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Leadership and gender advantage

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Abstract

Claims of “gender advantage” in the area of leadership are critiqued, and the findings from research on sex/gender differences in social behavior and leader effectiveness are reviewed. Meta-analytic studies that have considered sex differences in leadership are examined with respect to both leader behavior and leader effectiveness. It is concluded that claims of comparative gender advantage, based on stereotypic reasoning, are overstated. Recent research on gender similarity is highlighted with recognition that a “fine-grained” analytic approach is critical. Plus, the usefulness of including temporal dimensions and perceived leader tolerance of demographic differences is suggested. Additional attention is given to research indicating that gender stereotypic descriptive tendencies arise when men and women are asked to describe behaviors for imaginary others or to describe their own actions after the passage of time. Literature that pertains to whether females and males differ in effectiveness as followers is also reviewed. Finally, an agenda is outlined for future gender research on aspects of leadership and followership.

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1. Introduction

Several distinct trends document the increased involvement of women in leadership positions. For example, the proportion of women in executive, managerial, and administrative roles nearly tripled during the last three decades of the 20th century (US Dept. of Labor, Labor Statistics, 1998). Women-owned small businesses employ a growing portion of the US workforce (Moore, 1999). Plus, roughly one-third of all American businesses are owned by women. Although percentages vary widely from country to country, the worldwide par-

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ticipation of women in the labor force, as well as in managerial positions, also has been expanding (International Labour Office, 1996).

Another clear trend is the entry of women into positions of global political leadership. Over the last 40 years, the number of women in top or senior political leader positions (e.g., president or prime minister posts) has been increasing exponentially. The rate of entry into political positions is so rapid that Adler (1996) contends that the world is witnessing the “feminization” of governmental leadership roles (feminization being definable as when women disproportionately enter a traditionally male occupation). Increased openness to women in positions of political leadership is also manifest in Gallup poll results that show a steady increase of the US population’s willingness to vote for a woman as president (from 33% in the 1930s to 92% in 1999; Gallup Special Reports, 1999).

Female entry into top corporate leadership roles (e.g., CEO positions in large firms) has been far less rapid. However, the presence of women in top management teams and executive positions has also expanded during recent years. One study of matched samples of female and male executives suggests that the experience of women in executive positions may be best characterized as “mixed” (with evidence of similarities to men on compensation and attitudes, but also evidence of smaller spans of control and less international mobility; Lyness & Thompson, 1997).

The increase in female entry into leadership ranks has been accompanied by an increase in social science research on the topic of sex/gender and leadership. The related empirical issues are numerous and varied, from differences in career guidance, to pay equity, to work–family conflict, to mentoring and workplace romance (Bass, 1990; Hooijberg & DiTomaso, 1996). However, the present article reviews only a specific facet of this sizable research domain and seeks to identify recurring themes, methodological concerns, major findings, and new directions for research relative to the topic of sex/gender and leader behavior. More specifically, four issues related to research on gender and leadership are examined: Do males and females differ in the forms of leader behavior they exhibit? Do the two groups differ in effectiveness in managerial positions? Do the groups differ in terms of being effective followers? What critical issues have been neglected in leadership research relative to sex/gender?

2. Shifting views of gender and leadership

The conceptualizations of key constructs in both gender and leadership have undergone comparable change. Of particular interest is the parallel nature of their shifting views. Specifically, gender was conceptualized early on as one-dimensional, with femininity and masculinity as opposite ends of a single dimension (Constantinople, 1973; Lenney, 1991).¹

¹ While it is important to recognize that sex refers to biological differences and gender refers to role behaviors and psychological processes/identity, much of the research in this domain readily mixes the two terms. Often, sex is what is actually measured, but gender is what is discussed. For some writers, gender appears to be a polite version of the word sex. Interestingly, a liberal mixing of two key terms also occurs among researchers who study “management” and “leadership.”

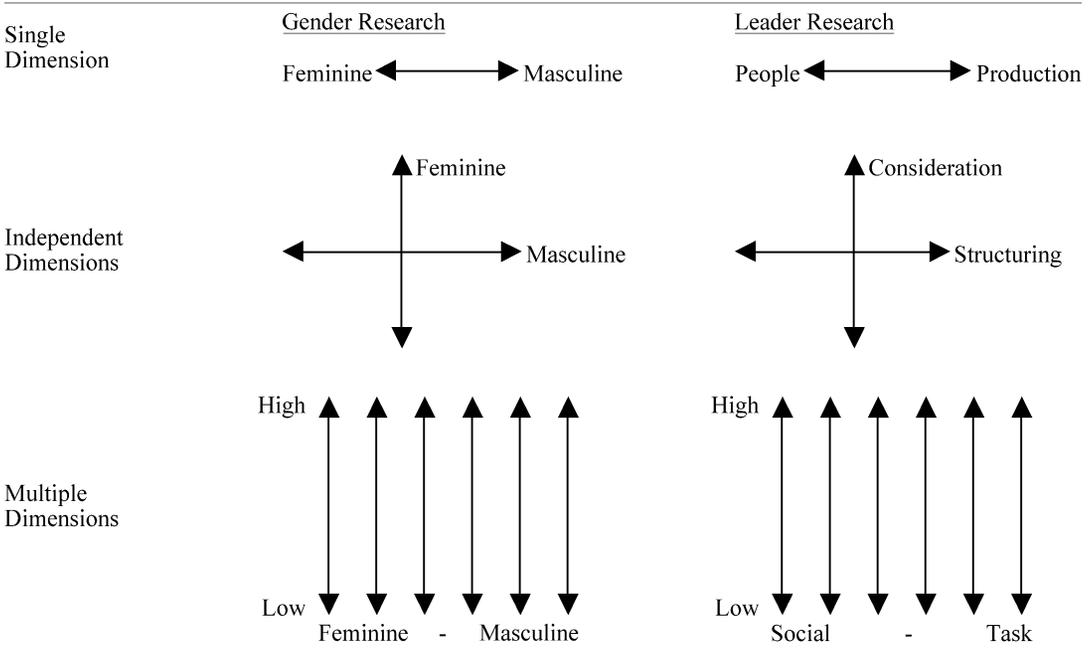
Initial attempts to measure gender with this approach involved one-dimensional personality scales (e.g., the MMPI, [Hathaway & McKinley, 1951](#)), with many items relating to preferred activities and interests ([Hoffman, 2001](#); [Morawski, 1985, 1987](#)). This view was replaced with an independent two-dimensional view of gender, wherein an individual could be judged to be relatively high, moderate, or low on separate dimensions of femininity and masculinity. Leading examples of scales that embody this bidimensional view are the Bem Sex-Role Inventory ([Bem, 1974](#)) and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire ([Spence & Helmreich, 1978](#)). One result of this bi-dimensional conceptualization was the suggestion that there is an “ideal” combination of these constructs. The optimal combination came to be known as the “androgynous person” ([Marsh & Myers, 1986](#)). However, evidence that an androgynous style is an optimal managerial style has not been clearly shown ([Powell & Butterfield, 1979, 1989](#); [Powell, Butterfield & Parent, 2002](#)).

