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THE SUBTLETY OF GENDER STEREOTYPES IN THE WORKPLACE

Current and future directions for research on the glass cliff

Leire Gartzia and Michelle Ryan

Gender inequality persists in the workplace. Women continue to be under-represented in particular sectors (such as IT and engineering; Wang & Degol, 2017) and, as we focus on here, in particular roles (such as leadership positions, Eagly, 2018; Eagly, Gartzia, & Carli, 2012). There is a substantive body of literature that illustrates how people's impressions of women in leadership positions represent an especially relevant obstacle for women's career advancement and access to leadership roles (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004).

The ongoing prevalence of stereotypes in leadership that are consistent with stereotypically masculine traits and values is a commonly recognized cause of workplace gender inequality (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Schein, 1973). For example, leaders are generally viewed as more agentic than communal and thus perceived as more similar to men than women (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011). At the same time, female leaders who violate gender stereotypes, for instance, by seeking power or engaging in high-status behaviors are disliked and penalized (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Okimoto & Brescoll, 2010; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012). To the extent that such think manager – think male associations signal a particular set of beliefs about women as leaders, their competences are not neutrally evaluated.

Recently, research has identified a number of factors that may attenuate or exacerbate such stereotypic associations. For example, research has identified situations in which stereotypically masculine constructions vary, showing that stereotypes of leaders are less masculine in stereotypically feminine contexts such as educational organizations than in domains such as politics, the judiciary, or the arts (for a meta-analytical review, see Koenig et al., 2011). This attenuation and exacerbation of gender stereotypes based on the context opens new opportunities for the promotion of women to leadership positions within certain organizational contexts.

One such variation from the traditional definition of leadership is the phenomenon of the glass cliff, identified more than 15 years ago (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). Research into the glass cliff has repeatedly demonstrated that female leaders are, perhaps counter-intuitively, more likely to be appointed to leadership positions in organizational situations of crisis in which companies

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experience downturns, compared to when all is well (e.g., Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Hennessey, MacDonald, & Carroll, 2014; Kulich, Ryan, & Haslam, 2014; Ryan, Haslam, & Kulich, 2010). This pattern has been investigated across a varied range of domains including managerial studies (e.g., Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Hennessey et al., 2014), politics (e.g., Kulich et al., 2014; Ryan et al., 2010; Thomas & Bodet, 2013), or education (Smith, 2015).

Although research in this area has been growing steadily, there remain gaps in our understanding of why, and when, women are preferred for such crisis management situations. Indeed, meta-analytic research demonstrates that while the phenomenon is relatively robust, it is also subtle, context dependent, and multiply determined (Morgenroth, Kirby, Sudkämper, & Ryan, 2020; see also Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Ryan et al., 2016). There is initial evidence for multiple explanations for the causes and consequences of the glass cliff given its multiply-determined nature, with many remaining questions about the underlying antecedents and effects of the selection of women in organizational crisis situations. Moreover, while meta-analyses point to a number of potential moderators, to date there are only a few studies that directly examine factors that may impact on the appointment of women to crisis situations and the boundary conditions of the phenomenon.

In our chapter, we review and critically examine current theory and research on the glass cliff with an emphasis on the questions yet to be answered. We begin by discussing the central importance of gender stereotypes to understanding implicit theories about leadership and crisis management. We then describe how the phenomenon of the glass cliff has come to represent a particularly strong deviance from the think-manager think-male association. To better understand the potential effects and antecedents of the glass cliff, we also discuss problematic issues with the way in which crisis is conceptualized in the field and the complex ways in which these associations may influence women's careers. We then identify some potential reasons for glass cliff appointments, as well as the moderators identified in previous research to explain the specific contexts in which women may be preferred for leadership compared to men. Finally, we conclude with suggestions on how to expand research into the glass cliff, and propose a shift in focus to a greater emphasis on understanding the specific types of crisis in which women are really likely to succeed.

Dynamic gender stereotypes in definitions of effective leadership

Understanding how people form impressions of leaders has been a particularly relevant topic when trying to understand workplace gender inequality. Leadership stereotypes have been demonstrated to be consistent with traits and values that are generally ascribed to men (Schein, 1973). Following Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruity theory, of particular relevance is the prevalent inconsistency between the communal qualities that are typically associated with women, such as being caring, nice, and sociable; and the agentic qualities that are typically associated with leaders and with men, such as being ambitious, assertive, and powerful (see also Eagly & Carli, 2007; Spence & Buckner, 2000). Such incongruence in the stereotypes of women's perceived qualities and the perceived demands of leadership has been shown to underlie both the evaluation of women as being less suited to leadership roles and the less positive evaluations of female leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly et al., 2012; Heilman et al., 2004).

