

# Pathways to Gender Equity in Leadership: More Than a Seat at The Table

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## *Abstract*

*The burgeoning literature on gender inequality and the increasing attention to women's leadership roles make it difficult to see the broader picture of where things stand with regard to progress toward gender parity. In this paper, we provide a brief overview of the framing, structure, and challenges that encompass the most important issues about gender inequality in the workforce and the pathways toward gender equity. The paper draws extensively from the work of experts in the field of gender studies and labor force inequality, including in the fields of management and organization, sociology, and psychology. The first part of the paper discusses the analysis of gender as an organizing framework for social relations that has been enduring and outlines the primary explanations that have been offered in the research literature for gender inequality. The second part of the paper briefly reviews the structural and institutional factors that have contributed to ongoing gender inequality. The third part of the paper discusses a range of other obstacles that have presented challenges for women's leadership success. The final part of the paper suggests possible future research directions.*

## **Gender as a Status Characteristic That Organizes Social Life**

Although women have outpaced men in educational attainment since the 1990s (and have done so all over the world), women are still not proportionately represented in leadership positions in any sector in the U.S. or globally.<sup>1</sup> Despite changes in the structure of work, in laws, and in social movements, gender inequality persists. Ridgeway argues that this is because we have been “framed by gender,” by which she means that gender serves as

a primary status characteristic that organizes social relations, among other ways by giving men greater access to positional inequality in organizations that provide them with both authority and greater material and social resources.<sup>2</sup> The shared cultural beliefs that constitute gender as a status characteristic specify gender role expectations about what are appropriate behaviors for men and for women both in the paid labor force and in the home. Status beliefs, then, are associated with assumptions that men, in general, are more competent, worthy, likable, and leader-like compared to women. Gender role expectations are so strongly embedded in cultural beliefs and practices that we tend to be very uncomfortable if we cannot identify the sex of the person with whom we are talking. In this regard, gender as a status characteristic tends to treat sex as binary, especially in traditional cultures. The power and resources associated with the positional inequality that favors men reinforce gender status beliefs in everyday interactions and contribute to their embeddedness in institutions. Only if the link between the gender hierarchy created by gender status beliefs and positional inequality is broken, according to Ridgeway, is gender inequality likely to erode.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to underline that status beliefs about gender and other social categories are not held only by men. They are generally accepted as what most people believe. Hence, women are as strongly influenced by gender role expectations as men, often in ways that are not well understood by them. Even in the U.S. and even in the aftermath of the Women's Movement that called strong attention to inequality in the household division of labor, it is still the case that in almost all households in the U.S., women do more household labor than do men.<sup>4</sup> Parents then teach both their daughters and their sons, in both conscious and unconscious ways, that it is the primary responsibility of girls and women to tend to children and to do the caring, cooking, and cleaning work in the household, while boys and men should have responsibility for the kinds of chores that are done only periodically such as maintenance of the yard and the home.<sup>5</sup> The gender differences in household labor carry over into the workplace, with women more likely to be concentrated in jobs that resemble those they do at home and in service occupations that are predominantly female-oriented, and men more likely to take jobs that are predominantly male-oriented, often in leadership roles. While there have been changes over the last several decades in women's aspirations and their achievement of positions in leadership, there is strong evidence to suggest that a gender hierarchy still governs most social relations in the home and in the workplace.

The extensive research on gender inequality has led to many explanations for why it still exists and what should be done to change the dynamics. Ely et

al. outline four frameworks or explanations for gender inequality in organizations that pull together much of the research.<sup>6</sup> Their first framework is “Fix the Women.” This framework suggests that women do not know how to “play the game” because of the differences in socialization between men and women. Literally focusing on the games that boys and girls play, this framework finds that boys are more likely to have played team sports that taught them organizational skills, including the ability to get along with people even if they do not like them. In contrast, girls are more likely to engage in play activities with one or two friends, often enacting family roles like motherhood, and if they experience conflict, they often cease play and go home.<sup>7,8</sup> This research contributed to the development of Title IX of the Civil Rights Act, on the assumption that girls also needed to experience team sports in order to teach them adult skills that would enable their obtaining leadership positions.<sup>9</sup> One could summarize Framework 1 as follows: “Men and women are different because of their socialization, and men are better.” The implications of this kind of explanation for gender inequality are that programs have been offered to teach women the skills that they ostensibly missed out on in their socialization processes, such as being assertive, learning to deal with conflict, and importantly, finding mentors who can give them advice about the “rules of the game.”

