has attempted to determine the conditions under which mentoring is an asset or a liability for women. According to Hoyt and Simon (2011), the extent to which women are able to identify with role models may be a critical moderator. For example, they found that exposure to elite female leaders had self-deflating effects on women’s leadership aspirations and self-perceptions following a leadership task. In contrast, exposure to less elite female role models with whom the women could better identify did not have this negative impact. As a result, they concluded that to have a positive impact on women’s leadership aspirations it is important for women to have role models they strongly identify with and feel they can achieve similar levels of success to. Overall, these findings suggest that mentoring can be valuable for women under certain conditions: Mentoring focused on helping women traverse the route to the top from role models they can identify with can help women achieve leadership success. For this argument, Sandberg’s claims are largely supported by scholarly evidence.

#6: Women Must Be Authentic

The sixth key piece of advice for which we sought management evidence is Sandberg’s suggestion to be true to oneself. She titles one of her chapters “Seek and Speak Your Truth.” Research by Alice Eagly and colleagues perhaps speaks most directly to this suggestion and highlights the pitfalls women encounter as they attempt to be authentic—that is, true to their values, preferences, and personalities in the workplace. After decades of research examining gender differences in leadership, one of Eagly’s conclusions is that “male leaders may enjoy easier access to a wider range of leader behaviors” (Eagly & Carli, 2003, p. 822). In other words, female leaders are expected to behave within a narrower range of what is considered acceptable behavior for leadership positions. The implication of this is that if being authentic falls outside of this narrow range of acceptable behaviors, women will likely be perceived as lower performers in their leadership positions.

Overall, research reveals that people consider and expect men to be more agentic than women, and women to be more communal than men (Deaux & Kite, 1993). Furthermore, the communal qualities that people associate with women, such as warmth

and selflessness, are typically not associated with successful leaders. In contrast, agentic qualities, such as assertiveness and instrumentality, are considered to be more masculine and are the characteristics ascribed to successful leaders (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Given this robust finding, often described as the “think leader–think male” phenomenon (Schein, Mueller, Lituchy, & Liu, 1996), researchers have examined whether highly agentic female leaders are able to overcome this. What they discovered was that such women were perceived as acting less feminine, resulting in negative outcomes (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Fiske & Stevens, 1993). Eagly and Carli (2003) concluded:

This rejection as “too masculine” results from injunctive or prescriptive gender role norms—that is, consensual expectations about what men and women ought to do—that require women to display communal behavior and not too much agentic behavior. As a result of these injunctive demands, female leaders often receive less favorable reactions than male leaders do for male-stereotypic forms of leadership. (p. 820)

Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky (1992) conducted a meta-analysis to examine evaluations of male and female leaders. They found that participants evaluated autocratic behavior by female leaders more negatively than they evaluated the equivalent behavior by male leaders. They concluded that because men are not as constrained by others’ attitudinal biases, they are freer to lead in a more autocratic and nonparticipative manner. In some ways then, the research suggests that women are damned if they do and damned if they don’t. If they act in ways that are stereotypically feminine, they are not perceived as successful leaders. Yet if they act in ways more stereotypically associated with male leaders, they are perceived less positively for not acting feminine enough.

By extension, this makes it very difficult for women to act authentically. In fact, some research has shown that women may actually be able to increase their likability and influence by “feminizing” their behavior to display increased warmth or cooperativeness, whereas men’s influence does not depend on displays of communality (Carli, 2001; Carli, LaFleur, & Loeber, 1995). Overall, research evidence seems to suggest that if women are more agentic, they will be penalized (viewed less favorably by others) for acting authentically. One exception to this is recent research by Rosette and Tost (2010), who uncovered a “female leadership advantage”—but only for women leaders who have reached the highest levels of leadership.