An alternative approach is to view gender role as a social construction that resides more in observer attribution than in the object of study. Hence, feminine or masculine labels can be overlaid on a set of relatively separate and distinct behavioral dimensions. Such a view suggests that individuals be assessed on a variety of dimensions. Whether these dimensions could be considered as being more feminine or more masculine is a separate judgment. For example, we might obtain assessments on such individual behaviors as being directive, evaluative, caring, nurturant, etc. Efforts to group these behaviors as being “masculine” or “feminine” may add less to an understanding of individual behavior than to an understanding of the labeling process. Questions of leader effectiveness are well beyond these grouping issues, and involve examining main and interactive effects of potential predictor dimensions with a set of outcome criteria. In light of theory and research in leadership, situational attributes likely determine what an optimal combination of behaviors (or optimal profile) would be.

Interestingly, a comparable and parallel shift has occurred in the dominant scholarly view of leadership dimensions. A one-dimensional view of leadership (wherein “concern with people” versus “concern with production” were seen as mutually exclusive leader options) is today regarded as simplistic and inappropriate. When [Fiedler’s \(1967\)](#) construct of the Least-Preferred Coworker (which embodies this bi-polar view) was first offered, it was already something of a step backward in that the bi-dimensional view of the Ohio State University approach was widely recognized as a superior approach ([Schriesheim & Klich, 1991](#); [Schriesheim & Stogdill, 1975](#)). One result of the bi-dimensional approach was the suggestion that there is an “ideal” combination of levels of these constructs. Like the search for the androgynous manager, evidence has not clearly shown that a particular (“high–high”) leader style is optimal ([Larson, Hunt, & Osburn, 1976](#); [Nystrom, 1978](#); [Schriesheim, 1982](#)).

In recent years, researchers have generated a large number of additional leader behavior dimensions. Arguably, these dimensions could be subsumed under the broader Ohio State dimensions of consideration and structuring. However, such factoring exercises may reveal more about the categorizing or labeling process of the researchers than the object under study. If we add the goal of predicting leader effectiveness, then it must be acknowledged that no single profile is “best” for all settings, and that situational attributes likely play a major role as moderators ([Kerr & Jermier, 1978](#)).

Table 1
Shifting views



The parallel development of these shifting conceptualizations of gender and leadership has coincided with attempts to merge the major dimensions of these conceptualizations by equating “femininity” with consideration and “masculinity” with structuring (Table 1). At an intuitive but superficial level, one can see how a stereotypic view of gender-based behaviors may merge with a stereotypic view of leader behaviors. For example, Maier (1992, 1999) argued that the theories of managerial leadership could be configured around a purportedly inherent incompatibility in the task–people dimension. As illustrations, Maier highlighted such “masculine/feminine models” as McGregor’s (1960) Theory X–Theory Y, Likert’s (1967) Systems 1–4, the Ohio State approach’s (Stogdill, 1974) structure–consideration, Managerial Grid’s (Blake & Mouton, 1978) concern for production–people, the Contingency Model of Leadership’s (Fiedler, 1967; Fiedler & Chemers, 1982) task–relationship motivated, Vroom–Yetton–Jago decision model’s (Vroom & Jago, 1978, 1988; Vroom & Yetton, 1973) autocratic-consultative/group responses, and Situational Leadership Theory’s (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977, 1982) task–relationship behavior.

A notable omission from this list is the vertical dyad linkage model (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Scandura, 1986; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999), which focuses on the social exchange process that develops between a leader and each follower rather than on a stylistic caricature of a leader. However, the forced femininity–masculinity dichotomy could easily be extended to make the claim that female leaders should have larger in-groups than male leaders due to the presumed female tendency to foster greater social inclusion and power sharing. Units headed by women should, as a consequence, have

higher subordinate satisfaction, higher performance, and lower employee turnover. In essence, the creation of in-groups is an arguably feminine tendency, while the creation of out-groups is a presumptively masculine tendency.

As is the case with other superficial and simplistic approaches, the equating of major dimensions of leadership with gender stereotypes has not demonstrably advanced understanding. Furthermore, Maier's claim of an inherent incompatibility of a task-versus-people dimension is actually a return to a one-dimensional view of leadership (and is, therefore, not an accurate characterization of most major models). An honest reflection on behaviors witnessed in work settings forces us to admit that both males and females are capable of acting assertively and sympathetically, that leaders can vary their actions across behavioral dimensions while being effective through different avenues, and that the search for a "single best way" of prescribing leader effectiveness is not likely to be successful.

3. Gender advantage: the resurrection of a dormant controversy

The core question of whether the sexes differ in aptitudes and abilities for leadership deserves special attention due to the controversy surrounding recent claims that one gender role is inherently better skilled for leadership in organizational settings. This position, labeled the "feminine advantage" perspective (Yukl, 2002, p. 412), contends that women are more skilled at inclusiveness, interpersonal relations, power sharing, and the nurturing of followers; and as a consequence, women should be superior leaders (Carr-Rufino, 1993; Grant, 1988; Helgeson, 1990; Loden, 1985; Rosener, 1990, 1995).

The proposed female propensity to prefer frequent contact and information sharing should result in "webs of inclusion" (Helgeson, 1990) that foster greater effectiveness. Evidence for the "webs of inclusion" thesis is derived from a diary study of four women, two of whom were entrepreneurs (Helgeson, 1990, pp. 16–18). While no comparable males were assessed in this ideographic approach, contrasts were drawn to Mintzberg's (1973) early diary study.² Females, it is also contended (Loden, 1985), are inclined to a cooperative leadership style that includes team structure, while males are inclined to a competitive leadership style that includes hierarchical structure. This contention, that males and females operate out of distinctly different leadership models (cf. Loden, 1985, pp. 26 and 63 for a summary that contrasts suggested sex-related leadership differences), is based on interviews with 200 women and 50 men. An unreported number of these women, however, refused to participate and/or insisted that no differences existed. The remaining women (who agreed with the starting thesis that differences do exist) provided the information on which the book is based. The males who provided data were selected by their women colleagues because they were described as "enlightened" (p. 13).

² As noted by Martinko and Gardner (1985), ideographic studies offer the opportunity to generate new insights. However, nomothetic studies (that examine large samples) offer greater assurance for making normative appraisals and comparisons.

Other versions of the feminine advantage position (Rosener, 1990, 1995) argue that males prefer an alpha-style of leadership based on command-and-control, whereas females prefer a beta-style of leadership based on social interaction. The empirical base of Rosener's argument is taken from a survey of an unreported number of women who were members of the Independent Women's Forum (a reported 31% response rate). These respondents also provided the names of an unreported number of comparable males who received the same questionnaire (1990, p. 121). From these survey data and interviews, it was concluded that women's self-descriptions frequently referred to aspects of interactive leadership (e.g., participation, power sharing, and inclusion).

Recent claims of gender advantage often cite Gilligan's (1982) arguments that there are distinct psychological differences between the sexes (particularly in the domain of moral reasoning, cf. the moral stage theory of Lawrence Kohlberg, 1969). A recently published meta-analysis (Jaffee & Hyde, 2000), however, concluded that observed sex differences in moral orientation were "small" and that the meta-analytic results did "not offer strong support for the claim" that females predominately employ a caring orientation while males predominately employ a justice orientation. Other challenges to Gilligan's work have been put forward by Christina Hoff Sommers (2000a, 2000b, 2000c), who contends that Gilligan has (1) not been willing to produce her original data, (2) relied heavily on anecdotal evidence, and (3) employed small samples. For a further critique of Gilligan's work, see Tavis' (1992, pp. 80–90) *The Mismeasure of Women*.