The second framework identified by Ely et al. is “Celebrate Differences,” which argues that women have unique contributions to make because of the differences in their socialization and that employers should embrace what women have to offer.<sup>10,11</sup> From this perspective, scholars have pointed to the more relational and interdependent engagement of women with other people compared to the more self-centered and independent ways that men think of themselves compared to others. Some have even labeled this perspective the “female advantage.”<sup>12</sup> One could summarize Framework 2 as follows: “Men and women are different because of their socialization, and women are better.” The implications of the Celebrate Differences framework are that companies should offer diversity training and other programs that help employees understand the ways that women may be undervalued and why their contributions are important to the organization. This view of gender inequality is consistent with the reports and studies that argue for a “business case for gender equity” that claims that companies perform better with more women in positions of authority and as they move toward gender equality.<sup>13</sup>

The third framework offered by Ely et al. is “Create Equal Opportunity.” From this perspective, it does not matter so much that men and women may be socialized differently, because what contributes to gender inequality is that men and women do not have equal access to the same opportunities for

leadership positions and for higher paid occupations. In this perspective, it is not the characteristics of men or women that matter, but rather the structure of opportunity that is available to them. Men are offered more opportunities and therefore are more likely to succeed in corporate positions, while women are denied the same kinds of opportunities and find themselves in less favorable positions. Kanter is perhaps one of the first to make this case explicitly by arguing that “structure creates psychology,” meaning that the types of positions in which men and women find themselves contribute to the differences in how they behave.<sup>14</sup> Kanter argues that men tend to hold positions that have more power associated with them, defined as the resources to get things done, with longer career ladders, and where they tend to be in the majority. Each of these structural characteristics of men’s jobs contribute to them having better prospects for advancement and leadership positions. In contrast, Kanter argues that the positions that women hold are less likely to have power associated with them, have shorter career ladders that make it more difficult to move into top jobs, and women are often in the minority, which tends to make them tokens who stand out for the wrong reasons. The implications of Framework 3 are programs such as affirmative action, although Ely et al. note that such efforts can invoke backlash.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the fourth framework outlined by Ely et al. is to “Revise the Work Culture.” The assumption from this perspective is that gender inequality comes about because of the deeply embedded ways that both organizations and jobs are gendered, meaning that they better fit men’s lives than those of women. In this regard, Framework 4 is consistent with Ridgeway’s argument about being “framed by gender.” The examples often given about how work organizations are gendered have to do with their hierarchical structures, the command-and-control norms about leadership, and in the work hours that—until the recent pandemic—required being away from home and in the office on a regular basis.<sup>16,17</sup> Many of these characteristics have changed over the years and are no longer quite as problematic for women as they have been in the past, but even the advent of flexible hours have in some contexts led to questions about women’s career commitment in ways that does not occur for men. In the post-Covid period, there is a possibility that both men and women will take more advantage of flexibility in work hours. Unless men and women both follow more flexible patterns, doing so can create a disadvantage for women that raises questions about her commitment to her career. There are other ways that organizations are gendered, however, leading many management scholars to advocate for analyses of the ways that everyday policies and procedures may impede women’s advancement. Correll offers one such example in the study of performance appraisal systems in a high-tech firm which valued speaking up and speaking out in their assessment of

leadership.<sup>18</sup> The implications of Framework 4 are that there are many ways in which men are favored in organizations because of the embedded assumptions about gender role expectations that reward them for conforming to a gender stereotype that is more masculine than feminine and that disadvantages women.<sup>19</sup>

Whether in the processes of socialization, in the structural arrangements within organizations and in the characteristics of jobs, or in the processes of institutionalization that embed gender role expectations into the ways that we go about living our lives, gender role expectations continue to have a strong influence on how men and women are treated in organizations and in leadership positions. Masculinity is associated with agentic behavior, meaning someone who is able to take action and exert power. Because we observe men more often in leadership positions, especially at the top of organizations, we develop a cognitive association between men and leadership. Hence, good leadership is also thought to entail agentic behavior, leading to prototypical images of both masculinity and of leadership that overlap.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, the gender role expectations for women are that they are more communal, meaning that they are concerned with the well-being of others and are more nurturing or caring in interactions, which overlap the prototype that we hold of femininity. Because the agentic behavior associated with men is consistent with the role expectations of leaders while the communal behavior associated with women is not, men are thought to be more suited for leadership than are women. Further, when women adopt more agentic behaviors, they often experience negative reactions.<sup>21</sup> Some have called this a “double bind,” because many women leaders cannot win. If women enact their leadership roles in ways normally associated with men, they will be thought of as insufficiently feminine and will not be liked, but if women enact their leadership roles in ways normally associated with women, they will be liked, but not thought of as competent.<sup>22</sup>