Their experimental research found that when women leaders are seen as legitimate leaders—that is, they have reached the upper echelons of companies—their agentic as well as communal behaviors are judged to be more effective leadership behaviors than their male counterparts’. In essence, women who have broken through the glass ceiling are perceived to be quite excellent, whether they act agentially or communally, because they have scaled external barriers.

DOES THE SAME ADVICE HOLD TRUE FOR WOMEN OF COLOR?

Much of Sandberg’s advice, as she readily admits, comes from her own experience as a white, socioeconomically privileged woman. Indeed, the majority of research on women in leadership stems from data where white women form the majority of samples. Thus, beyond examining evidence for Sandberg’s main arguments, we also consulted the literature to probe the extent to which Sandberg’s advice may be useful for other racial groups. There is a growing literature examining the experiences of women of color in leadership roles (e.g., Bell & Nkomo, 2003). In this section, we examine this literature to determine the extent to which it tends to support or refute the arguments contained in *Lean In*.

An analysis of whether Sandberg’s claims apply to women of color is fraught with some inherent limitations. For example, even the term *women of color* is imprecise. It can be used to describe women who are African American, Asian, Latina, and Pacific Islander, while it is also used as a proxy for a specific racial group, often black women in the United States (Luna, 2016). Additionally, the complexities involved when considering intersectional identities and within-group variation are rarely considered (Byars & Hackett, 1998; Byrd, 2009). However, the overall experience of exposure to gender-based stereotypes, bias, and discrimination may unfortunately be a shared phenomenon across racial groups. That is, research suggests that while there are distinct and separate experiences for each group, there are also shared experiences that women of color face across ethnic groups. The advancement statistics for women of color in the United States are even more disturbing than for white women, with just 17% working in entry-level leadership jobs and 3% in the executive suite (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2016). To fully understand the depth of the disparities faced by a specific racial group of women, their experiences and outcomes must be

viewed as separate and distinct from those of women in general.

Intersectionality, a feminist sociological theory coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989), describes the complex ways the effects of different forms of discrimination combine, overlap, and intersect in the experiences of marginalized people or groups. This literature examines the unique experiences of women of color, a group that identifies with two subordinate social identities, and the ways in which multiple subordinate identities interact with one another. Traditionally the intersectionality research has centered on the differences in experiences between people with multiple subordinate group identities and those with single subordinate group identities (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). The phenomena of double jeopardy and intersectional invisibility are two main approaches that have emerged from intersectionality research.

Double jeopardy contends that disadvantage accumulates with each subordinate group identity. So a black woman who is a lesbian would be considered a triple minority and experience more discrimination than a black man or a woman who is not a lesbian. It predicts that multiple minorities will be subjected to greater discrimination than those with a single minority status. In contrast, intersectional invisibility predicts that membership in multiple subordinate identity groups results in a different form of discrimination: being virtually invisible in the workplace. According to Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008), those with multiple subordinate identities are seen as nonprototypical and, as a result, experience intersectional invisibility. They define intersectional invisibility as “the general failure to fully recognize people with intersecting identities as a member of their constituent groups” (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008, p. 380). Intersectional invisibility attempts to move beyond the narrative of who is more oppressed to more readily specify the distinct forms of oppression that people with intersecting identities experience.

According to research, the nonprototypical status those with multiple subordinate identities hold yields both advantages and disadvantages. A distinct advantage of intersectional invisibility is the potential to elude active forms of oppression and discrimination experienced by those perceived by others as prototypical members of a subordinate identity group (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). An example of this advantage is found in a study (Livingston, Rosette, & Washington, 2012) in which 84 nonblack participants were assigned to conditions

in which race, gender, and leader behavior varied in a description and photograph of a fictitious senior VP. The study found that white women who display agentic behaviors are generally less accepted by others, whereas black women who display agentic behaviors (e.g., dominance, demandingness, assertiveness, etc.) are more accepted and experience less of a penalty when it comes to their leadership status (Livingston et al., 2012). They concluded that black female leaders do not suffer the same backlash that other nondominant leaders do when behaving in an agentic fashion: “As a consequence of invisibility, Black women may be buffered from many of the racial hostilities directed toward Black males” (Livingston et al., 2012, p. 355).