Claims of gender superiority are certainly not new. Historically, such preferential claims have been based on exaggerated gender stereotyping (i.e., the "masculine advantage" perspective that presumes men are inherently better skilled for leadership due to greater task focus, lower emotionality, and a propensity to be directive). Arguably, the more recent claims of female advantage constitute a modified reincarnation (or resurrection) of a previously dormant debate. Regardless of how it is framed, the gender advantage position rests on assumptions that strong polarities exist and that specific poles are to be valued. Rather than relying on stereotypic assumptions favoring either sex, empirical tests are required to determine whether claims of relative superiority are valid.

4. Are there differences in leader behavior as a function of gender?

We might first ask a very basic question: Do females and males differ in displayed behavior? The answer of course is that, in the aggregate, the sexes do differ with respect to social actions (Archer, 1996; Eagly, 1995; Eagly & Wood, 1999).³ Men have been found to be somewhat more self-assertive, aggressive, and coarse in their manner and language than women. Females, in contrast, have been found to be more expressive of emotion and

³ Although mean differences on physiological dimensions (e.g., height and physical abilities) and aptitudes (e.g., test score differences on math, visual-spatial, and verbal tests) are widely recognized (see Deaux & La France, 1998; Feingold, 1988, for reviews), it is important to emphasize that the present discussion focuses on the domain of social behavior.

compassion (although also quite capable of behaving aggressively; Chesler, 2001; Simmons, 2002).

In an analysis of tapes of mixed-sex groups of management students (Case, 1985), comparisons of conversations suggested that males more typically employ an imperative tone, slang, and use of the third person, whereas females more typically use passive agreement, tag questions, and intensifiers. When men and women address each other and try to influence each other, they may also modify their speech, with women using more tag questions and hesitation so as to be liked more and perceived as more trustworthy by men (Carli, 1990). Although men and women may engage in gossip with comparable frequency, females use more animated tones, detail, and feedback (Fox, 2002). Women and men may also differ in the way they convey power and status (Cashdan, 1998), such that male body posture tends to be more “open” (suggesting greater social ease, relaxation, or potential assertiveness). However, a high degree of extraversion predicts elevated social status for both sexes (Anderson, John, Keltner, & Kring, 2001). Whether these differences are largely a result of innate dispositions versus social–structural processes, or the product of the interplay of these forces, is a subject that continues to draw attention and debate (Buss, 1996; Eagly & Wood, 1999). It is important to underscore, however, that these findings are of an aggregate, or mean, differences nature and that the ranges for the groups overlap substantially (i.e., there are males who are quite expressive of emotion, and there are females who are quite self-assertive). It is perhaps even more important to emphasize that evidence of aggregate differences does not mean evidence of aggregate deficiencies.

A highly practical question, however, is whether these identifiable aggregate differences are likely to be job-relevant. By and large, it is difficult to conceive of positions where job descriptions would include these specific attributes. Furthermore, even if jobs were created that did explicitly include these attributes, it would still be a questionable practice (in fact it would be illegal) to hire only one type of applicant because that applicant’s group membership is generally higher, on average, on that particular attribute. Recall that decisions about individuals are to be made based on individual (not group) abilities and aptitudes in order to conform to current legal guidelines. For example, evidence that one sex is, on average, taller or can float in water for longer periods of time (McLean & Hinrich, 2000), even if highly job-relevant, would not justify the preferential hiring of only members of one group (i.e., each individual would have to be assessed on the particular dimension). Despite this practical legal limit on the potential usefulness of findings of sex differences relative to employment decision making, research on this topic has sought to identify stylistic differences in females and males in leadership roles in laboratory and organizational settings. Presumably, the practical value of any findings in this vein would be for developmental insights related to the understanding of others and one’s self.

Lab studies of sex/gender differences offer the clear advantage of substantial experimenter control. However, one obvious down-side is that the contrived circumstances are of relatively short duration. Plus, strangers in groups with assigned leaders or presented with videotaped or written vignettes may rely heavily on stereotypic responses as lab settings are usually informationally - impoverished situations. It is also possible that the hypothesis under examination may be somewhat transparent.

In spite of these factors and the potential of stereotypic responses emerging in such limited circumstances, evidence of sex/gender effects in lab studies and simulations has been difficult to obtain (Butterfield & Powell, 1981; Trempe, Rigny, & Haccoun, 1985). Also, Ragins (1991) observed that sex/gender effects did not exist when power-related variables were controlled (i.e., lab scenarios omit information on leader power and thereby allow respondents to introduce sex-role stereotypes when judging another's behavior).

Greg Dobbins and Stephanie Platz (1986) reported the results of a meta-analysis of 17 studies that examined sex differences in leadership. They selected only studies that had observers as raters of leaders (i.e., they did not include studies that relied on leader self-reports). Their analyses revealed that male and female leaders did not differ on consideration and initiating structure.

In a subsequent meta-analysis, Alice Eagly and Blair Johnson (1990) examined a much broader sample of studies ($n=370$) that included unpublished documents and dissertations. Moreover, they included leader self-ratings in their analyses (despite the fact that this type of assessment is presently regarded as highly suspect in the field of leadership research). In fact, roughly half of the leader style measures were self-report in nature. Also, the variety of leadership scales they included was extremely inclusive and encompassed such scales as the Leadership Opinion Questionnaire (Fleishman, 1957), the Leadership Effectiveness and Adaptability Description Scale (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982), and the Least-Preferred Coworker Scale (Fiedler, 1967).

The LOQ is recognized for providing inflated self-reports and is of little value compared to alternative rating sources. The LEAD Scale has not demonstrated adequate psychometric properties (Graeff, 1983, 1997). Plus, the LPC Scale has not been shown to correlate with the Ohio State dimensions or other widely used measures and has doubtful construct validity (in fact, it may actually provide a measure of what it precisely proclaims to be, a description of one's least-preferred coworker, but an index of little else). Moreover, the bi-polar character of the LPC Scale is at odds with the orthogonal view of task and social behaviors offered by other leadership frameworks (Schriesheim & Kerr, 1977a, 1977b; Vecchio, 1979).

Yet, despite this generous inclusion of a broad range of studies, Eagly and Johnson (p. 233) concluded "female and male leaders did not differ" in the two leader styles of interpersonal orientation and task orientation within organizational studies. However, these two aspects of leader style were found to be "somewhat gender stereotypic" in lab experiments and assessment studies (defined as studies wherein the styles of individuals are assessed, but individuals are not selected for leader roles). It is worth restating that the lab studies involved short-term duration experiences employing undergraduates and are of, understandably, limited practical relevance.

Eagly and Johnson (1990) then concluded that there was a tendency for women to be more democratic and for men to be more autocratic. The measures of democratic–autocratic orientation were mostly (16 of 28 comparisons) "unique measures" or measures "constructed by authors from components" in the document. The remaining comparisons (12 of 28) involved unusual indices of democratic–autocratic style. Specifically, six comparisons used the Vroom and Yetton's (1973) problem set. This problem set involves hypothetical scenarios that may reveal gender-based propensity but do not provide an index of actual behavior. Two of

the remaining comparisons used Sargent and Miller's (1971) leader questionnaire. This ten-item forced-choice self-descriptive scale has little evidence of construct validity in the organizational behavior literature beyond Sargent and Miller's scale development study based on 42 4-H club leaders. Four of the remaining comparisons employed the Grobman and Hines (1956) Principal Behavior Checklist. The checklist involves responses to 86 hypothetical situations. Importantly, responses to the *F* scale index of authoritarianism were unrelated to Principal Behavior Checklist scores, for both males and females (p. 13). Also of great relevance is the revelation (p. 14) that "virtually all the women principals studied were in elementary schools," where it may be "that the situation lends itself more readily to what were considered democratic practices." Males were more typically operating in high school settings.