Recent research, however, has argued that many of our assumptions about women in the workplace are really about the experiences of White women more than of women from other race/ethnic groups.<sup>23,24</sup> Hall et al., for example, have argued that because the cognitive processes by which we categorize groups of people tend to be both binary (i.e., as either/or) and essential (i.e., who they are, rather than how we portray them to be) that gender tends to be racialized and race/ethnicity tends to be gendered.<sup>25</sup> That is, as noted in the original work by Crenshaw on intersectionality, in U.S. culture, the prototypical woman is White and the prototypical Black person is a male, leading to the marginalization of those who do not fit these cognitive schema or prototypes.<sup>26</sup> This research shows that White men constitute the cognitive prototype of normative or “just right” masculinity,

and White women constitute the cognitive prototype of normative or “just right” femininity. In contrast, Blacks are thought of as “too masculine” and Asians as “too feminine.”<sup>27</sup> Such cognitive associations treat Blacks, on the one hand, as threatening and Asians, on the other hand, as not tough enough, i.e., as lacking in leadership capabilities. Implications of this combination of race/ethnicity and gender means, for example, that for Black men in leadership positions, it helps to have a presentation of self that is not threatening, such as having a “baby face,” while Black women may have more leeway to exhibit agentic behavior if they are able to reach leadership positions, i.e., they are less subject to the “double bind” than are White women.<sup>28,29</sup> The research suggests that it is harder for Black women to obtain leadership positions, and in doing so, they have less room for error, but if they take on leadership roles, they will get less of a negative reaction to agentic behavior than do White or Asian women.

While the strong influences of gender role expectations seem to be persistent in shaping behavior both in the workplace and in the home, it is important to keep in mind that the presumed sex differences between men and women are likely overstated. That is, there are actually more similarities than differences between men and women on many of the characteristics that matter, so to use the presumed differences between men and women as an explanation for gender inequality may place too much emphasis on individual characteristics rather than on the structural circumstances that they face in the labor market.<sup>30,31</sup>

### **The Structural Context of Gender Inequality**

A key component of Ridgeway’s analysis of how we are “framed by gender” is that gender role expectations are linked to positional inequality in the workplace and in the home.<sup>32</sup> That is, men are given greater access to the power and resources that are invested in leadership roles, whether as patriarch in the family or as manager or leader in a company. As long as there is such a close relationship to gender role expectations and the positions that men and women hold in the workplace and in the family, then gender parity is unlikely. Despite slow progress over the last half century, the gender gap in both wages and in job segregation are still extensive. Because women tend to do the same kinds of jobs outside the home as they do within, women’s work in the paid labor force tends to be devalued. Thus, the jobs typically held by men, on average, pay more than the jobs typically held by women and the gap increases with time in the labor force. This is evident in data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics that found that 16 of the 20 jobs in the top earnings decile were male-dominated, while 14 of the 20 jobs in the bottom earnings decile were female-dominated.<sup>33</sup> A job is defined as male-

dominated when 75 percent or more of job occupants are males and female-dominated when 75 percent or more of job occupants are females. Data from 2018 found that only 7.2 percent of women worked full-time in male-dominated jobs, and only 9.5 percent of men worked full-time in female-dominated jobs.<sup>34</sup>

Because men's jobs pay more on average than women's jobs, the fact that most men and women do not do the same type of work contributes significantly to the gap in wages between men and women in the paid labor force. The extent of job segregation is typically measured with what is called an index of dissimilarity, which effectively indicates what proportion of people would have to change jobs for men and women to be equally distributed across occupations. Analyses by the Institute for Women's Policy Research found that in 1972, for jobs to be equally distributed by gender, 70 percent of men and women would have had to change jobs, but this index had fallen to about 50 percent of men and women by 2011.<sup>35</sup> This suggests an improved but still high proportion of gender segregation of jobs. This same report found that most of the progress toward the desegregation of jobs by gender took place among earlier cohorts, with a slowing down in recent decades. These changes have affected men and women from different race/ethnic backgrounds differently. As has been true in general, White women have gained more from the desegregation of jobs than have women from other race/ethnic groups.

