

## Gender, Race, and Leadership

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### Suggested Reference

Begeny, C. T., Wong, C. Y. E., Kirby, T. A., & Rink, F. (2021). Gender, race, and leadership. *Oxford Encyclopedia of Psychology*. Oxford University Press.

This article has been accepted in its current form for publication in the  
Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Psychology

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## Summary

Leaders exist in myriad types of groups. Yet in many of them – including in organizational, political, and educational domains – leadership roles are disproportionately occupied by individuals of certain social categories (e.g., men, whites). Speaking to this imbalance in representation, there is a wealth of theory and research indicating that gender and race are key to understanding: (i) who tends to get placed in leadership roles, and (ii) what an individual’s experience will be like while in that role, or on the path to it. In part, this is because there are commonly held stereotypes that make certain individuals – often those of socially dominant racial and gender groups – seem better suited for leadership. By comparison, individuals of other genders and races are often perceived and evaluated as less suitable, and treated as such (e.g., deprived of opportunities to become leaders or develop leadership skills). These stereotypes can also elicit *disparate internal states* (e.g., stereotype threat, internalized negative self-perceptions) that affect individuals’ likelihood of pursuing or obtaining such roles (e.g., by affecting their motivation, performance). In this way, leadership dynamics are intimately connected to the study of gender and race. Overall, these dynamics involve several psychological processes. This includes myriad forms of gender and racial bias – discrimination in evaluations, pay, hiring, and promotions, and in access to role models, mentorship, and support; backlash effects; queen bee effects (self-group distancing); glass cliff effects; motherhood penalties; fatherhood bonuses. It also involves multiple lines of theorizing – role congruity theory; lack of fit; masculine defaults and ambient belonging; modern sexism; aversive racism; social identity threat, and others.

Looking ahead, there are several critical directions for advancing research on gender, race, and leadership. This includes examining leadership processes from a more precise, intersectional lens – rather than studying the implications of one’s gender *or* race in isolation (e.g., by integrating work on intersectionality theory, gendered races, and intersectional invisibility). Future study of these processes will also need to consider other relevant social identities (e.g., reflecting class, religion, age, sexuality, ability and neurodiversity, nationality and immigration status), along with a more thorough consideration of gender – going beyond the study of (cisgender) men and women to consider how transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals are perceived and treated in leadership roles, or on the path to such roles. Additionally, and ultimately, it will be critical to develop effective strategies for addressing the underrepresentation of women, racial and ethnic minorities, and other social groups in leadership. In part this will mean carefully evaluating strategies now being employed (e.g., organizational diversity messages, quotas and affirmative action, mentorship programs) – some of which may be largely ineffective, if not causing harm (e.g., implicit bias training, campaigning for women to “lean in”). Addressing the lack of diversity in leadership will be a crucial step towards tackling broader issues of social inequity.

## Keywords

Gender, Race, Ethnicity, Leadership, Stereotypes, Discrimination, Bias, Intersectionality, Diversity, Interventions

## Introduction

Women and racial/ethnic minorities are often underrepresented in leadership positions, including in work organizations, academia, and politics (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019; Catalyst, 2020; ENAR, 2017, 2019). For example, women make up half of the workforce in the European Union and United States but only 30% of all managers (Catalyst, 2020). Racial and ethnic minorities are similarly underrepresented in leadership roles (e.g., making up 39% of the US population but only 12% of all executives; 13% of the UK population but only 7% of executives; Hunt et al., 2018). Speaking to these long-standing disparities in representation, there is now a wealth of theory and research that help explain the dynamics between gender, race, and leadership, including how and why individuals' gender and race impact their likelihood of being placed in leadership roles.

It is important to recognize, however, that if one only considers gender and racial dynamics among those who are *in* positions of leadership, they are only seeing the tip of the iceberg. It misses the fact that individuals' gender and race also affect the likelihood they will *ever be near* a leadership role. Thus, to understand what is happening at the point of leadership (e.g., who is represented in such roles) one must consider the *path to leadership* as well. For instance, in the workplace, how do individuals' race and gender affect their chances of getting fairly evaluated at each stage of their career (e.g., in terms of competence, abilities, leadership potential)? How do individuals' race and gender affect the opportunities they are given to develop leadership-relevant skills, or their access to mentors and role models? Therefore, to fully understand the dynamics between gender, race, and leadership it is important to not only consider theory and research that has leadership as its explicit 'end product,' but also that which explains how gender and race shape the 'pipeline' to higher level positions more generally. In other words, it is important to not only consider the effects of gender and race: (i) *at the point of leadership*, but also (ii) *on the path to leadership*.