Although black women may experience some advantages as a result of holding the unique space of invisibility, there are potentially more disadvantages as a result of intersecting identities (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). One distinct disadvantage is the distortion of the experiences of those with intersecting identities. According to Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008), “The struggle to be recognized or represented is the most distinctive form of oppression for people with intersectional identities. They face a continuous struggle to have their voices heard and, when heard, understood” (p. 383).

Numerous studies highlight the unique struggles that women of color experience in the workplace. Women of color perceive more obstacles to advancement and report receiving less assistance with their advancement in organizations than white females do (Key et al., 2012). While all women of color report experiencing workplace bias due to racial stereotyping, African-American women are disproportionately affected by this phenomenon (Beckwith et al., 2016; Key et al., 2012). African-American women in organizations report that racism, not sexism, is the greatest barrier to their upward mobility (Beckwith et al., 2016). Women of color are often placed in leadership roles where they are the only representative of their gender and/or race, frequently becoming the de facto spokesperson for the demographic group to which they belong (Catalyst, 2016). This can result in limited friendships, constrained social activity, and stunted development within their organizations (Catalyst, 2016).

Beckwith and colleagues (2016) reported that, in addition to fighting stereotypes and isolation, there is added pressure to be successful. African-American women executives report having to work harder and outperform their counterparts. Studies have found that “the intersection of race and gender

biases often results in workplace inequities that distort others' perceptions of African-American women's capabilities and, thus, permeate the everyday experiences of African-American women" (Scott, 2011, p. 13). This leads to more scrutiny and criticism for African-American women executives than other women of color (Beckwith et al., 2016).

This rather expansive literature highlighting the additional barriers, stereotypes, and biases women of color face as a result of multiple nondominant identities suggests that ignoring negative messages and changing their mindset, as Sandberg advocates, is more difficult to accomplish for this group than for white women. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that others *expect* women of color to change and ignore negative messages to better assimilate into the dominant culture. For example, recent research found that minority ethnic women often report that they perceive expectations from others to "leave their culture at the door" to fit into their organization's culture and advance (Showunmi, Atewologun, & Bebbington, 2016). The researchers concluded that there seems to be a general perception that the only way for women of color to progress is to adopt the dominant culture, at personal cost to themselves, or to leave. Likewise, Beckwith et al. (2016) reported that African-American females learn early the need to assimilate to be accepted. Pompper (2011) discussed the paradox women of color often face in that they both resist and accept master narratives of "less than" to achieve their maximum potential. That is, women of color may internally reject negative messages and pressure to conform to the dominant culture while externally adopting an assimilation strategy for survival in corporate America.

With respect to Sandberg's advice to be authentic, there appears to be ample evidence to suggest that this may actually be harmful for many racial minorities. For example, Chin (2013) reported that blacks are often viewed as being angry when being assertive, Asians are viewed as passive when being modest or using indirect means of communication, and Latinos are viewed as overly emotional when expressing enthusiasm. African-American women executives are often characterized as overly aggressive in communication (Valentine, 2007).

Researchers from Catalyst (2004) concluded that stereotypes held by others can significantly influence the behavior and performance of African-American women executives. The manner in which African-American women executives communicate, lead, make decisions, and assert themselves in a work setting places them under heightened scrutiny (Collins,

2000; Valentine, 2007). The literature has reported mixed findings when it comes to agentic leadership behaviors and the role of race. For Asian-American women, Leong and Gim-Chung (1995) concluded that stereotypes of Asians as excelling in math and science and the myth of the "model minority" as educationally and economically successful (Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017), as well as passive and compliant (Seo & Hinton, 2009), have all too often caused a lack of attention to the occupational constraints and inequities that exist in the workplace for that particular group of women of color. Research by Catalyst (2003) found that Latina women report the need to adjust to fit within their companies. "Nearly one out of four Latinas report fitting in with accepted behavioral styles as an extremely important strategy for women of their ethnic/racial group. Similarly, not fitting behavioral style to what is typical at the company was reported as a barrier to success by one out of five Latinas" (p. 23).