In their meta-analysis of the cultural stereotypes of leaders, Koenig and colleagues (2011) demonstrated the prevalence of masculine leader stereotypes across three different research paradigms. The first was the think manager–think male paradigm developed by Schein (1973), where direct comparisons are made between leader stereotypes and female and male stereotypes. These analyses demonstrated stronger intraclass correlations for similarity between men and leaders (.62) than between women and leaders (.25). Second, the agency–communion paradigm,

developed by Powell and Butterfield (1979), directly compares stereotypes of leaders' agency and communion. Analysis of these studies indicated that stereotypes of leaders showed greater agency than communion (g = 1.55). Finally, analyses of Shinar's (1975) masculinity–femininity paradigm included studies measuring stereotypes of leadership on a single masculinity–femininity dimension, demonstrating greater masculinity of leaders than the androgynous scale midpoint (g = 0.92). Additional analyses showed that while the masculine construal of leadership across the three paradigms had decreased over time and was greater for male participants compared to female participants, taken together these findings confirmed the persistent and multi-dimensional construal of leaders as being stereotypically masculine.

While there is clear evidence for the persistence and prevalence of masculine notions of leadership, and, relatedly, the inconsistencies between construals of leadership and the stereotypical feminine roles, this is not to say that such stereotypes apply equally in all situations. Indeed, the incongruity effects between leader stereotypes and women's gender stereotypes described by the role incongruity model are not fixed, but rather vary depending on changes in either gender stereotypes or leadership stereotypes (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Gartzia & Baniandres, 2019). For example, notions of leadership should be less prototypically masculine in female-dominated fields such as elementary education or nursing, given the stereotypically feminine qualities, such as warmth, empathy, consideration, that are believed to be required in these fields (Koenig et al., 2011; see also Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Glick, 1991). Accordingly, the features associated with leadership in these fields are less likely to be based solely on agentic, stereotypically masculine characteristics. In contrast, male-dominated fields like finance or engineering should have a more masculine construal (Gartzia & Baniandrés, 2016; Knights & Tullberg, 2014; Larreina & Gartzia, 2017). Similarly, in comparison to mid-level management, people tend to define higher level positions like those of executive leaders (e.g., corporate officers in listed companies) in agentic ways, given that they are more often occupied by men (Catalyst, 2010).

Such moderating effects are particularly important for our understanding of gender stereotypes across contexts because they capture how beliefs about leadership practices may change in response to the perceived requirements of different organizational contexts. Of particular interest to our chapter, research suggests that notions of leadership may be more stereotypically feminine in certain crisis contexts. In contemporary leadership, stereotypically feminine approaches to leadership, such as teamwork or participatory processes in decision-making, are, more than ever, becoming seen as relevant (e.g., Koenig et al., 2011; McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004). Such practices are in line with a "female advantage" perspective (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly et al., 2012) and go beyond command-and-control leadership styles more representative of traditional definitions of masculinity. Indeed, research suggests that within organizational contexts where innovation is required and where leaders need to motivate people and promote extra-role behaviors, communal capabilities, such as those implied in more stereotypically feminine traits, become more important (Aragón-Correa, García-Morales, & Cordón-Pozo, 2007; Gartzia & van Knippenberg, 2015; Hunt, 1999; King, 2002; Madera & Smith, 2009; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). Therefore, a question that emerges is whether crisis situations that go beyond ordinary organizational circumstances can generate notions of effective leadership consistent with a think crisis – think female perspective (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Gartzia, Ryan, Balluerka, & Aritzeta, 2012; Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, & Bongiorno, 2011).

Building from the metaphor of the glass ceiling, the "glass cliff" phenomenon has traditionally captured how female leaders are more likely to be placed in managerial positions associated with greater risk of failure, compared to when all is well (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). In this invisible cliff, women in such crisis-related, risky managerial positions, potentially face negative effects of failure, being more likely to suffer from criticism and blame about the organizational situation

(Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Several media articles have portrayed these effects, referring to the special difficulties that women face as leaders in crisis situations. For instance, many headlines in the popular press trumpet real-life glass cliff situations that Teresa May faced with the difficult task she was handed during Brexit (e.g., "Like many women before her, Theresa May was set up to fail", The Guardian; S. Stern, 2019, or "Think crisis, think female: Why Theresa May is a classic example of the glass cliff", Global News; J. Gerster, 2018). These headlines portray Teresa May, and other female leaders in uncertain situations, as real-world examples of women who are invited to take on a leadership role in precarious circumstances.