There is a close relationship between the segregation of jobs by gender and the gender pay gap. In most comparisons by gender, analyses consider only full-time, year-round workers, and in such comparisons, it is often reported that women now make approximately 80 percent of what White men make, suggesting substantial progress over the last half century. The 80 percent figure, however, is relevant primarily to White women, while Black and Hispanic/Latinx women make much less on average compared to White men. Importantly, Rose and Hartmann argue that comparing only full-time, year-round workers at one point in time is misleading for all women, because it turns out over 2001-2015, the most recent 15-year period they considered, only 28 percent of women worked full-time, year-round compared to 59 percent of men.<sup>36</sup> Because women are expected disproportionately to be responsible for the care of children and families, many women take time out of the paid labor force or work less than full time or less than full years. Rose and Hartmann document that working fewer hours, weeks, or years as men is very costly to women and to their families. Over the three 15-year periods for which Rose and Hartmann performed analyses, they found that the cost of taking time away from paid work outside the home actually increased for women from the earlier period to the more recent one, even though their

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labor force participation rates increased, gender job segregation decreased, and women's wages increased overall.

Rose and Hartmann found that when taking the complexity of women's lives into account, women made only 49 percent of what men made in the period from 2001 to 2015 (the most recent analyses). By ignoring the lives that women actually lead and comparing only the small proportion of women whose work patterns are more similar to men's, we underestimate by a large factor what resources are available to women as a whole to support themselves and their families compared to what men earn. Rose and Hartmann note that despite the progress that has been made in women's wages, in every year of the last 45 for which data were available, men made more than twice what women made. Specifically, over the most recent 15-year period in their analyses, women earned \$341,280 in total on average, compared to the \$697,410 in total on average earned by men, a difference of \$356,130. As Rose and Hartmann note, women's wellbeing would be substantially enhanced if the burdens for household labor and family responsibilities were more equally shared by men and women, if women's work were not devalued, and if men and women could work in similar jobs at similar pay.<sup>37</sup>

To add further concern to the patterns of job segregation and the gender pay gap, a report from the American Association of University Women (AAUP) also found, as many others have as well, that the progress that women have made in closing the gender pay and gender segregation gap over the last half century has leveled off in the last two decades.<sup>38</sup> The AAUP report calculated that if trends had continued as they had been from about 1960 to 2000, it would take until about 2059 to reach gender parity in earnings, but if the trends continue as they have since 2000, reaching gender parity would take to at least 2119. The AAUP report similarly found that although women and men start out in their first jobs at near parity, with women earning about 95 percent of what men earn, the gender gap in earnings widens with more years in the labor force, including for those in managerial and professional jobs. Men are more likely than women over time to get promoted, to get raises, and to get job assignments that give them visibility and position them for further career advancement.

Consistent across all of these analyses is that women and their families are penalized in terms of both income and access to higher paying jobs because of women's greater responsibilities for children and family members. Not only do family responsibilities affect the ability of women to work full-time and year-round across their careers, but it also reinforces gender role stereotypes about what positions are appropriate for women in the paid labor force. As noted by Rose and Hartmann, "The long-term earnings gap is a



critical indicator of women's wellbeing because a woman today is more likely to have many years in which she is the sole or primary source of her own and her family's income."<sup>39</sup> A majority of adult women, including those with young children, now work in the paid labor force, and most expect to continue employment to older ages. According to 2015 data, 42 percent of mothers were family breadwinners, and another 22 percent of mothers were co-breadwinners. Further, as women have surpassed men in terms of the proportion who have completed college and graduate degrees, their aspirations for careers outside the home have followed suit.

In combination with changes in the economy, the structure of jobs, and the increased cost of living to raise a family, these changes in women's lives have had marked effects on the patterns of marriage and childrearing in the United States and in most developed countries. Fewer men and women are getting married, those who are marrying are doing so at older ages, and fewer couples are having children in or outside of marriage. The age of first marriage in the U.S. in 2018 was 27.8 years for women and 29.8 years for men, far surpassing the average ages of past decades. Consistent with this shift, only about half of the population 18 years and over are married, down from 72 percent in 1960. Households with married couples are now less than half of all households in the U.S., and only a minority of households now include a male in the paid labor force with a wife staying at home. These trends cut across race/ethnicity, although Black women are still less likely than White, Asian, or Hispanic/Latinx women to be married. The trends are also quite similar in pattern for men and women. Interestingly, it is no longer the case that women getting advanced degrees are less likely to get married than other women. Many of these trends reflect the economic challenges of the last decade that has hit the current generation sharply, especially those with lower levels of education.