In summary, one piece of Sandberg's advice—rejecting negative messages—may actually be a societal norm, a way of getting along in the workplace, for women of color. In some ways, this group of women may have been leaning in for many years, before it was popular to do so. Likewise, her advice to be authentic may be extremely career limiting, and not apply at all for women of color who unfortunately remain in "double jeopardy" or experience invisibility in most contemporary organizations.

WHAT ABOUT SOCIAL CLASS?

Following its publication, much of the criticism leveled against *Lean In* was about social class—that Sandberg, as a member of one of the highest income brackets, could, for example, afford high-quality domestic help in balancing work and family. Therefore, her advice about how to be successful may not apply to women who lack the same means. "The fact that she has more effectively rallied corporate leaders of both genders around the campaign than she has rallied women of different socioeconomic classes is very telling about who the campaign is for," journalist Sarah Leonard told the *New Yorker* in 2015 (Vara, 2015). Yet in fairness, Sandberg clearly acknowledges in her introduction that most women are not in her position—are "struggling to make ends meet"—and that her book is "most relevant to women fortunate enough to have choices about how much and when and where to work" (p. 10). Our analysis concurs: Much of the *Lean In* advice assumes that women have personal agency in

their jobs. Jobs that do not provide opportunities for women to raise their hands for discretionary assignments, organizations where mentors do not exist, and/or dead-end jobs with nowhere to advance make Sandberg's messages irrelevant for women with lower socioeconomic status (SES). Yet Sandberg counters this criticism in her prediction that if the book did hit its intended audience, and "we succeed in adding more female voices at the highest levels [of organizations], we will expand opportunities . . . to all [women]" (p. 10).

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE-BASED CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Overall, our analysis of Sandberg's work found that some of her key arguments are supported by scientific evidence, while others lack empirically based support (see Table 1). In general, there is a lack of strong evidence to suggest that women are holding themselves back or disengaging from work as a result of their desire to focus on family matters. In fact, the data suggest that women are just as, if not more, committed to their careers than men, and do indeed hold strong leadership aspirations. That being said, some key pieces of Sandberg's advice are supported by the management and psychology literatures. In our view, much of the advice provided in *Lean In* can be summarized as a "fake it till you make it" approach. And our analysis shows that the academic literature seems to agree: Trying on leadership roles to enhance leadership self-efficacy and developing a self-affirming leadership identity may be considered important internal work that women should engage in to enhance their leadership opportunities. In the section that follows, we examine what the management literature can tell practitioners about the "fake it till you make it" approach to leadership by considering the literature on leader identity development.

Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, the primary implication that flows from the management and psychology literatures is that first, it is important for women to understand that a critical step in leader development is what has been described as "identity work," which involves creating a leader identity that is congruent with their personal identity through a process of trial and error (Ibarra, 1999). Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb (2011) described this as a process in which "participants construct coherent and actionable

narratives about who they are and wish to become, grounded in candid assessments of the cultural, organizational, and individual factors shaping them" (p. 487). It may involve developing a vision and mission for one's life and work or developing long- and short-term leadership goals. Ely and colleagues (2011) discussed the need to support women in their shaping of who they are and what they can become. Obtaining data and feedback to identify one's gifts, values, and passions can assist women in creating development plans and personal goals (Chrobot-Mason, Ruderman, & Nishii, 2014). Looking for patterns in reactions to life events or developing what Ruderman and Ohlott (2002) described as a leadership lifeline (p. 185) may also facilitate this identity work.