Such perspectives generally describe the negative experiences of managerial women in crisis situations and provide a critical examination of the negative effects that glass cliff positions pose for women. However, at the same time, the phenomenon of the glass cliff represents an opportunity to look at when traditional stereotypes about gender and leadership may be challenged. Indeed, research suggests that stereotypes of leadership are very different in times of crisis, such that there is a perceived suitability of female leaders in crisis situations. This phenomenon, which has been termed the think-crisis think-female association (Ryan et al., 2010; see also Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Gartzia et al., 2012), underscores how construals of management as male may be weaker in such crisis contexts compared to regular organizational situations. Likewise, the question has emerged whether these effects operate differently across gender dimensions, suggesting that crisis contexts may generate less traditional ideals of management *both* in relation to selection of women and selection of stereotypically feminine leadership traits (see Gartzia & Baniandres, 2019; Gartzia et al., 2012; Gartzia, Komarraju, & Eagly, 2013; Gartzia, Kulich, & Komarraju, 2017 for explicit comparisons between gender dimensions across leadership effects).

In the next section, we address some of the boundary conditions of these associations, with a particular emphasis on how broad definitions of crisis can be problematic for understanding these effects.

Defining crises: Remaining challenges for glass cliff research

The specific way in which a crisis is defined can be critical if we want to understand the extent to which construals of effective crisis management are consistent with gender stereotypes. In the management literature, a crisis is generally conceptualized as a situation that poses a substantial threat to an organization's goals and survival, often with little response time available (Mulder, de Jong, Koppeaar, & Verhage, 1986; Slatter & Lovett, 2004). In particular, studies in this field have often understood crises as extreme events where there is a risk of severe physical, psychological, or material consequences (see Hannah, Uhl-Bien, Avolio & Cavarretta, 2009 for a review). In contrast to findings on the glass cliff, this research has traditionally shown that followers tend to look for direction and agency when events generate stress and threat such as natural disasters or management requiring rapid responses (Flanagan & Levy, 1952; Isenberg, 1981). During these extreme events, leadership becomes even more directive and transactional (e.g., Dynes, 1983; Perrow, 1984; Slatter, Lovett, & Barlow, 2011).

Confirming these trends, there is evidence in the management literature that task orientation (vs. people orientation) and leaders' ability to deal with abrupt threats in a directive and authoritarian way is often seen as relevant for the success of an organization (Bass & Bass, 2008; Dynes, 1983; Perrow, 1984). Indeed, leaders who exercise power in traditionally masculine settings such as an aircraft carrier (Mulder, Ritsema van Eck, & De Jong, 1971; Mulder & Stemerding, 1963) seem to be more effective during such extreme events. There is also evidence from military officers that shows that leaders who provide rapid and authoritative responses, that is stereotypically masculine leadership, are more likely be followed in such turbulent organizational situations (Mulder et al., 1986).

These studies suggest that stereotypically masculine, agentic stereotypes may more easily be evoked in extreme crisis situations. Note, however, that many of these studies were conducted some decades ago and in some cases were specific to extreme crisis situations in stereotypically masculine fields. Leadership prototypes and effectiveness in such extreme events may be different in other fields and may have changed substantially, in line with contemporary definitions of leadership requiring more communal qualities (see Koenig et al., 2011). Indeed, other conceptualizations of organizational crises more clearly underscore the communion-related specificities of crisis management situations, by pointing to the interpersonal nature of these uncertain situations where displaying teamwork and promoting the importance of cooperation (Aragón-Correa et al., 2007; Hunt, 1999; Sweeney, Thompson, & Blanton, 2009; see also Gartzia et al., 2013).

The complexity of the effects that leaders can have in crises context is also represented in those more recent definitions of crises that incorporate more positive connotations. In the classic approach, crisis was an inevitable and undesirable enemy whereas in contemporary approaches crises are no longer seen as unusual events but rather as frequent and natural processes in the life cycle of an organization (Alas & Gao, 2010; Slatter & Lovett, 2004). Also, even the abovementioned leadership studies examining organizations under extended periods of stress have demonstrated the importance of trust in leaders, which includes communal components of interpersonal orientation (Sweeney et al., 2009; see also Clinchy, Belenky, Goldberger & Tarule, 1985; Sweeney et al., 2009).

When communal dimensions of a crisis are made salient, both women and stereotypically feminine traits of leaders (e.g., being kind, empathetic and sensitive to others' needs) may have a stronger role compared to agentic features, which may potentially serve as the stereotypical basis for glass cliff associations. Gartzia, Komarraju, and Eagly (2013) examined these effects by providing participants with descriptions about companies facing different crisis situations (e.g., including stereotypically masculine crises such as major financial or technology problems in manufacturing products and more stereotypically feminine crises such as internal problems involving people not working well together). They then asked participants to identify the qualities that would be most suitable for a leader in each crisis situation. Findings demonstrated that the glass cliff preference for a woman – and for stereotypically feminine traits (e.g., emotional and agreeable leaders) – occurred only in those crises that are believed to favor stereotypically feminine leadership skills. These situations included conceptualizations of crises due to a company's internal disharmony and lack of knowledge about customers' preferences. In other crises, they found a general preference for male leaders and agentic qualities (e.g., analytical and confident rather than emotional and agreeable personality). These findings suggest that glass cliff effects cannot be generalized across all crisis contexts.