Women in the U.S., as is the case in most developed countries, are also having fewer children. The average fertility rate for adult women in the U.S. was 1.73 in 2018, down from 2.07 in 2008, meaning that the fertility rate is now less than replacement. Without immigration, this suggests a declining population. Another factor that undoubtedly has some effect in generating and perpetuating these trends away from marriage and children is that there is evidence that women who have children incur a motherhood penalty that affects both their pay and their job opportunities, while in contrast, men who have children are rewarded with a fatherhood premium.<sup>40,41,42,43</sup> With each additional child, women are less likely to be employed, while the number of children makes no difference to the employment prospects for men. Further, with each additional child, women reduce their average work hours, while men increase theirs with each additional child. Mothers are also more likely

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than fathers to either quit their jobs, take significant time out of the labor force, or turn down a promotion when there are family care needs, while men are less likely to do any of these things.

The household division of labor has also put additional burdens on women that make it more difficult for them to engage as actively in their careers as men are able to do. Based on 2017 data and not including childcare, women averaged 2 hours and 15 minutes of household labor a day, compared to 1 hour and 25 minutes for men. The household work that women also do, activities like cooking and cleaning, have to be done every day, while the types of activities that men do are more likely to be things that can be done periodically, including on weekends. Thus, it is harder for women to take on demanding careers because of the additional demands on their time for family responsibilities and childcare, demands that men are and have been much less likely to share.

Nonetheless, there have been some hopeful signs that suggest that gender parity could improve over the coming decades. For example, some countries have mandated a greater representation of women on corporate boards, contributing to pressure even for companies in countries where there are no legal mandates to follow suit. Further, Stainback et al. found that the greater the representation of women in positions of leadership, including on corporate boards, in executive positions, and in managerial positions, the greater the representation of women at each lower level as well.<sup>44</sup> Hence, women's progress appears to beget further progress for women in leadership roles. Perhaps the most impactful narrative that has called attention to the contributions women bring to the paid labor force has been the claims made in a number of studies that increased gender parity improves both economic and social performance.

McKinsey, for example, examined the gender diversity in the executive teams of 1000 companies in 15 countries and found that the top 25 percent of companies in terms of gender diversity had 11 percent higher financial performance, while the lowest 25 percent of companies had a 19 percent lower financial performance.<sup>45</sup> The McKinsey study also found that greater gender parity improved organizational climate, corporate social responsibility and reputation, leveraging talent, and innovation and decision-making. An even broader study by the McKinsey Global Institute found that across 95 countries there is a positive relationship between gender parity in the economy and the per capita income in the country.<sup>46</sup> As the title of the study suggests, the analyses by the McKinsey Global Institute argued that if each country reached "best in class" in terms of gender parity, that doing so could add \$28 trillion to the global GDP. A similar analysis in the U.S. alone, suggested that reaching gender parity at the level of "best in class"

could add over \$4 trillion to the U.S. GDP.<sup>47</sup> Despite this type of evidence for the “business case for diversity,” as it is called, there has still been only slow progress toward gender equity both in companies and in countries.

### **Additional Obstacles to Women’s Success in Leadership and Pathways to Upward Mobility**

In addition to the prevalence and strength of gender role expectations on the opportunities available to men and women in the paid labor force and to the structural and institutional barriers that perpetuate job segregation and the gender pay gap, there are also several areas that have received a lot of attention in the research on gender and leadership. Specifically, we want to discuss what has been called the “confidence gap” between men and women, the growing body of research on the effectiveness of women compared to men in negotiations, and the ability of women compared to men to gain the help of others in their careers, what has generally been called “social capital.” In discussion of each of these issues, women have often been urged to change their behavior, change their attitudes, or learn new skills. In making such recommendations, however, there is a risk of falling into the “fix the woman” presumption, as if women need to learn how to behave the way men do in order to be successful. More nuanced discussions of these issues, however, recognize that there is a context to what women have learned and to how they behave. In many cases, women do things differently from men, because they are reacted to differently when they exhibit confidence, negotiate, or seek connections with others. That is, there is a potential for backlash when women violate gender role expectations, or even absent a backlash, women’s efforts sometimes are less effective because others do not respond to them the way that they would respond to men engaging in the same behaviors.

These concerns are certainly evident in discussions of what has been labeled “the confidence gap.”<sup>48</sup> In general, research evidence has found that men have higher self-esteem than do women across countries, that self-esteem rises with age for both men and women, and that the gender gap in self-confidence is greater in developed countries than in developing ones.<sup>49,50,51</sup> Among other things, a number of studies have found that women are more likely to give up or not try when they believe that men are likely to be better at a task than they are. Ertac and Gurdal have called this “deciding to decide.”<sup>52,53</sup> The implications of these behavioral differences include that women are less likely to apply for jobs even when they have the same credentials as men have, that they are more likely to express doubt when offered a challenging assignment or a promotion, and that they are more likely to attribute their successes to luck than to their hard work or talent.<sup>54</sup> Despite this research, however, it is important to remember that there are