As mentioned earlier, the process of leadership involves both the claiming and granting of leadership. Thus, the second practical implication is that those who wish to support and facilitate women's development as leaders need to understand the important role they play in affirming women in such positions. Ely and colleagues (2011) described this as a back-and-forth process:

A person takes actions aimed at asserting leadership, others affirm or disaffirm those actions, encouraging or discouraging further assertions, and so on. Through this back and forth, the would-be leader accumulates experiences that inform his or her sense of self as a leader, as well as feedback about his or her fit for taking up the leader role. (p. 476)

When an individual receives validation of her self-identification as a leader, this increases self-confidence and motivation to lead and seek opportunities to practice leadership (Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009; Kark & van Dijk, 2007). Others' affirmation of one's leader identity serves to strengthen that identity and motivates one to develop and practice leadership skills and seek opportunities for growth as a leader (Lord & Hall, 2005).

Though challenging given the many stereotypes women face, developing a leader identity in which one is able to see oneself as a leader with influence and decision-making power is an essential first step toward leaning in. Leader identity development is a long journey, not a one-time event (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2002; Van Velsor & Drath, 2004). The earlier this process begins the better. Sandberg points out in her book that the impact of stereotypes on women's careers starts in grade school when girls are encouraged to pursue some academic topics rather than others (e.g., artistic endeavors versus science, technology, engineering, and math). Thus, the development of a

TABLE 1
Lean In Versus the Literature

Key arguments	Lean In observations/advice	Research evidence	Overall conclusion
Women are holding themselves back.	Women lack self-confidence. Women don't raise their hands. Women have lower expectations of themselves than men do. Men look for stretch assignments but women hang back.	Women report lower leadership self-efficacy than men of similar age and education (McCormick, Tanguma, & López-Forment, 2002). Female managers report lower self-confidence than their male counterparts (Morris, 1998; Tsui, 1998). Women underrepresent their accomplishments to others, whereas men are consistent in self-promoting their successes (Budworth & Mann, 2010). Women and men have similar career aspirations (Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1994).	The literature suggests that perhaps women do at times hold themselves back. However, reasons for this are complex and rarely seem to be the result of a lack of desire to engage in leadership roles.
Women leave before they leave.	Women do not aim for high positions because they may hope to someday have a family.	Meta-analytic (Griffith, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000) and longitudinal (Pelled & Xin, 1999) evidence finds little differences in rates of turnover between men and women. Little, Major, Hinojosa, and Nelson (2015) found that when professional women become pregnant they tend to work harder in an effort to maintain their professional image and prove their value and commitment.	Women are not purposefully disengaging/withdrawing due to anticipated family roles, but instead their extra effort may unintentionally result in burnout and withdrawal.
Women must change their mindset to ignore negative messages.	Women must do their best to dismiss criticism and negative feedback. Women must continue to move forward despite the bias and stereotypes they face.	The literature on stereotype threat (for a recent review see Spencer, Logel, & Davies, 2016) has empirically shown that gender stereotypes are psychologically harmful and do indeed negatively affect women's behavior.	Research on stereotype threat illustrates how difficult it is for women to maintain positive work and achievement attitudes in the face of negative messages. Yet women may benefit from developing a self-affirming mindset and controlling reactions to gender stereotypes.
Women need to overcome their fears.	Fear is the root of many barriers that women face—fear of not being liked, making a wrong choice, drawing negative attention, failing, being a bad mother/wife/daughter, etc. What would you do if you weren't afraid?	Leadership has been defined as a socially constructed process of claiming and being granted a leadership identity (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Identification of oneself as a leader enhances motivation to lead, engagement in the leadership process, and opportunity seeking (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009; Kark & van Dijk, 2007).	The literature suggests that women may need to push aside fears to try on various leadership roles, develop a leader identity, and generate leadership self-efficacy.