Eagly and Johnson's (1990) statements that women and men differ in their tendency to "adopt" different styles (p. 247) and "to lead" in autocratic or democratic fashion (p. 233) seem to be overstatements in that these conclusions are based largely on nonstandardized measures of leader behavior and clearly include self-reports rather than independent observer ratings. Again, it is worth noting that the overall results of Eagly and Johnson are essentially equivocal and that reported differences are of the weak aggregate/mean differences type that requires a restatement of the overlap of the two distributions. Further, Eagly and Johnson also concluded that both sexes were inclined toward a task-oriented style when in a gender-congruent (or gender-congenial) context. This conclusion suggests that, regardless of sex, individuals are inclined to be work-focused. Interestingly, Eagly and Johnson also found that female researchers obtained more stereotypic gender findings, thus replicating an earlier "sex of researcher effect" (Eagly & Carli, 1981). In a later study, Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky (1992) concluded that females were judged to be more task-oriented than males. This finding actually runs counter to the traditional stereotypic view of sex roles.

In summary, the search for sex differences in the behavior of leaders has yielded results that are highly equivocal. The relatively selective literature review by Dobbins and Platz (1986) concluded that the sexes do not differ. Moreover, Dobbins and Platz went so far as to call for a halt to sex differences studies of managerial leadership. The relatively inclusive literature review of Eagly and Johnson (1990) also concluded that the search for sex differences has not demonstrated substantial differences. While Dobbins and Platz can be applauded for focusing their analysis on more rigorous, published studies, Eagly and Johnson can also be applauded for striving to address Rosenthal's (1991) and Rosenthal and DiMatteo's (2001) "file drawer problem" by trying to identify less visible studies (i.e., studies that may have obtained null effects and, hence, were less likely to be published).

5. Are there differences in leader evaluations and effectiveness as a function of gender?

As with the prior question of whether there are differences in leader behavior, we might again begin by asking another more basic question: Is there a tendency to pre-judge males as being more effective managers? This question has been examined in a stream of research that compares gender stereotypes with managerial stereotypes. In an early study, Powell and Butterfield (1979) asked evening MBA students and undergraduates to describe themselves

and a “good manager” on the Bem Sex-Role Inventory instrument (Bem, 1974). Their results indicated a “good manager” was viewed as having “masculine” characteristics by both groups of respondents, as well as by males and females. These characteristics included assertiveness, independence, and willingness to take risks. More “feminine” characteristics included sensitivity, compassion, and understanding.

Even though the proportion of women in managerial positions has increased since their initial study, replications of their methods (Heilman, Block, Martell, & Simon, 1989; Powell & Butterfield, 1989; Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002) have continued to show that the “agentic” stereotypic male qualities (of competitiveness, daring, assertiveness) are more aligned with stereotypic views of managerial roles, versus “communal” stereotypic female qualities (of kindness, supportiveness, and affection). Research in cultures outside of the United States has also replicated this tendency to view successful managers in relatively masculine terms (Schein & Mueller, 1992; Schein, Mueller, Lituchy, & Liu, 1996).

While this line of research is intriguing for offering insights on the stability of gender stereotypes and managerial stereotypes, as well as their overlap, this research is understandably limited due to the omission of contextual dimensions. In essence, subjects are asked to respond to very limited information; and in so doing, they reveal thumbnail stereotypic responses. If subjects had been asked to envision specific positions with which they were familiar or positions involving (e.g.) greater requirements of nurturing and mentoring, it seems likely that the results would have differed. Studies of differences in leader effectiveness, therefore, require the use of objective indices of performance within organizational settings.

An interesting related question is whether there is a tendency for students to pre-judge male professors as being more effective classroom instructors. Substantial data from anonymous student evaluations of faculty have been collected over the years. Although a meta-analysis by Feldman (1993) showed no overall main effect for teacher sex/gender, other evidence suggests that women instructors fare better than men on questions reflecting warmth and concern for students, while male instructors fare better on ratings of enthusiasm and knowledge of subject matter (Basow, 1995; Marsh & Ware, 1982; Bernstein & Burke, 1995). An interesting question that is analogous to the study of managerial stereotypes is whether ratings of the stereotypic “good professor” would be more characteristically feminine, masculine, or a mix. If the stereotypic “good professor” were found to be characteristically feminine or masculine, the aforementioned meta-analytic findings of no main effect for teacher sex/gender would suggest that while stereotypes may exist, they have little bearing on evaluators who are asked to describe a real stimulus person.

As suggested previously, organizational studies allow for the examination of potential sex differences within settings of greater relevance. However, observed ranges of behavioral style may not be maximal due to the use of organizational selection criteria and subsequent attrition processes. Also, the sexes actually self-select into occupations due to differences in vocational interest. Further, individual propensities to speak in characteristically masculine or feminine styles (noted earlier as aggregate differences in the use of language) may be greatly curtailed in many employment settings. That is to say, there is a societally preferred style of communication when one is “on the job.” This preferred style results in job

incumbents dropping the more extreme forms of masculine or feminine styles of communication in favor of a type of “office-speak” that involves “putting on one’s business face.” This more professional, job-focused style of communicating may minimize potential gender effects. Of course, employee communication does not always conform to this workplace expectation, with results that can contribute to interpersonal conflict or heightened emotion.

Despite these limitations (which would perhaps lead one to anticipate truncated ranges and less likelihood of finding associations), some evidence of gender effects on leader effectiveness criteria has been found in organizational studies. [Ragins’ \(1991\)](#) comparison of organizational studies on the added dimension of control for power-related variables, however, indicated that gender effects were more likely when no control for power exists; and no gender effects were identified when control for power did exist. Similarly, lab studies that used written scenarios to describe leaders and that did not control for power-related variables did report gender effects ([Bartol & Butterfield, 1976](#); [Haccoun, Haccoun, & Sallay, 1978](#); [Jacobsen & Effertz, 1974](#); [Rosen & Jerdee, 1973](#)).

[Dobbins and Platz \(1986\)](#) examined studies of “satisfaction with supervision” as a function of supervisor sex. They concluded that no evidence of meaningful differences existed. [Eagly et al. \(1992\)](#) reviewed research on sex and evaluations of leaders. The great majority of the studies that they reviewed, however, presented subjects with written descriptions of leaders’ behaviors. As a result, the only difference in leader portrayals were changes in the leaders’ names and the personal pronouns used in the vignettes. Their comparison of experimental data showed only a small nonsignificant overall tendency of subjects to evaluate female leaders less favorably than male leaders. Specifically, 56% of the reports favored male leaders and 44% favored female leaders (a nonsignificant difference from a 50% null hypothesis expectation). This difference was somewhat greater when leaders occupied male-dominated roles and the evaluators were male. Differences favoring males were most pronounced in the context of college or school athletics. In an examination of the sex of the subordinates, male subordinates favored female leaders over male leaders with male subordinates, while female subordinates favored male leaders over female leaders with female subordinates. [Eagly et al.](#) suggest that this reversal may reflect the subjects’ viewing the mixed pairings of women and men as more interesting or provocative. Unlike their prior meta-analysis, [Eagly et al.](#) did not report on a test for “sex of researchers” in relation to magnitude or direction of observed gender effects.