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more similarities than differences between men and women on measures of self-esteem.<sup>55</sup>

Importantly, there is general agreement that confidence is not something that people are, but rather it is what they do. Rosabeth Kanter argues that, “Confidence is the bridge connecting expectations and performance, investment, and results.”<sup>56</sup> Others have also emphasized that confidence comes from taking action, because doing so prepares one to be successful or at least to have a greater chance of achieving intended goals. Kay and Shipman argued that confidence is built through practice and that women can develop confidence through what they do. It is not something that women either have or do not. Despite the advice that confidence can be developed by preparing oneself for success and making positive outcomes more likely, Thomson has called the confidence gap a myth, because, she argues, women are penalized for calling attention to their accomplishments and that makes them hesitant to do so.<sup>57</sup> Further, Reuben et al. find that men exhibit overconfidence and get rewarded for doing so, and this is apparently most evident for males majoring in business.<sup>58,59</sup>

A similar pattern exists with regards to gender and negotiation. The research has shown that women are less likely to negotiate than are men. That is, women “don’t ask,” and when they ask, they ask for less, get less; and they face more resistance from negotiating partners.<sup>60</sup> Both men and women incur substantial costs for not negotiating, including lower starting salaries, fewer benefits, and fewer opportunities going forward, but because women are less likely to negotiate, the costs they incur are even greater. Further, the costs to women for not negotiating, especially early in their careers are compounded over their careers. As much as one-third of the gender gap in pay can be accounted for by differences in negotiating starting salaries. For example, Babcock and Laschever did a number of experiments to support their argument that women don’t ask. They found that 57 percent of male students negotiated their starting salary, while only 7 percent of women students did. Those who negotiated, on average, received a 7 percent increase in their starting salaries. Even if no other negotiation took place over their careers and assuming a typical yearly increase, that one single negotiation could account for a half million dollar over their lifetimes.<sup>61</sup> Women can incur a social penalty, however, by asking for higher salaries, but if they use relational accounts that provide a rationale for their contributions to the organization, it improves their negotiation outcomes.<sup>62</sup>

There has been extensive research on gender and negotiations, which in general finds that gender roles expect women to be nice, caring, and take the wellbeing of others into account, which are counter to the images of those who seem to negotiate for self-serving interests. Hence, negotiation as a task

tends to violate the norms of how women are expected to behave. Using relational accounts is one potential way to counter the responses of those who think that women are being too demanding when they try to negotiate salaries and other benefits for themselves. There is also concern that women themselves may need to rethink their view of themselves in order to gain what they want from negotiation. Specifically, some evidence suggests that reframing the negotiation task either in terms of the individual or the situation may improve the negotiation outcomes for women. Bear and Babcock, for example, found that if women are asked to think of a time when they were assertive and felt in control, they were more likely to have positive outcomes in negotiations, because by changing the frame by which women saw themselves as being more agentic than communal, they were more likely to feel empowered to negotiate.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, if one reframes the situation to suggest that the negotiation is being done for the benefit of others, then women are more likely to experience more positive outcomes from the negotiation. Reframing the individual makes the self more consistent with the demands of the situation, i.e., enhancing the agentic outlook of women in negotiations. Reframing the situation makes the gender role expectations more consistent with the negotiation task, i.e., such as negotiating for a friend or for the good of the organization. Women are also likely to be more successful if they justify their requests by showing the value their skills bring to the organization.

Some have argued that this advice for women is to “do it with a smile,” i.e., to negotiate in their roles as women in a context in which they can feel that the negotiation is consistent with gender role stereotypes or that their capabilities fit the situation. In effect, women are asked to learn that asking is possible, to practice asking, and to do so in a way that affirms their gender role expectations of themselves and of others, not by giving in or being kind, but by seeing how negotiating for themselves is consistent with the benefits to others. Given the costs to women from not negotiating, it is also imperative that they recognize that whatever discomfort they may feel from the act of negotiating, especially for their own salary and for better job offers or assignments, it will be less than the discomfort they might feel when they get to the end of their careers and realize how much money they gave up or left on the table by not negotiating.

One of the persistent themes that has been raised in the last several decades about women’s leadership has been the importance of mentors to give women advice about how to succeed in their careers. Almost from the emergence of the Women’s Movement in the U.S., there have been books about the need for women to have people to help them reach leadership roles. Drawing from the insight that women who did well in leadership roles

often had fathers who had been successful and noting that all men who reached leadership positions had people to help them along the way, the narrative soon developed that one of the solutions to women moving up the corporate ladder was the need to have mentors. Hennig and Jardim, for example, argued that all women who succeed have mentors.<sup>64</sup> If one does an internet search for the term mentor, one will find that a mentor is someone who gives advice, provides wisdom, conversation, and helps in growth and development.