TABLE 1
(Continued)

Key arguments	Lean In observations/advice	Research evidence	Overall conclusion
Women should seek support from others to achieve success.	Women need to strategically find good mentors for advice and support.	Blake-Beard's (2001) research shows that participation in mentoring can signal that a woman is not a high-potential person. While mentoring helps women's advancement more than men's, psychosocial (i.e., emotional, work-family balance) support reduces women's advancement more than men's (Tharenou, 2005).	Mentoring can be valuable for women under certain conditions. Mentoring focused on career achievement from role models that women can identify with is key to leadership success.
Women should be authentic.	Women should be true to themselves. They should seek and speak their truth.	People expect men to be more agentic than women and women to be more communal than men (Deaux & Kite, 1993). The communal qualities that people associate with women (warmth, selflessness) are incongruent with perceptions of successful leaders. In contrast, agentic qualities (assertiveness, instrumentality) that are considered more masculine characteristics are consistent with successful leaders (Bagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).	Research suggests that if women are more agentic they will be penalized for acting authentically. Overall, research evidence suggests that if women are more agentic, they will be penalized (viewed less favorably by others) for acting authentically.
Does the same advice hold true for women of color?	A majority of the research on women in leadership stems from samples of white, higher-SES women. There has been less focus on the experiences of women of color in leadership roles. Research reveals that women of color have shared experiences across ethnic groups—i.e., disadvantage associated with being a “double minority” or the “double jeopardy effect.” While all women of color report workplace bias due to racial stereotyping, African-American women are disproportionately affected by this phenomenon compared to other American women workers. Women of color are often placed in “token” leadership roles, frequently becoming de facto spokeswomen for the demographic groups to which they belong.	There is some evidence that others expect women of color to change and ignore negative messages to better assimilate into the dominant culture. Blacks may be viewed as being angry when being assertive. Asians may be viewed as passive when being modest, and Latinos may be judged as overly emotional when expressing enthusiasm.	Rejecting negative messages may be important, but authenticity may have career-limiting effects.

leader identity must begin in grade school and continue through high school and college as young women begin to lean into challenging tasks.

A third implication is that organizations need to be aware of the stereotypes many women face in being denied pivotal challenging work assignments, to ensure that they are given the same opportunities as men to develop leadership competence and skills. Reaching the upper echelons of leadership roles in corporate America and elsewhere does not happen overnight. It requires a series of progressive challenges and roles to develop the necessary skills and confidence (Day & Harrison, 2007). Women need equal access to developmental opportunities (Metz & Tharenou, 2001), and they need to take advantage of them—or “raise their hands,” as Sandberg advises—when they are offered (Sandberg, 2013).

A fourth implication is that a change of mindset is required for women—as Sandberg advocates—but also for others who are gatekeepers to women’s advancement. Rather than viewing family, home, and community responsibilities as a liability in the workplace, it is important that women know about research that has demonstrated that such roles are not a liability but an asset to their human capital. For example, Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, and King (2002) provided evidence for a role accumulation perspective: that participation in certain roles generates resources for performance in other roles. They found that the roles women play in their personal lives (mother, community organizer, house manager) provide benefits that serve to enhance their effectiveness in a management role and are positively related to life satisfaction. But managers must change their mindsets as well. Managers must be made aware of the implicit biases they hold about women’s career motivation and job performance due to assumed family–work conflict (Hoobler et al., 2009, 2014). Rather than making assumptions that can equate to benevolent sexism, it is important that managers overcome biases to give women the option to assume leadership roles and responsibilities.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In this paper, we used an evidence-based approach (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006b) to critically evaluate key arguments put forward in the popular, influential book *Lean In*. Rather than agreeing or disagreeing with Sandberg’s interpretation of her own life events and the wisdom she has developed as a result, we felt it was most beneficial to consult the psychology and

management literatures to carefully examine six of the key arguments, to identify which are supported by scholarly research. Our findings were mixed.