In their seminal paper using archival analyses of the performance of FTSE 100 companies, Ryan and Haslam (2005) introduced the phenomenon of the glass cliff demonstrating that women are particularly likely to be placed in positions of leadership in circumstances of general *financial* downturn, thereby emphasizing the financial dimensions of a crisis. Following this research, a good number of experimental glass cliff studies – but not all – have implicitly incorporated financial dimensions in their definition of an organizational crisis. Importantly, glass cliff findings suggest that the preference for women in crisis situations is indeed more likely to occur when the crisis impacts indicators such as stock price (Kulich & Ryan, 2017; Ryan & Haslam, 2005;).

Because men are generally more likely to engage in economic-driven activities and constitute the majority of the workforce in male-dominated domains like the industrial and financial sector (see Knights & Tullberg, 2014), they are more likely to represent an implicit leadership stereotype of effective management. This is particularly the case in crisis contexts involving stereotypically

masculine competences such as managing economic-driven activities and financial downturns. As Knights and Tullberg pointed out, "to be an in-group member means that you need to join in the dominant masculine discourse" (Knights & Tullberg, 2014, p. 512). These ideas are consistent with the foundations of role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and the previous meta-analysis examining the think manager-think male stereotype, which have shown that masculine stereotypes are more prevalent in domains with few female managers and higher status leader roles (Koenig et al., 2011).

Operationalizing crises in financial or technological terms (as opposed to broader organizational terms such as limited performance or internal problems) is noteworthy as these activities differ substantially from a gender perspective. Financial activities are a particularly challenging crisis as they are characterized by competitive behavior, that is stereotypically masculine, which is reinforced at the organizational level (Larreina & Gartzia, 2017; see also Gartzia & van Engen, 2012; Gartzia & van Knippenberg, 2015). The mainstream culture in the financial system has been described as disproportionally competitive, with a marked absence of ethics and social values (Gómez-Bezares, Ansotegui & González, 2014; Russ, 2016). In this context, unfair and fraudulent behavior is common, with many managers having to make selfish and unethical decisions that may negatively affect the lives of others, based only on financial criteria. Given this background, the pressure to act in stereotypically masculine, agentic, and competitive ways is especially marked in these financial contexts.

In terms of the qualities that are needed to deal with stereotypically masculine tasks, such as dealing with a financial crisis, there is a marked stereotypical mismatch between women (and communal qualities) and the perceived demands of effective leadership. There is experimental evidence that, for both male and female leaders, communal traits (i.e., kind, empathetic, and people-oriented) reduce the extent to which leaders are perceived as competent in financial activities, such as leading a financial transaction or increasing economic profits (Gartzia & Baniandrés, 2016). These findings point to a stereotypical mismatch, which needs to be further investigated, between women's stereotypically feminine qualities and the features perceived as necessary when managing a financial crisis. Surprisingly, however, previous glass cliff research has provided evidence for the preference of women in these contexts, in contrast to what Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruity model would predict. In the next section, we address how research has examined some of these complexities as these antecedents of women's appointments in crisis situations.

Underlying reasons: *Why* are women preferred in crisis situations?

Because the glass cliff is a complex phenomenon, there are current debates regarding the causes underlying the appointment of female leaders in precarious contexts (Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Ryan et al., 2016; see also Kulich & Ryan, 2017). In particular, there is much ambiguity regarding the stereotypical reasons why women may become leaders, connected to the abovementioned conceptualizations of crises. In general, previous studies have referred to several potential explanations for the selection of women in general crisis management situations (for a meta-analytical review about glass cliff, see Morgenroth et al., 2020; see also Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Ryan et al., 2016). These explanations rarely examine the effects of specific types of crises on appointments of women but include a good number of social and psychological elements.

A first set of explanations capture the effects of sexism and gender discrimination in glass cliff decisions, underscoring the idea that women are appointed to difficult organizational situations because crisis management positions are generally more precarious and more likely to result in failure (see Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, & Bongiorno, 2011, Study 3; Ryan et al., 2016). Consistent with this view, there is evidence that women's appointments in crisis situations are more likely to

occur when relevant stakeholders (e.g., shareholders and other relevant organizational members) do not support the appointment of a new leader, pointing to the idea that female leaders are set up to be exposed to failure. In a study by Rink, Ryan, and Stoker (2013) manipulating information about whether the leader either could or could not count on the support and confidence of relevant stakeholders and the larger organizational network, the female leader was expected to be more effective than a male leader where support and resources were absent (Rink et al., 2013).