All of these may be helpful for young women starting out in their careers, but there is also a limitation to what a mentor can do. Usually, a mentor is someone who is more senior but is not necessarily someone in a position to make a difference in terms of job assignments and promotions. Hence, more recent work has argued that it is more important to have a sponsor, rather than a mentor, because a sponsor is someone who advocates for you and helps you gain opportunities.<sup>65</sup> The distinction is often made that a sponsor is the person who speaks on your behalf when you are not in the room, with the added note that all of the important career decisions are made about you when you are not in the room, including compensation decisions, promotion decisions, and evaluation decisions. Another way of characterizing the distinction is that sponsors speak *for* you, mentors speak *with* you, and coaches speak *to* you. Also important in this conversation is that one can have multiple sponsors and mentors at the same time and over time. There is no need to restrict oneself to a relationship with a single person, which in effect puts all eggs in the same basket. Further, sponsors and mentors can often do different things and are useful for different purposes over the course of one's career.

Of course, it is not that easy to find and make arrangements for someone to either serve as a sponsor or a mentor. In response to the call for helping women find mentors, many large companies initiated formal mentoring programs in which women in leadership positions were assigned mentors, although informal mentoring has probably played the largest role for most women. Importantly, any such relationship with people who might be helpful for career advancement grows out of relationships that are reciprocal and mutually beneficial. Because men are disproportionately represented in the top positions in many companies and because there is a preference for ingroup favoritism in which we see those who are like us as more competent and worthy, women are at a disadvantage compared to men to find mentors or sponsors.<sup>66</sup> As Burt notes, women and male minority employees often have to "borrow" social capital from White men, because those are the ones who are most represented in decision-making positions in major companies.<sup>67,68</sup>

In order for women and male minorities to gain the support of more senior males who might be helpful to their careers, they have to stand out often by taking initiative, develop an area of expertise that is indispensable to the corporation, draw on similarities wherever they can do so, and be friendly and likable. They also have to have the skills to manage relationships in ways that are mutually beneficial, including making the sponsor or mentor look good, coming through when there are critical deadlines, extending the networks of the sponsor or mentor by helping them tap into new sources of information or people who can be helpful, and otherwise, helping the sponsor or mentor as well as themselves build their brands.<sup>69</sup> As DiTomaso and Palmer note in their analysis of who helps whom at work, it is important to understand if sponsors and mentors tend to provide opportunity to those who are like them but advice to those who are different from them.<sup>70</sup>

While developing social capital by fostering relationships with others who can act as sponsors, mentors, role models, or coaches, there are also some important things to keep in mind for women when they are managing their careers. For example, although some people maintain a close relationship with sponsors and mentors over the long term, most such relationships are relatively short term and change over the course of a career. Hill, for example, estimates that the average mentoring relationship may last about three years before the changes in the careers of either the junior or the senior person are such that the relationship is no longer as mutually beneficial as it might have been at the outset.<sup>71</sup> Further, like any human relationship, there can be uncomfortable or difficult situations that arise. Among other things, because women are often being sponsored or mentored by senior men, there can be sexual tension in the relationship that needs to be finessed and can sometimes lead to misunderstandings and even hard feelings. Most agree, however, that women should not be denied the support of those in more senior positions and that it is imperative on male bosses to maintain professionalism in their relationships with others. Sometimes the opportunities offered or the advice given does not work to the interests of the junior person, or in some situations, it might even be bad advice that will not be helpful for career advancement. Thus, it is important to develop relationships with others who can be helpful in your career, but these relationships also need to be managed and sometimes ended or redirected.

These situations can be even more difficult for women in subordinate positions than for others who seek out help with careers. As with all such situations at work, it is important to be gracious, to use emotional intelligence, and to have confidence in one's own sense of self and value system to address difficult situations and come away the better for it. When relationships with others on the job work well, then they can be extremely

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helpful and may be the pathway to upward mobility, but it is also important to keep in mind that being your own mentor may be an important part of the process.<sup>72</sup> Perhaps equally important is that women need to serve as mentors as well as benefit from the help of mentors. Women should be developing their own networks and mutually beneficial relationships with others as they rise in their careers. Developing relationships is a social process as well as a skilled performance. Building social capital, as is the case for financial capital, is an investment that one needs to make with time and sometimes resources as well, and having made an investment, there is the possibility of returns and of expanded benefits. Getting help requires giving help and also importantly, adding value to the relationship.