From these studies, [Eagly et al.](#) concluded that their analyses produced evidence of only a slight tendency for females and males to differ in their evaluations, with some evidence of selective devaluation by sex. Specifically, gender-role expectations for specific positions may operate against individual leaders when their behavior is not congruent. It is, of course, difficult to generalize this evidence from hypothetical scenarios to actual organizations, given that much greater information on leader performance is available to evaluators in real-world settings.

In a further meta-analytic effort, [Eagly, Karau, and Makhijani \(1995\)](#) compared studies that examined effectiveness and leader sex. A comparison of the “effectiveness” of leaders differs from a comparison of the “evaluation” of leaders in that “effectiveness” implies greater attention to measurable outcomes, whereas “evaluation” implies a comprehensive, but

largely subjective, judgment of performance. In a comparison of 14 studies that employed objective measures of performance versus 57 studies that employed subjective measures, no evidence of a sex effect was found. Also, the confidence interval for the mean weighted effect size for objective measures of performance bracketed 0.0 (mean effect size = -0.02 , 95% CI = -0.17 to 0.14).

In a comprehensive meta-analytic test of all studies, no evidence of a sex effect was found. However, a test of the homogeneity of the effect sizes indicated a lack of homogeneity. Hence, 12 studies were removed from subsequent analyses because they were relative outliers. All of the 12 outlier effect sizes favored male leaders over female leaders. Half of these outlier cases involved military settings and two involved leaders in a sport and an Outward Bound program. The removal of these outlier cases resulted in an overall effect size that slightly favored females over males as leaders. Yet the proportion of remaining cases favoring males (43% of the effect sizes) did not differ significantly from the .50 proportion expected under the null hypothesis. Eagly et al. (p. 134), therefore, concluded “that women and men did not differ in general in their effectiveness as leaders.”

Despite this overall finding of no differences, Eagly et al. contended that the specific setting played a role in determining relative effectiveness in conjunction with leader sex. Specifically, Eagly et al. pointed to the military study outliers as evidence that males were favored in some settings, while females were somewhat favored in other settings (i.e., education and government/social service). Interestingly, neither sex was favored in business organizations (p. 136). These results suggest that female and male leaders may be differentially effective in particular settings. A key condition associated with relative advantage was whether leadership roles could be characterized as gender-congenial.

Because gender congeniality was assessed via undergraduate students' ratings of brief job descriptions of various leadership roles (e.g., principal of an elementary school, middle manager in a manufacturing firm, coach of a boys' high-school basketball team) rather than actual job-analytic techniques concerning specific requirements taken from incumbents, supervisors, customers, peers, or subordinates, the question is open as to whether gender-congeniality is largely a reflection of societal experiences and general expectations. That is to say, the undergraduate ratings may simply have reflected their general impressions and likely experiences in dealing with leaders; effectiveness measures may also have reflected impressions based on the relative frequency of past experiences in dealing with leaders; and hence, the two indices may co-vary due to common, impressionistic bases rather than actual matching of talents to objective job requirements.

6. Gender advantage versus the contingency view

Finally, it is worth considering how the gender advantage perspective compares with the widely-held view of the merits of a contingency perspective. According to a contingency perspective, there are few easy answers to seemingly simple social science questions. For example, consider the simple question: Is it better for someone in a leadership position to be autocratic or democratic? While we might be inclined to quickly endorse one side of this

question based on experience or preference, the most accurate answer is that the better style “depends” on other contingent factors. For instance, if the task involves time pressure (such as a strict deadline), then the autocratic style may be superior to the democratic; if the work group is quite large, then logistics may dictate an autocratic style for the leader; if the followers have strong expectations for an ideal style of leadership (such as when one is leading a group of neo-fascists or urban terrorists), then again an autocratic style may be the better response; if the larger societal culture places a strong value on autocratic leadership (as seems true for some non-Western cultures), then an autocratic style may be more appropriate; and if the leader lacks the skills or confidence to enact a particular style, then the leader may necessarily rely on one style over another.

Clearly, there is no simple answer to a seemingly simple question. Yet, the gender advantage perspective implies that one gender is superior at enacting a preferred style—a preferred style that is useful across settings. Advocates of a gender advantage perspective offer a simplistic, stereotypic view that largely ignores the importance of contextual contingencies. In essence, a gender advantage perspective is a step backward in explaining social behavior in work settings.

A superior approach to tackling the simplistic question of “autocratic versus democratic” style would be to investigate whether leaders who are able to enact a range of behaviors (encompassing autocratic and democratic behaviors), and who are able to effectively integrate and balance a variety of leader behaviors, are judged to be comparatively more effective. In addition to being able to competently enact these roles, a more effective leader should be able to recognize *when* to enact each role. Such enaction involves issues of social intelligence (i.e., being able to “read” people and situations; Sternberg, 1988, 1997; Sternberg & Horvath, 1999; Sternberg, Wagner, Williams, & Horvath, 1995) and leader flexibility (i.e., being able to enact differing roles; Hooijberg, Hunt, & Dodge, 1997). Leader flexibility is a topic that has received relatively little empirical attention (Zaccaro, Foti, & Kenny, 1991), while leader social intelligence has only received significant attention in recent years (Baron, 2000a, 2000b).

Sternberg’s work on “tacit” intelligence has emphasized how job “know-how” is domain-specific, and has not focused on sex/gender differences. Similarly, proposals concerning leader flexibility have not considered whether the genders would differ in such an ability. Potential arguments for sex/gender differences in these areas are difficult to sustain. Leader flexibility is also recognized as important by Hooijberg et al. (1997), who highlighted the construct of “social differentiation” as the ability of a leader to discriminate among facets and aspects of social settings over time, including differentiating emotions in one’s self and others. Hooijberg et al. also proposed the related concept of “behavioral differentiation” as the ability of a leader to perform roles adaptively in response to aspects of organizational settings. These promising constructs await empirical testing.

In summary, it has not been demonstrated that either sex is clearly advantaged with respect to operating as a leader. Strong claims of masculine or feminine advantage do not have the data to support them. While the behaviors of the sexes differ stylistically, the overlap of the two groups should not be ignored in favor of claims based on small mean differences in these distributions. The argument that including setting in “gender advantage” discussions allows one to make strong claims is also suspect. The strongest evidence of setting-based “gender

advantage” is from military and coaching settings. Yet, these results have been discounted as being “outliers.” Evidence from business organizations does not substantiate the gender advantage claims of either perspective.

The best evidence in support of a possible female advantage is a weak effect for education and government/social service settings. However, highly “feminized” job settings (such as nursing or child care) do not have much published data relative to sex differences. This is somewhat surprising as a sizable empirical literature has developed for the nursing profession, with journals devoted exclusively to such research (e.g., *Nursing Research*, *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *Journal of Nursing Administration*, *Research in Nursing and Health*, *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, and *Journal of Professional Nursing*). The relatively low number of male head nurses or male clinical directors has perhaps contributed to this lack of data (males presently comprise only 6% of the nursing profession; Evans, 1997; Hilton, 2001).

Potential influences of sex/gender differences in preferred aggregate styles are probably muted by organizational emphasis on (and the tendency of leaders toward) being task-focused (rather than engaging in highly gender-stylized behaviors). Individual supervisors who engage in the worst aspects of each stereotypic style (e.g., by over-socializing or being overly directive) may be advised by their supervisors to change their style (or they may be less likely to be placed in positions involving responsibility for others). Furthermore, obstacles to leader effectiveness, that are fundamentally gender-based, need to be better understood. The study of subordinate acceptance of a leader based on gender similarity, length of association, and initial preferences may provide additional insights to the potential impact of leader gender on unit outcomes.