Adding to this approach, previous studies have also shown that the glass cliff is more likely to occur among people with higher scores in conservative ideologies (Brown, Diekman, & Schneider, 2011; Ryan et al., 2010) as well among individuals with high scores in legitimizing ideology (Brown et al., 2011). Extending these effects, Gartzia and colleagues (2012) evaluated participants' sexism in glass cliff decisions and demonstrated that stereotypic beliefs about the roles and behaviors of women and men (e.g., seeing women as nurturing and caregiving and men as protective and competent) translated into a greater preference not only for men but also for greater agency in leadership positions (e.g., selecting leaders who are competitive, ambitious and independent).

An additional set of explanations arises more directly from the perspective of gender stereotypes, capturing at least two different ways in which stereotypes underlie glass cliff decisions. The first underscores the abovementioned connections between communion/femininity and agency/masculinity (Eagly & Karau, 2002), with the underlying assumption that an agentic definition of leadership may be weaker in "crisis" situations compared to regular organizational contexts. These explanations capture the specific content of the glass cliff stereotype, consistent with the think-crisis think-female association (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Gartzia et al., 2012; Ryan et al., 2010). A second area of research has examined how stereotypes about crisis management may include assumptions about an implicit need for change, suggesting that crisis contexts are taken as a signal that something needs to be different from the previous organizational norm (Kulich, Lorenzi-Cioldi, Iacoviello, Faniko, & Ryan, 2015). In the following, we summarize these explanations as two different ways in which stereotypes underlie glass cliff appointments – based on content versus based on changing the prevailing norm.

Content stereotypes: Think crisis – think female

As we noted earlier, Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruity model outlines how the incongruity between stereotypes of leaders and stereotypes of women is dynamic and dependent on context (e.g., Koenig et al., 2011). One such context is that of a crisis – if notions about effective leadership are indeed more stereotypically feminine in certain crisis contexts where motivating employees is particularly relevant (e.g., Aragón-Correa et al., 2007; King, 2002; Madera & Smith, 2009; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993), it is possible that glass cliff decisions are motivated by people's perception that stereotypically feminine, communal characteristics are important during times of crisis. This approach is consistent with a "think crisis–think female" association (Ryan et al., 2011; see also Gartzia et al., 2012) and, ultimately, with the notion that women bring relevant features as leaders (Eagly et al., 2012).

In line with this approach, Ryan and colleagues (2011) examined leadership stereotypes in the context of a company that was doing either well or badly in relation to different organizational performance contexts. The results suggested that, in line with the glass cliff, stereotypically feminine traits (e.g., tactful, courteous) are seen as more desirable in times of "crisis" than stereotypically masculine traits (e.g., assertive, adventurous), while the opposite was the case in a more stable organizational context (Study 2). In an attempt to more specifically capture potential differences across contexts, this research demonstrated that the perceived suitability of

stereotypically masculine and feminine traits for a crisis leadership position was dependent on what is explicitly required from the leader (Ryan et al., 2011; Study 3). Where a less traditional leadership role was required (e.g., managing people and personnel issues through the crisis, staying in the background, or enduring the period of poor performance), communal traits were seen as more desirable. Such a preference for stereotypically feminine traits was not seen when the leader was required to be a spokesperson or turn the crisis around.

While this provided indirect evidence for the think crisis – think female association, and for its context dependence, the study did not directly examine the selection of male and female leaders. Thus, the specific issue of how the desirability of stereotypically feminine traits might lead to women being chosen in these situations was unclear. Gartzia and colleagues (2012) extended these findings by explicitly differentiating between the selection of women and the selection of stereotypically feminine features (i.e., communal traits) in crisis contexts. Their study looked at employees and leaders who varied in their levels of sexism and in the gender stereotypicality of their definitions of effective (male) leadership. The results demonstrated variations in the selection of both stereotypically feminine traits and women in a crisis context. Consistent with the general prevalence of a think manager-think male association in leadership (Koenig et al., 2011), results showed that both sexism and stereotypically masculine representations of leadership played a role in glass cliff selections, such that individuals with higher sexism scores, and a more stereotypically masculine construal of leadership, were less likely to choose both women and communal individuals for leadership positions in a time of crisis.