### **Future Directions in Women's Leadership**

In this short paper, we provide a brief overview of some of the key issues in the research literature with regard to the development of women leaders, especially in major business organizations. Our discussion has highlighted issues that those who are concerned with women's leadership should know and take into account, but of course, we have not covered all relevant topics, both because of space and because some issues have been addressed quite thoroughly in other contexts. We did not, for example, discuss implicit or unconscious bias, the use of power and influence, communication differences between men and women, sexual harassment or romance at work, nor other topics that might be considered relevant. Instead, we focused on those issues that have received a great deal of attention in the research literature but perhaps not as much in the corporate context in recent years or about which we thought there needed to be more clarity about what the issues are and how they should be considered. In this regard, we discussed gender as a social frame that creates and reinforces a gender hierarchy and gender inequality, the intersectionality of gender and other forms of social identity, the structural and institutional factors that create the context for ongoing gender inequality, including job segregation, the gender pay gap, and issues with regard to marriage and family, and we discussed three key issues that have been thought of as obstacles to women's leadership, including the confidence gap, as it is called, the role of gender in negotiations, and the relationships that are needed to help women in their careers, including those from sponsors and mentors.

There continues to be very good work being done on topics of importance to women's leadership, but much more needs to be done. Among research topics that will gain more attention in the future are the role of women's leadership in a global context, including women leaders in global companies, women in emerging markets, women as expatriates, and women as political



leaders around the world. The reports that have been regularly generated by the World Economic Forum, which has been tracking the progress in women's representation on several dimensions, have made a strong business case for women's leadership but have also called attention to the slow progress in improving the representation of women in major private firms and in governmental roles. Similarly, the work being offered by the McKinsey Global Institute has called attention to the high cost of excluding women from leadership roles around the world.

In a recent book edited by King, Roberson, and Hebl, prominent gender scholars provided an overview of their own research careers and outlined what they believe to be the key topics for the future.<sup>73</sup> The themes are consistent and tend to overlap across the authors who contributed to this book, but they also add a long list of areas that need new attention or that have not been given sufficient attention in the field. Many of these scholars agree that there needs to be more research on intersectionality and how gender interfaces with race/ethnicity, class, and other forms of social identity, especially in a global context. Among other things, the interrelationship between the lives of women in the developed world with the lives of women in the developing world or in emerging markets needs to be considered, for example, with regard to what Hochschild called "the nanny chain."<sup>74</sup> Those of us in the U.S. often do not give enough attention to the ways that the lives of women in the paid labor force in the U.S. are made possible by the sacrifices and contributions of women in the third world, whether those who have immigrated to the U.S. and now provide childcare and other services for U.S. born women or those women in global villages who have provided cheap labor to support the consumption needs of U.S. women in the labor force, as well as those who provide childcare and family care to the families left behind by those who have immigrated to the U.S.<sup>75</sup> How gender relates to social justice is another topic that does not receive enough attention. In this regard, several of the gender scholars in the King et al. book also mentioned the need for more studies that address multiple levels of analysis, bringing together the social psychological, the organizational, and the societal factors that each have effects on women's leadership opportunities and which interface with each other in terms of multiple and mutual causality.

A series of other topics are also seen as important for future research, including more attention to men as allies and advocates for women and for minority men; yet more work on sexual harassment and toxic masculinity; benevolent sexism that ambiguously mixes positive and negative attributions about women, as well as continued work on second generation (i.e., implicit) bias; the need for more attention to psychodynamic issues of self-healing;

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women's health and the effects on their ability to work in the paid labor force, including, childbirth and breastfeeding, menstruation, menopause, and other milestones of women's life cycles; what some have called "in-between" groups who are nonbinary; the work-family interface and the effects on women's ability to give sufficient attention to either; and the conflict between women's increasing achievement in completing degrees in contrast to the war for talent in companies. From this long list, it is evident that there is much to do, much to know, and much to share with regard to what we need to understand about women's leadership. The field has come a long way, but still not far enough. Changes have undermined some of the foundations of gender inequality, but it continues to be recreated in new forms. Among the necessary changes are for women to understand their own motivations with regard to career goals. Women need to advocate for themselves, but they also need allies. Women also need to step up to the leadership of which they are capable. As Dweck, a well-known social psychologist has been noted to say, "If life were one long grade school, women would be the undisputed rulers of the world."<sup>76</sup> But it isn't, and they aren't. The journey is not yet finished.

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