7. Gender advantage and gender similarity

The gender advantage perspective is arguably an “average-leadership style” perspective that ignores the unique social exchange that occurs at the dyadic level (Danserau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Dienesch & Liden, 1986). The gender advantage perspective implies that sex/gender dictates leader behavior and that all group members will be subjected to or experience the manifested appropriate (or relatively less appropriate) leader style. A superior approach that recognizes the potential influence of dyadic diversity is embodied in a “fine-grained” analytic approach (Williams & O’Reilly, 1998). This approach explores the potentially unique influences of specific types of leader–follower demographic differences and acknowledges that various forms of demographic differences are not equivalent. Hence, the demographic similarity of each supervisor–subordinate pair becomes the focus of study in order to describe more precisely how differing forms of demographic dimensions might be differentially related to outcomes.

In addition to the value of studying sex/gender similarity (rather than merely studying leader sex/gender), further insights may be gained by incorporating temporality and tolerance/support of diversity into leader research (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998; McGrath, 1991). The length of time that a leader and subordinate interact likely plays a role in explaining how

leader–subordinate gender similarity may influence outcomes. Sex/gender is a superficial (or surface) attribute, as is sex/gender similarity. Surface-level similarity/diversity may convey information of limited value. However, surface-level information is all that unit members may be able to rely on during the initial period of a working relationship. One consequence is that stereotypic influences may be invoked during this early phase of contact. As time passes and involvement increases, interpersonal assessments will be based more on specific observed behaviors and less on stereotypes. Sociologists, who have termed this process “the contact hypothesis” (Ellison & Powers, 1994; Pettigrew, 1998; Sigelman & Welch, 1993), argue that interpersonal attraction and group cohesion should build over time, while prejudice and interpersonal conflict should decrease as relationships mature and people come to recognize their common humanity. A further moderator of potential importance to gender similarity is whether the leader is perceived to be tolerant of surface-level differences. That is to say, if one differs from a leader, then a key concern for the subordinate is likely to be whether the leader is seen as being supportive of diversity (versus less tolerant of demographic differences).

One recent study, that employed a “fine-grained” approach to studying gender similarity and also incorporated the moderators of length of relationship and leader’s perceived tolerance of diversity, reported several interesting findings. Specifically, Vecchio and Bullis (2001) analyzed subordinate survey data from 2883 US Army officers who described their relationships with their supervising officers. Separate analyses were run for males supervising males, males supervising females, females supervising males, and females supervising females. When subordinate appraisal of satisfaction with supervision was examined as the dependent variable, satisfaction with one’s supervisor was found to decrease generally over time. Plus, there was a significant interaction of length of relationship with gender similarity. More specifically, the largest drop occurred for females who were supervised by females, while the most consistently satisfied pairing over time was males who were supervised by males. Also of interest was the finding that the range of mean responses increased across length of relationship. This “fanning-out” pattern of average satisfaction over time, coupled with the declines in average satisfaction, is contrary to what the “contact hypothesis” would lead us to expect.

According to the contact hypothesis, the pattern of means early on in relationships should have been more variable but also in alignment with sex/gender similarity/dissimilarity. This initial pattern of responses should have been followed by improved levels of average satisfaction, due to deep-level similarity replacing surface-level similarity as a more important influence on subordinate attitudes. In the Vecchio and Bullis (2001) results, the pattern of means reflected an early positive level of satisfaction via a tightly clustered set of means for all four gender-similarity combinations. This pattern then fanned-out and declined over the length of working relationships.

The same study also identified a significant interaction involving gender similarity (of supervisor and subordinate) and perceived supervisor tolerance of diversity for predicting subordinate satisfaction with supervision. This interaction was of the form that support for diversity was regarded as a positive feature by all gender pairings. However, nonsupport of diversity was viewed as a positive feature of a supervisor if the subordinate and supervisor were both males.

These results are of importance for illustrating how a fine-grained analytical approach (where various mixes of supervisor–subordinate demographics are not combined but are treated as unique, and supervisor sex is not examined as a simple aggregate-level grouping variable) can yield insights on how differing forms of demographic pairings may not have comparable or equivalent effects. They also suggest there are limits to broad generalizations concerning the likelihood that increased length of contact between diverse individuals will lead to improved social relations (i.e., the contention that increased contact between diverse dyads enhances positive regard). On the plus side, the magnitudes of the observed effects were not particularly strong. This suggests that demographic similarity/dissimilarity is a weak contributing, but far from controlling, factor in the affective reactions of subordinates.

8. Gender differences, gender stereotypes, and gender heuristics

In light of the empirical evidence on gender differences, a deeper question arises: Is the belief in gender advantage (feminine or masculine) a social construction that is based on learned heuristics? That is to say, do gender stereotypes function as a heuristic device that is employed in retrospective or prospective judgments? Gender stereotyping may be used as a “rule of thumb” when judging others, especially in the absence of target-specific and setting-specific information, as well as when judging one’s self. Such a heuristic would be based on a societally-popular, learned perspective concerning aggregate sex group differences. Evidence that a gender heuristic may be operative in some instances can be discerned from recent research on the common stereotype that females are “more emotional” than males.

To be more precise, the “emotionality stereotype” maintains that females are more emotional within certain affective domains (e.g., love, sadness, guilt, shame, and compassion), while males are inclined to be more emotional within other specific domains (e.g., anger and pride/ego). The stereotype holds that the intensity of these emotional experiences and their public display differs according to an individual’s sex. Intriguingly, evidence on this fairly simple and widespread stereotype is inconsistent. When individuals report past emotions or a general tendency toward an emotion, then the data support the stereotype. Yet, when individuals report ongoing specific emotions or recent experienced emotions, the stereotype is not substantiated (Fischer, 1993; LaFrance & Banaji, 1992; Shields, 1991, 1995). This evidence suggests that the stereotype is false, and that people invoke the stereotype to estimate emotions in others or to estimate emotions in themselves when emotions are not immediate within themselves.

One interesting demonstration of this gender heuristic comes from a study by Robinson, Johnson, and Shields (1998). Specifically, they reported that when participants rated their own emotions immediately after playing a timed cooperative–competitive word-game that was designed to arouse moderate levels of emotion, no stereotypic gender differences were observed. However, stereotypic gender differences did appear in ratings collected after a week-long delay. Also, people who merely observed the game-playing showed no gender differences in their ratings of others. Yet, when the observers were asked to imagine a game

involving themselves and an average man or average women, the ratings matched the gender-based stereotypes.

While these results neither prove nor disprove gender differences in emotional reaction, they do suggest that stereotypic differences were not perceived unless the circumstances were recalled at a later time or were imagined by the respondent. Of further interest is the failure of Robinson et al. (1998) to find evidence that gender stereotypes were influenced by the sex of the observers themselves. Both males and females, therefore, appear to share the same gender stereotype and to use the same gender heuristic. This absence of a participant-sex X target-sex interaction has also been reported in other research (Birbaum, Nosanchuk, & Croll, 1980; Fabes & Martin, 1991; Johnson & Shulman, 1988).

Other evidence (Shields, 1991, 1995) suggests that gender differences in emotional self-reports are more likely when these reports are global and retrospective rather than specific and concurrent with events. Global retrospective reports of feeling angry typically yield a gender effect (i.e., males report feeling anger more frequently than females). However, a study that had males and females maintain diaries of immediate experiences of anger revealed that the sexes experienced anger with equivalent frequency (Averill, 1983).