More recently, Kulich, Iacoviello, and Lorenzi-Cioldi (2018) conducted three experimental studies to examine the extent to which people prefer leaders to have stereotypically masculine or feminine traits when implementing change. Contrasting the glass cliff hypothesis, their findings showed that candidates with stereotypically masculine traits (i.e., agency) were preferred over stereotypically feminine candidates (i.e., communal) for poorly performing companies, but not for companies that were performing well. Moreover, this effect was due to perceptions that stereotypically masculine candidates had higher task-orientation and potential for change. Extending these findings, Gartzia et al. (2017) examined how variations in types of crises influence the strength of the think crisis-think female association on selection of both female and communal leaders. In several experimental studies presenting different crisis situations with a stereotypically feminine (e.g., an internal disharmony) versus masculine nature (e.g., a financial problem), and a no crisis situation, results supported the reasoning that the "think crisis-think female" phenomenon is only specific to crises involving stereotypically feminine components and is particularly strong for gender traits (communal leaders) compared to selection of women.

Stereotypes signaling change

Because women are generally believed not to be equipped with agentic qualities, Kulich and colleagues (2018) posed the relevant question of whether the selection of women in crisis situations is due to an attraction to women's leadership qualities or rather a more instrumental means to signal something to shareholders and the general public. Such an approach is consistent with the increasingly relevant argument in the glass cliff literature that women are more easily appointed in situations of crisis because, as members of an underrepresented group in management, they signal change by shifting away from previous leadership styles (e.g., as represented by male leaders). The fact that glass cliff appointments also occur across different underrepresented racial and ethnic groups (e.g., Morgenroth et al., 2020) can be taken as additional support for the idea that women and other members of underrepresented groups are appointed to crisis contexts as a way of signaling change (Kulich et al., 2015).

To experimentally investigate a signaling change approach to the glass cliff, Kulich and colleagues (2015) investigated the processes underlying the appointment of women. They demonstrated that a preference for female leaders in crisis contexts can be better explained by raters' beliefs that women can signal change, rather than perceptions of women's effectiveness in such leadership positions. More specifically, their results reveal that a female candidate is more likely to be chosen in a poorly performing company with past faulty leadership because her atypicality for such a leadership position is believed to symbolize change, rather than because of her qualification or suitability to handle the crisis and improve performance. These ideas are consistent with ethnographic studies of women in leadership demonstrating how people give salience to gender as a relevant membership category when evaluating women in leadership positions, even more than female leaders themselves (e.g., Sorrentino & Augoustinos, 2016; see also Gartzia et al., 2017). Also in line with this approach, Bruckmüller and Branscombe (2010) showed through experimental research, that glass cliff decisions only occurred where there was a previous history of male management, which pointed to the argument that companies may see women's gender as a salient category generating an "intention for change" effect behind their appointment.

Such a perspective generally sees the choice of a woman, or another atypical leader from a minority group, as a strategic movement: as a way to simply "publicize a change" to the outside world. As Kulich and colleagues (2015) pointed out, the atypicality of the female leadership – which typically follows a more typical male leadership – can be a symbol of change for those who may evaluate the company, such as shareholders, the media, or the general public. Importantly, this selection is not necessarily explained because of the woman's qualification per se, but because of gender stereotypes and the association of women with a *different* set of qualities compared to those of men. Importantly, this "signaling change" hypothesis only seems to play an important role in glass cliff appointments in certain contexts, such as when a company's performance is attributed to past leadership, which represents an internal and controllable cause, but not when it is attributed to global economic circumstances, which represented an external, uncontrollable cause (Kulich et al., 2015). These findings are also consistent with the experimental study conducted by Ryan and colleagues (2011), in which the "think crisis–think female" association was particularly prevalent when the leader was expected to endure the crisis or to act as a scapegoat.

Taken together, research on the perceived signaling power of female leaders suggests that they may be preferred in crisis situations to send the public the message that a new approach is being taken. From this change-signal-motivation approach, the appointment of women can be also seen as a strategy to influence the evaluations of an under-performing company and, for example, improve the company's public image or performance. By merely providing information that traditional leadership has not been successful people may change their stereotypes of leadership, resulting in less traditional views about who should be in a leadership role in such multifaceted situations.

Stereotypes as social constructions that vary with context: Moderating effects

Given the abovementioned complexities involved in glass cliff decisions, a critical analysis of this phenomenon also requires a better understanding of the specific situations under which glass cliff decisions can occur, evaluating moderating effects that can potentially reinforce or attenuate its occurrence. Indeed, for decades social psychology has shown that how people form impressions of others is not fixed but determined by a number of key individual and contextual variables. Therefore, it is likely that the preference for female leaders in crisis situations is influenced by a

wide range of moderating variables, too, which to some extent are connected to its underlying causes and help disentangle the specific effects of stereotypes in these associations.