Before going forward, it is also important to keep in mind that, to date, research on gender, race, and leadership has often been carried out in Western contexts and cultures – where men and/or whites are often overrepresented in and seen as 'the norm' for leadership roles. This body of research has also been carried out largely in organizational contexts, including workplaces and academic institutions. As a result, much of what is discussed in the proceeding sections reflects that limited knowledge base. The processes described here may function similarly in other contexts and cultures, but may also differ in important ways (Henrich et al., 2010; Morley & Crossouard, 2016; Stamkou et al., 2019).

## Gender and Racial Discrimination in Leadership

An individual's gender and race can impact how others perceive, evaluate, and treat them. This bias emerges not only in the form of disadvantage (e.g., for women, racial minorities) but also in the form of unjustified *advantage* (e.g., for men, whites). For example, in pursuit of leadership positions women can encounter *glass ceilings*, *glass cliffs*, and *motherhood penalties*, while men can encounter *glass elevators* and *fatherhood bonuses*; racial minorities similarly encounter underestimations of their competence and leadership potential, while whites benefit from *overestimations* (see proceeding sections for more on these processes). Both forms of bias – being unjustly disadvantaged, and unjustly advantaged – contribute to discriminatory outcomes.

### ***Discrimination on the Path to Leadership***

As noted, discrimination that manifests at the point of leadership is in some ways just the tip of the iceberg. It misses the fact that individuals' gender and race can affect the likelihood they will *ever be near* a leadership role. Thus, to understand some of the gender and racial dynamics occurring 'at the top' (in leadership roles) it is key to consider what happens further down – at the various stages that may lead individuals to leadership, or thwart their path to it.

#### *Evaluations, Pay, and Hiring/Promotion Recommendations.*

In many work contexts, women and racial minorities are evaluated as less competent and worthy of being hired for positions compared to men and whites, which can be a barrier on the path toward higher status and leadership roles. A meta-analysis of over 100 controlled experimental studies – comparing men and women statistically matched in their qualifications and experience, if not absolutely identical in every way aside from their purported name/gender – show that women are evaluated as less competent, hireable, and promotable compared to men, and are advised to receive lower salaries than men, particularly in male-dominated professions (e.g., in several STEMM professions; Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics & Medicine). In traditionally female-dominated professions, neither women nor men are systematically favored (Koch et al., 2015). In professions once male-dominated – yet where women have now become well-represented – men are still favored (e.g., evaluated as more competent; Begeny et al., 2020; similarly, see Grunspan et al., 2016).

In the context of race, evidence similarly shows that discrimination has and continues to occur in evaluations and hiring practices, with very little decline in the pervasiveness of discrimination in the past 25 years (particularly toward Black individuals; Quilliana et al., 2017). For instance, meta-analyses of controlled field experiments conducted in the US between 1989 and 2015 show that whites received 36% more job-related callbacks on average compared to Black individuals (e.g., following submission of a resume where the name on it was randomized to either signal that the job applicant was Black or white).

Additional research on these and other similar forms of gender and racial discrimination are available (Atir & Ferguson, 2018; Bedi et al., 2012; Brower & James, 2020; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Ellemers, 2014; Heilman & Haynes, 2005; Holleran et al., 2011; Joshi et al., 2015; Régner et al., 2019; M. K. Ryan et al., 2020; Shen, 2013; Treviño et al., 2018; Ziegert & Hanges, 2005).

#### *Mentorship, Support, and Skill Development.*

Discrimination can also manifest in the opportunities that an individual is afforded to develop new skills and receive mentorship and support (e.g., by managers at work), which can be vital to advancing their path toward leadership roles. For example, managers in traditionally male-dominated professions are less willing to give female employees opportunities to develop new skills, compared to identical male employees (e.g., opportunities to take on new supervisory responsibilities; Begeny et al., 2020). They are also less likely to offer support and encouragement to those female employees when they express interest in pursuing a promotion. Similarly, in academic institutions, research scientists in biology, chemistry, and physics are less willing to offer career mentorship to female job applicants, compared to identical male applicants (Moss-Racusin et al., 2012). Women and racial minorities working in academic fields within STEMM also have less access to support (e.g., mentoring, peer networks, external funding) and

skill development opportunities (e.g., speaking invitations, editorial positions), while also carrying a disproportionate load of responsibilities that are *not* valued or important to career development (e.g., higher teaching loads, expectations to take on uncompensated service roles; for an overview, see NASEM, 2019, 2020) – all of which represent added barriers along the path toward higher status and leadership roles.