Extending the logic of the gender heuristic argument to judgments in work settings is a straightforward exercise. The heuristic hypothesis suggests that when respondents are asked to describe their own behavior in a job setting, stereotypic gender differences in anticipated leader inclinations may be difficult to identify. Yet, when subjects/respondents are asked to envision whether gender differences may exist or are asked to generalize over past work experiences, they may be more likely to invoke a gender heuristic to characterize differences among leaders. Furthermore, increases in temporal distance between work experiences and reporting may facilitate stereotypic inferences, while the availability of specific episodic information may eliminate stereotypic inferences.

9. Gender and followership

Discussions of leadership often recognize the dependency of leaders on subordinates for unit effectiveness (Heller & VanTil, 1982; Litzinger & Schaeffer, 1982). To be sure, leadership cannot exist without some degree of followership (Hollander & Kelly, 1992; Lundin & Lancaster, 1990; Vecchio, 1987). Effective leadership implies or requires effective followership, in a yin-yang sense of interdependency. Yet, our views of leadership are far more developed than our views of followership (Kelley, 1988). While we have a number of models that detail styles or dimensions of leadership, we have no formal models that detail styles or dimensions of followership. Extending the gender advantage perspective to followership, one could argue that sex/gender differences exist with respect to being an effective subordinate. This argument implies that one gender should be relatively more loyal, more self-sacrificing, more obedient to authority, more devoted to a leader, etc.

An argument that females are better followers can be raised from two positions: First, it can be argued that women are socialized to be more cooperative and that (from feminist arguments) women's inferior social standing predisposes them to be cooperative. Second, one can also

raise the “women are wonderful” argument that stems from the general ascription that females possess such admired qualities as being communally-oriented, self-sacrificing, and devoted to the well-being of others (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989, 1994; Eagly, Mladinic, & Otto, 1991).

An argument that males are better followers can be offered on the grounds that males are socialized (especially via involvement in team sports experiences) to fall into place within a hierarchical social order and to accept one’s social standing for the benefit of a higher goal (team victory). Further, the notion that “maleness” is compatible with self-sacrifice has regained national recognition following the actions of the “first-responders” to the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, DC. This argument that “men are wonderful” has been dormant and has only recently reemerged within the popular culture, as reflected in various media commentary (Allen, 2002; Noonan, 2001a, 2001b).

Since competing arguments can be raised in support of gender advantage relative to followership, it is instructive to move beyond the rhetoric of gender stereotypes to identify available empirical evidence. Leaving aside extreme examples of risking personal safety to rescue others or instances of suicidal devotion to a cause, followership per se has not received substantial investigation, especially along gender lines. One notable exception is the famous work of Milgram on obedience to authority (Milgram, 1963).

In his classic studies, Stanley Milgram’s subjects were instructed to follow orders in circumstances that pitted personal conscience against moral objections. Competing gender arguments concerning likely degree of obedience (measured by how far a subject would go in administering electric shock to another individual) can be raised as follows: (1) females should be more obedient because of social conditioning that emphasizes compliance with directions; (2) females should be less compliant because of social permission to feel compassionate toward a person in suffering; (3) males should be more obedient because of social conditioning to ignore issues of compassion concerning others; and (4) males should be less compliant because of social permission to be assertive and to defy authority.

In recent years, Blass (1999) reexamined data collected on male and female subjects from various Milgram and Milgram-based studies to determine whether sex/gender differences existed. Blass concluded that the sexes displayed equivalent levels of obedience to authority. Like many sex/gender studies, however, it is not possible to rule out (or rule in) any of the four proposed dynamics (or to conclude whether differing processes cancel each other out).

In the more mundane aspects of routine work-related followership, evidence of gender differences in subordinate performance has been sought in lab and organizational studies. These studies have employed ratings, rather than “hard” performance measures. Therefore, issues of rater sex/gender, as well as ratee sex/gender are of some importance. Bartol’s (1999) narrative review of sex/gender influences on evaluations of men and women concluded that findings from a variety of lab studies indicate little or no impact of rater sex/gender on performance evaluations.

Field studies (which are much fewer in number because of the difficulty of finding comparable numbers of evaluators from both sexes), however, also have not shown convincing evidence of gender bias (although contextual and gender similarity issues deserve further exploration). Evaluations received by subordinates of both sexes have shown equivocal results (Bartol, 1999). Plus, research on sex/gender differences in assessment

center evaluations has failed to identify differences in the ratings received by nonmanagerial and low-level supervisory personnel who were assessed for purposes of identifying management potential (Ritchie & Moses, 1983).

Insights on sex/gender differences may also be gained from research on intraorganizational influence tactics. If the sexes differ in propensity to use certain interpersonal influence tactics “to get their way” with others, then the variety of identified social tactics should yield clear differences. For example, we might expect males to use assertiveness more frequently, while females would make greater use of friendliness and ingratiation. Some tactics that have been labeled as relatively “hard” may be more characteristic of males, while tactics that have been labeled as relatively “soft” may be more characteristic of females.

Major studies of the use of influence tactics in organizations (Kipnis, Schmidt, Swaffin-Smith, & Wilkinson, 1984; Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980; Schmidt & Kipnis, 1987) have examined the varieties of influence that employees utilize and the factor structure of these tactics. The factors that they identified include assertiveness, ingratiation, rationality, sanctions, exchange, upward appeal, blocking, and coalition formation.

Of particular interest to our present discussion, Kipnis et al. reported no significant relations associated with the sex of respondent or the sex of the respondent’s boss in terms of frequency of use of the eight influence dimensions. These authors concluded that men and women chose similar social tactics when attempting to “get their way.” Moreover, highly assertive employees (termed “shotgun” employees who refused to take “no” for an answer and who used all of the above social tactics to obtain their goals) received the lowest evaluations from their supervisors. This low evaluation held for both males and females. Hence, the popular rhetoric that assertiveness is tolerated or valued when displayed by males, but criticized when displayed by females, is probably in error. In general, being viewed as highly assertive is not judged favorably for either group within organizational settings.

Subsequent important research that sought to replicate and refine the influence tactics work of Schmidt, Kipnis, and Wilkinson (Farmer & Maslyn, 1999; Schriesheim & Hinkin, 1990) and to extend their research to lateral and upward influence (Yukl & Falbe, 1990) did not explicitly report differences on sex/gender. However, it seems likely that had significant differences been identified in this later research (with their great variety of samples); it would have been noted by these authors.

Notwithstanding these findings, the possibility remains that the sexes may yet be found to differ in the aggregate, along various dimensions of follower style. Also, the sexes may differ with respect to followership dimensions as a function of contextual factors. That is to say, we may find that the sexes differ in commitment to a leader as a function of different external factors (such as differences in commitment to, or identification with, a leader’s principles or cause). The specificity of these moderating contextual dimensions, as well as the identification of dimensions of followership, are two major directions for future research.⁴

⁴ Research on the construct of organizational commitment may have some bearing on followership, in terms of affective, continuance, and normative commitment (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993). So too, findings on organizational citizenship behavior may have some relevance (Kidder & Parks, 2001; LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002; Organ, 1977).