Because the impressions that people can have of leaders in crisis contexts occur in different circumstances (Gartzia et al., 2012, 2013; Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Ryan et al., 2016), one of the most commonly evidenced moderators of the glass cliff, either directly or indirectly, is the type of crisis described in our earlier section. As we have discussed, in certain crisis contexts, what is seen to be desirable for the organization (e.g., motivating employees or attending to internal disharmony) may be more clearly linked to relational dimensions that are typical of feminine stereotypes and women (Gartzia et al., 2013, 2017; Ryan et al., 2011). These findings suggest that different crisis contexts can change what is required from the manager and moderate the effect of the glass cliff.

There is also indirect evidence in the broader leadership literature that the context and specific field in which an organization operates can moderate glass cliff effects. For instance, analyses of leadership in extreme situations suggest that authoritarian expressions of leadership occur particularly in the first phase of a crisis. It is only after the turnaround phase that a more relationship-oriented leader is needed, in part to facilitate a return to stability (Slatter, Lovett, & Barlow, 2011). Bass and Bass (2008) also argued that followers are more likely to accept more authoritarian, autocratic leadership in threatening situations that are poorly determined because, in such extreme crisis contexts, people may have pre-established schemas where centralization of power from their leaders is more likely to be accepted.

In a meta-analysis examining the emergence of the glass cliff, Morgenroth and colleagues (2020) examined some of these moderators using studies conducted with both archival (i.e., real-world cases) and experimental data. They showed that the glass cliff was moderated by domain (i.e., more evident in the educational domain compared to management or politics), the minority group (i.e., affecting the appointment of members of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups), and the design of the study (i.e., being more prevalent for studies using between-participants rating only a woman or a man than for studies using within-participant designs evaluating male and female candidates simultaneously). No moderating effects were found based on whether participants were men or women or based on sample type (e.g., undergraduate vs. working participants).

Decisions about the ideal candidate for a given crisis management position may also vary depending on the dimension being evaluated: selection of women versus selection of stereotypically feminine traits. When making a decision about someone to lead an organizational crisis, the same communal leadership behaviors might be differently evaluated when performed by a female or a male leader. Research has shown that assumptions of women's communal traits represent a clear obstacle for women's access to leadership roles (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Heilman et al., 2004). Indeed, experimental evidence suggests that glass cliff decisions tend to be stronger for communal female leaders compared to agentic female leaders in organizational contexts where the agency is not taken as a reference of effective leadership (Gartzia et al., 2012). In situations where more stereotypically masculine referents of leadership prevail, men are more likely to choose men over women for crisis management regardless of their stereotypic orientation (communal/agentic; Gartzia et al., 2012). Performance implied in stock price management has some unique features related to projection to outsiders (e.g., stock is made public), so it may be a particularly relevant moderator to the hypothesis that women signal change. In other words, given the weak stereotypical congruence between stereotypically feminine roles and financial domains (Knights & Tullberg, 2014; Larreina & Gartzia, 2017; see also Gartzia & Baniandrés, 2016), these findings give strength to a "signaling change" explanation as the underlying process of glass cliff decisions in companies experiencing financial downturns. If crises that are

clearly described in financial terms are not clearly perceived as requiring stereotypically feminine attributes (which would point to a stereotypical congruity between feminine features and financial management), other factors beyond gender stereotyping should be driving glass cliff effects in crisis management contexts. Financial problems that are communicated to the general public and shareholders through stock price participation may more clearly be a symbol of change and serve as a moderator of glass cliff effects, but would also likely result in greater failure for women in the long term. Future studies further examining these questions with specific variations of research variables in both definitions of a crisis and exposure to potential evaluators would serve to understand these nuances in more detail.

Conclusion

The glass cliff literature is rich and has spanned many years. It has repeatedly shown, since its early demonstration more than fifteen years ago (Ryan & Haslam, 2005), that female leaders are disproportionately likely to be appointed to leadership positions in organizational situations in which companies have experienced a continued pattern of poor financial performance (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). As we have argued, however, the glass cliff may not be a universal phenomenon, but rather emerge under particular contexts and complex ways depending on the situation (Gartzia et al., 2012; Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Ryan et al., 2016). This complexity may help to explain why evidence for the preference of women in crisis situations can be inconclusive across different studies and fields of analysis.

Although the management literature generally suggests that some type of change is required in crisis situations, some conceptualizations of organizational crises are more likely to underscore the communion-related specificities of crisis management situations, by pointing to the interpersonal nature of these uncertain situations where displaying teamwork and promoting the importance of cooperation (Aragón-Correa et al., 2007; Hunt, 1999; Sweeney et al., 2009). Therefore, the specific definitions of crisis can produce different effects that need to be further examined.