Notably, this type of discriminatory treatment is not expressed exclusively by those who belong to dominant social groups. For instance, while there are men who express discrimination toward women, there are also some women who express discrimination toward female colleagues (Begeny et al., 2020; Moss-Racusin et al., 2012). In a similar vein, research on the *queen bee phenomenon* shows that women in male-dominated or masculine-typed contexts and occupations often receive less mentorship and support, including from some women in higher standing positions. This is in part because women in higher standing positions may respond to the discrimination that they themselves have experienced by distancing from other more junior women – an insight that has prompted some to suggest it is more useful and precise to refer to this phenomenon as *self-group distancing*, rather than a ‘queen bee effect’ (Faniko et al., 2020; van Veelen et al., 2020). For more detail, see Derks et al. (2016).

Additional research on inequities in mentoring and other forms of support is available (e.g., Morgenroth et al., 2015; Tharenou, 2001; van Laar et al., 2019; Xu, 2008).

#### *Backlash Effects.*

Another barrier on the path to leadership comes in the form of *backlash effects* (for a review, see Rudman & Phelan, 2008). This is when individuals experience reprisals or ‘backlash’ for acting in counter-stereotypical ways. For example, women are not stereotyped as particularly agentic (relative to men; e.g., assertive, ambitious), which is a trait that is often considered vital for leaders to have. In response, women may try to demonstrate agentic qualities; yet because prescriptive stereotypes also state that women *should not be* agentic, women’s attempts to demonstrate agency can result in others reacting negatively toward them. Consequences include being seen as unlikable, and lowering their chances of being hired for leadership positions. As Rudman and Phelan (2008) note, “backlash can undermine women at every stage of their career.” Backlash effects have also been found in political spheres (Okimoto & Brescoll, 2010) and along racial lines (Phelan & Rudman, 2010). Though, backlash effects are not always evident in every context (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010; Bongiorno et al., 2014; M. J. Williams & Tiedens, 2016).

#### *Work-Family Dynamics, Motherhood Penalties, and Fatherhood Bonuses.*

Individuals’ paths to higher standing positions, particularly in organizational contexts, are also affected by work-family dynamics. For instance, when working women become mothers – or when the mere fact that they *are* mothers becomes known to others – they are perceived as less competent, less hireable, and are less likely to be recommended for promotion and leadership opportunities (compared to women who are not [known to be] mothers), suggesting a *motherhood penalty* (for more on why this effect occurs, see section, *Stereotypes and Perceived Incongruity*, along with the literature cited in the current section). By comparison, when working men become fathers, there is no such penalty. If anything, they receive a *fatherhood bonus*: a boost in others’ willingness to hire and promote them, pay them more, and give them leadership

opportunities (Budig & England, 2001; Correll et al., 2007; Cuddy et al., 2004; Heilman & Okimoto, 2008). While the implications of these work-family dynamics as a function of race need further investigation, there is some evidence that fatherhood bonuses are particularly strong for white men (Hodges & Budig, 2010).

Additional research on this topic is available (e.g., Bear & Glick, 2017; Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005; Fuegen et al., 2004; Morgenroth, Ryan, et al., 2020; Morgenroth & Heilman, 2017; Rivera, 2017).

### *Tokenism.*

Tokenism refers to circumstances where a member of a certain social category is ‘the only one’ (or one of very few; e.g., women) in that position or situation. In other words, members of that social category are not wholly absent or blocked from that domain, group, or role, but are severely limited and thus nominal in representation (Kanter, 1977; Wright, 2001). For members of such a category, the implications of being a “token” can be multiple, including more negative evaluations of one’s work performance (Sackett et al., 1991). In this way, negative experiences and evaluations that arise from being a “token” can be an added obstacle on the path to leadership (for more on tokenism, see Cohen & Swim, 1995; Danaher & Branscombe, 2010; Heilman & Blader, 2001; P. B. Jackson et al., 1995; Kanter, 1977; Niemann & Dovidio, 1998; Richard & Wright, 2010).

### ***Discrimination at the Point of Leadership***

The previous section, *Discrimination on the Path to Leadership*, illustrates many of the ways in which gender and racial discrimination affect individuals’ paths to potential leadership. In this section, we describe evidence that gender and racial discrimination do not stop there. Even for those who attain a leadership role, discrimination remains a potent force. It is also important to note that in addition to the forms of discrimination discussed in this section, many of those described in the previous section, as occurring ‘on the path to leadership,’ also occur at the point of leadership (e.g., differential access to mentorship and support, backlash effects).