10. An agenda for gender research

While any suggested abandonment of research on sex differences seems quite extreme (Baumeister, 1988), any predisposition to accept claims of dramatic differences also seems quite extreme. Although claims of relative gender advantage with respect to leadership remain suspect and legal hurdles prohibit the utility of possible evidence of leadership-related sex differences, other research streams devoted to gender dynamics in organizational contexts may offer additional insights. For these research efforts to be most fruitful, evidence should be gathered from research designs that are more than simple main effect cross-sectional examinations of sex/gender. Main effect studies have generally ignored contextual dimensions (e.g., the association of sex proportion on performance evaluations, cf. Kanter, 1977; Pazy & Oron, 2001) and often ignored temporal dynamics (e.g., the sequencing of specific leader behaviors, cf. Casimer, 2001). Also, the study of leadership and sex/gender in short-term contact settings (lab studies) should be curtailed in favor of the study of intact, continuously performing groups.

There is a further need to specify the processes that link individual sex/gender with anticipated outcomes. Without the specification and measurement of these intervening dynamic connections, much of the theoretical grounding is decidedly lacking or, at best, post-hoc (Lawrence, 1997). One consequence is that sex is often treated as a “proxy” for supposed underlying variables. As noted by Wallston (1987), a fair amount of research on sex/gender has been atheoretical in nature, with a consequence that results are often difficult to integrate.

Findings that the sexes differ with respect to preferences for idealized styles of leadership (i.e., that females prefer leaders who are more considerate) are also of limited value, as the underlying dynamics that foster differences are not fully understood (Vecchio & Boatwright, 2002). As noted by Yukl (2002, p. 413), sex differences in leader behavior and effectiveness may be driven by biologically-based differences that are reinforced by socialization processes, and/or differing gender stereotypes that influence role expectations, perceptions and evaluations (i.e., these processes are not mutually exclusive). Perhaps, because it is not feasible to manipulate biological factors or socialization experiences, research on sex/gender differences in leadership has not been able to address underlying causes of potentially observable differences.

It is a common practice among social scientists to treat hypothesis tests of sex differences as something of a “freebie.” That is to say, researchers will often run tests on the variable of sex because the data are so routinely and easily obtained. Although a given study will not necessarily be designed to study sex differences as a primary focus, when sex differences are identified it becomes, essentially, a “bonus” for the researcher in that it provides more material for the write-up and the selling of the manuscript in the journal review process. Considering how many times sex differences must be tested in the normal conduct of social science (especially survey) research (e.g., by simply checking the correlations between sex and all other variables or by treating sex as a moderator/mediator), it is instructive that significant sex differences are not frequently reported in management journals or conference proceedings. The reality that researchers do not widely advise each other that “sex is so critical to examine because it is so commonly found to reveal differences” is itself insightful.

The relative absence of strong evidence of sex differences is probably reflective of the influence of societal and organizational influences. Two major *societal* dynamics that likely contribute to the difficulty of identifying sex/gender differences in the domain of leadership are (a) the growing openness to women in leadership positions (see [Gallup Special Reports, 1999](#)) as a consequence of cultural values that emphasize equal opportunity for individuals and (b) the socialization of young men and women by teachers and administrators of both sexes (i.e., the West does not segregate the sexes for educational purposes, and many people have substantial experience with authority figures of both sexes beginning in their earliest employment years).⁵

Major *organizational* dynamics that likely contribute to the difficulty of identifying sex/gender differences in the domain of leadership are embodied in Ben [Schneider's \(1983, 1987\)](#) attraction–selection–attrition framework. Schneider's A–S–A framework suggests that job incumbents tend to have a high degree of homogeneity because certain types of people are (a) drawn to specific positions, (b) selected by the employing organization, and (c) adequately socialized to position/role expectations so as to be effective and less likely to quit or be terminated.

Cultures wherein these societal and organizational dynamics are not operative (i.e., where there is cultural resistance to women in leadership roles, the sexes are segregated in their education and various employment settings, individuals are not free to pursue occupational interests, and job performance and socialization norms are not clear or enforced) should reveal relatively greater sex/gender differences on work-related dimensions.

While the magnitude of within-culture sex differences should vary in a systematic fashion across cultures, it is important to not be seduced by stereotypes of cultural differences (even when couched in elegant theoretical frameworks). For example, consider the following (reasonably accurate) description of a culture wherein the “core values” include “femininity—in the sense of being more relationship-oriented than task-oriented and highly and demonstrably communicative; driven by traditions of emoting and verbal eloquence” ([Scarborough, 1998, p. 121](#)). We might think that this culture would (at least compared to the West) be quite open to female involvement in leadership because of this “core value” and be economically successful (in accordance with the pro-female version of the gender advantage viewpoint). Yet, it is actually a description of the Arab culture. Clearly, we should not rely heavily on our stereotypic views of the world's cultures or the simple exportation of Western constructs and theories. It might be quite an eye-opener to discover how a theory of culture developed in the Arab world could be used to analyze issues surrounding sex/gender differences in the West.

Simplistic claims that increased unit diversity or increased contact promotes positive outcomes should also be regarded as suspect ([Keller, 2001](#); [Vecchio & Bullis, 2001](#); [Williams](#)

⁵ While young people (both female and male) have substantial exposure to authority figures of both sexes (including parents), one difference that is far more consistent in their employment experiences, and that is widely perpetuated in society, is the maintenance of a clear age differential between supervisors and the people they supervise. This norm is so readily accepted that it is seldom studied in work organizations (cf. [Lawrence, 1984, 1996](#)).

& O'Reilly, 1998). Instead, research should focus on how to effectively manage the nature of the contact that occurs between diverse peoples in order to minimize the possibility of dysfunctional conflict and maximize the likelihood of collaboration and unification. Furthermore, attempts to move beyond simple demographic effects by studying “relational demography” through the combination of superior and subordinate differences along a set of demographic dimensions may add little to understanding sex/gender issues (Roberson & Block, 2001; Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989).

Our knowledge of leadership techniques that facilitate a sense of commonality or mutual fate (common identity and common goals) is still limited, yet urgently needed to better integrate an increasingly diverse workforce. Rallying others to a sense of mission or the instillation of an attractive vision is in the realm of charismatic leadership (Bass, 1998; Conger & Kanungo, 1998). Heretofore, the study of sex/gender differences in charismatic leadership has been minimal. Yet, recent research on sex differences in charismatic leadership suggests that differences, if they exist, are not great (Bass, Avolio, & Atwater, 1996; Komives, 1991; Maher, 1997; van Engen, van der Leeden, & Willemsen, 2001).

For example, one study (Carless, 1998) reported no difference in subordinate evaluations of transformational leadership for female and male managers (although female managers self-reported greater interpersonal-oriented behavior than male managers). Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) reported that a comparison of male and female managers (that included ratings by superiors, subordinates, peers, or the managers themselves) indicated that males were more transactional, while females were more transformational in style. However, critical breakdowns of these analyses by job type and organizational context, or by rating source, in order to ensure comparability were not reported.

Leadership techniques that promote the development of a strong sense of unity have received little attention. Perhaps, this stems from an academic aversion to studying certain aspects of leadership due to major historical instances where leaders who advocated unity were later determined to be manipulative and exploitative of their followers. Cynicism concerning people in power also seems to have been at comparatively high levels following the Vietnam War era and the near impeachments of two US presidents. The emerging era of terrorist threats may be rekindling interest in the study of leadership techniques targeted toward the promotion of inclusion, unity, and allegiance, and less toward the emphasis of division and separateness (Bloom, 2002; Tavis, 2001).

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