These theoretical nuances in the definition of a crisis are particularly important from the perspective of stereotypes because, in principle, the associations between stereotypically feminine features and the qualities perceived to be required in a crisis should only occur if there is stereotypical congruence between women and the perceived demands of leadership. In general, stereotypically feminine attributes (i.e., communion) should be relevant only in organizational situations where leaders more clearly have the challenge of re-establishing confidence and motivating employees, given that more agentic qualities are preferred when broader conceptualizations of crises are provided (Gartzia et al., 2013, 2017; Mulder et al., 1971).

The study of the selection of women in times of crisis derives from a very specific view about crises in the glass cliff literature, building on early conceptualizations of the glass cliff in financial settings – as a general financial downturn or a situation of steadily decreasing economic performance (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). From the perspective of gender stereotypes, there is no clear theoretical reason to expect glass cliff decisions that lead people to prefer women – or communion – in crisis situations involving financial dimensions, given their markedly agentic nature (Gartzia & Baniandrés, 2016; Knights & Tullberg, 2014; Larreina & Gartzia, 2017). Therefore, a more thoughtful analysis of the crisis categories is needed. If the selection of women is not based on the congruence between their prescribed communal attributes and the characteristics of a "crisis", other factors should explain glass cliff effects.

Following previous research, only conceptualizations of crises containing stereotypically feminine elements like organizations facing internal problems, such as those involving people not working well together, a tendency to take excessive risk, scandals involving fraud or being out

of touch with customers, should accentuate glass cliff effects (Gartzia et al., 2013). To further understand these associations, glass cliff research should more clearly focus on capturing what is subjectively thought to be effective to solve specific types of crisis with special attention to differentiating between the two basic dimensions of gender (preference for female leaders) and stereotyping (preference for stereotypically feminine attributes). Just as stereotypes are not universal, the glass cliff may not be a universal phenomenon but rather emerge in complex ways across different categories and organizational contexts (Gartzia et al., 2012; Ryan & Haslam, 2009; Ryan et al., 2016).

Clearly differentiating the specific elements and determinants of a crisis may help researchers better understand the underlying gendered mechanisms behind glass cliff decisions, pointing to specific actions that can be implemented in organizations to help female leaders better operate in such difficult organizational contexts. In particular, given the relevance given to financial dimensions (e.g., Ryan & Haslam, 2005), further understanding of the different conceptualizations of crisis management studies in financial versus other broader organizational terms can also be relevant as financial activities are particularly incongruent with both communal roles (Gartzia & Baniandrés, 2016) and women (Knights & Tullberg, 2014).

Findings that women are preferred in most operationalizations of crises, regardless of their stereotypical nature, would reinforce interpretations that women are appointed to crises as a way of signaling change. However, to date our understanding of these nuances in stereotypical perceptions, as well as the underlying causes and effects on women's careers of glass cliff selections, are still unclear and empirically underdeveloped. This diversity and lack of specification in the conceptualization of crises is also manifest in the broader leadership literature, which has generally referred to "crisis" circumstances when evaluating leadership in such unusual circumstances in contrast to day-to-day situations (e.g., Alas & Gao, 2010; Mulder et al., 1986; see also Hannah, Avolio, Luthans, & Harms, 2008).

We strongly recommend a more thorough diagnosis of the consequences that glass cliff selections can have for women's managerial career. Given the proven effectiveness of interpersonally oriented dimensions of leadership in crisis situations (Aragón-Correa et al., 2007; Hunt, 1999; Sweeney et al., 2009), the generally communal repertoire of traits and behaviors that is commonly attributed to female leaders should ironically promote their perceived effectiveness in multi-faceted leadership roles. The tendency for female leaders to display more communal leadership styles, however, do not always translate into better evaluations of their performance and future career potential, but just more glass cliff appointments in crisis management situations and the precarity associated with these leadership positions. As Ryan and colleagues (2016) point out, to date most existing research has examined the antecedents of the appointment of women in crisis situations, but only a limited number of studies have evaluated its consequences for women's managerial progress.

Overall, we believe that future research should not solely examine perceptions of ideal leadership by the presence (or absence) of a crisis but should more specifically determine the nature of the crisis itself, incorporating a richer understanding of the underlying causes of glass cliff decisions. In addition, glass cliff research should more specifically and interactively address stereotypes about leadership, gender, and crises as well as its potential effects for women. Female leaders who are appointed to uncertain crisis situations are certainly capable of overcoming glass ceiling obstacles, but they nonetheless still face many challenges in relation to both physiological/psychological concerns (e.g., well-being, stress, health) and professional concerns (e.g., future appointments and their general career inside and outside the organization). Women leading uncertain organizational contexts face the challenge of being strong, creative, and psychologically mature in order to be successful, given the many obstacles they can face during the way.

Identifying the antecedents and nuances of these complex situations would help us more realistically understand how we might combat this subtle form of gender discrimination, helping both women and organizations become more effective in such challenging organizational times.

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