There is little evidence to support the assertions that women are holding themselves back or that they leave before they leave. What we did find, though, is that others may explicitly or implicitly hold women back by making assumptions about the extent to which they are interested in or would be committed to certain leadership roles. We found evidence to suggest that women may indeed benefit from ignoring negative messages, overcoming their fears, and developing a more self-affirming mindset. The evidence, however, also clarified that this is not an easy task. We know that stereotypes that permeate many organizational climates can have dramatically negative outcomes for women—and perhaps even more so for women of color, who must navigate multiple minority identities.

There is clear evidence that women benefit from role models and mentors who can strategically offer task-oriented advice and support. Yet unfortunately, women must be careful when seeking social support from workplace others, as it may lead to the perception that women who ask for help are not qualified for leadership positions. The research is also clear that women walk a fine line in terms of what leadership behaviors will be considered acceptable by others. This means that advising women to be themselves and act authentically may be good advice only when acting authentically is consistent with others’ expectations of how women leaders *should* behave. Unfortunately, the reality then is that most women pay a penalty career-wise for being themselves. Research has shown that this is particularly true for women of color, who not only are more likely to be perceived negatively by workplace others but also may be expected to abandon authenticity to assimilate into the dominant organizational culture.

Overall, these findings serve as a call for management and psychology scholars to conduct new research to explore some of the arguments for which *Lean In* lacks empirical support. For example, what are the conditions under which women seek out stretch assignments? Since we know that girls’ confidence in their own abilities is negatively affected by early life experiences, what types of positive and affirming experiences can we provide young women to help mitigate the effects of limiting phenomena such as stereotype threat and put them on a path toward leadership? How can we help young women become more resilient in the face of negative messages and develop a secure, self-affirming mindset?

Although some work has been done to study the longitudinal development of leader identity (Ibarra et al., 2014), more research is needed to understand the developmental progression of a leader identity over time for women, and to identify practices and strategies to facilitate this development. Longitudinal studies are needed to determine when and what types of developmental experiences will best serve young women who are in the process of developing a leader identity. Which messages may be most likely to derail such progression, and which messages most strengthen women's self-efficacy?

CONCLUSION

Returning to evidence-based management, an anonymous reviewer prompted us to consider why *Lean In* has been so popular, given that our analysis indicates that its major pieces of advice were based on limited scholarly evidence. Pfeffer and Sutton (2006a) gave several conditions under which individuals will eschew the best evidence-based solutions or advice, opting instead for something that "passes for wisdom" (p. 2). Perhaps this is what has occurred with the popularity of *Lean In*. One condition is when the solution or advice fits with what a person already knows. Women who were likely already achievement-oriented were the ones to buy *Lean In*, so Sandberg's advice to accelerate their careers fit with their vision of what they already wanted for themselves. Therefore, the readers believed in the advice, evidence-based or not. Another condition that prompts a belief in what passes for wisdom is when the wisdom takes the form of storytelling. Stories are more persuasive than hard facts (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006a). Because much of *Lean In* is a window into the personal story of a highly successful businesswoman in a highly successful organization (second-in-command of Facebook), these stories were impactful and memorable, and their messages were likely to be taken as factual evidence.

Based on hard evidence or not, the popularity of the book cannot be denied. Sandberg wrote unapologetically of her own success and gave permission for other women to say they also desired the C-suite (Potts, 2015). The last-century images of women business leaders included coldhearted, anti-child women who destroyed themselves and others to get what they wanted. Consider Diane Keaton in the movie *Baby Boom* and Sigourney Weaver as the conniving boss in *Working Girl*. In *Lean In*, Sandberg humanized the working mother as someone who admits she requires help in the domestic realm, but who also goes full speed toward the pinnacle of her career (Potts, 2015).

Some of the conclusions Sandberg draws from her own experiences are no doubt limited in their generalizability for reasons based on her privilege and position in society, yet there is evidence in the management literature to suggest that many of her messages are evidence-based. In sum, our analysis of *Lean In* serves to highlight how much we as scholars still do not know about how and why women leaders succeed, and, most important, what can be done to help them succeed in the future.

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