### *Evaluations and Pay.*

One manifestation of gender and racial discrimination is in how leaders are evaluated. For instance, male leaders tend to be evaluated as more effective than female leaders, especially in traditionally male-dominated contexts, and when leaders display stereotypically masculine behaviors (e.g., an autocratic leadership style; Eagly et al., 1992; Johnson et al., 2008; also see Bigelow et al., 2014). When displaying stereotypically feminine behaviors (e.g., individualized consideration for lower status members), there is some evidence that female leaders are favored over male leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2003). However, other evidence indicates that male leaders continue to be evaluated more positively in these circumstances (Hentschel et al., 2018; also see Heilman & Chen, 2005; Shaughnessy et al., 2015).

Similarly, with regards to race, white leaders are often evaluated more favorably than non-white leaders. For example, white leaders tend to be evaluated more positively, seen as more effective, and as having more potential than non-white leaders in organizational contexts (Knight et al., 2003; Rosette et al., 2008; Sy et al., 2010). In a similar vein, compared to non-white individuals, whites are seen as more leader-like (i.e., there is a stronger implicit association between white names and leadership roles [e.g., manager], and leadership traits [e.g., decisiveness]; Gündemir

et al., 2014). It is important to note that while white leaders tend to be evaluated more favourably than leaders of multiple other racial/ethnic groups, including both Black and Asian American leaders, the reasons why white leaders are evaluated more positively (compared to Black *versus* Asian American leaders) may vary. In other words, differing sets of biases can exist toward different racial/ethnic minority groups, yet with each resulting in discriminatory evaluations (see, e.g., Sy et al., 2010).

Discrimination also manifests in leaders' pay (for general statistics, see Longhi & Brynin, 2017; PayScale, 2020). For example, in academic medicine female leaders receive lower salaries than male leaders with equivalent rank and responsibilities, which also holds true when comparing men and women who are statistically matched on a host of factors (e.g., number of publications, area of specialty, institution type; Jagsi et al., 2012). Similarly, in the for-profit sector male versus female board of directors receive higher compensation, even when matched in terms of role, industry, and size of company (Kulich et al., 2011).

Pay disparities exist along racial lines as well. For example, when comparing Black and white managers/supervisors matched on various characteristics, Black individuals make less than their white counterparts – a pattern that remains largely consistent in higher-level leadership positions as well (e.g., among directors, executives; PayScale, 2020a).

Additional research on this and related topics are available. This includes evaluations of male versus female leaders based on their competence versus potential, their tendency to express emotions, and evaluations in the aftermath of some failure (e.g., Brescoll, 2016; Ellemers et al., 2012; Gündemir, Carton, et al., 2019; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Hoyt & Burnette, 2013; Hutchinson et al., 2017; Lyness & Heilman, 2006; Montgomery & Cowen, 2020; Player et al., 2019; Vial et al., 2016).

#### *Glass Cliffs.*

The *glass cliff* (M. K. Ryan & Haslam, 2005, 2007) is a phenomenon whereby women and racial minorities are more likely to be appointed to leadership positions when an organization is facing some crisis (e.g., declining performance, a lack of adequate resources). Thus, even when women and minorities get placed in leadership positions, having broken through the *glass ceiling* (a barrier to higher standing positions; Barreto et al., 2009), they may be placed in those positions that are most precarious or prone to failure, thus hurting their ability to be, and to demonstrate, effective leadership.

One leading explanation for the glass cliff is that it reflects an expression of gender and/or racial bias – a tendency to set women and racial minorities up for failure, whether done consciously or not. A recent meta-analysis found some support for this explanation, as well as support for the idea that women and racial minorities are appointed in times of crisis as a way of signalling change at the organization (Morgenroth, Kirby, et al., 2020).

#### *Disparate Internal States*

On the path to and at the point of leadership, gender and racial biases (real or anticipated) can also produce *disparate internal states* (e.g., internalized negative self-perceptions, threat-induced stress or cognitions) that affect individuals' motivation and ability to strive toward and sustain



leadership positions. In this way, such internal states are an important factor underlying the dynamic between gender, race, and leadership.

*Stereotype Threat, Lift, and Boost.*

One consequence of experiencing gender or racial bias in a given context, or simply being aware of the *possibility* that gender or racial biases could emerge, is that it can induce *stereotype threat* (Steele, 1997; also see research on social identity threat; e.g., Kaiser & Hagiwara, 2011). This is when members of a stigmatized social group (e.g., women, racial minorities) experience a disruptive internal state (e.g., additional stress, cognitive labor) or sense of ‘threat’ due to concerns about confirming stereotypes about their group. For example, women and racial minorities sometimes experience stereotype threat when engaging in leadership- or STEM-related tasks because of a common stereotype that they are relatively incompetent or intellectually inferior to men and whites in these domains (for more detail, see, e.g., the section on *Motivation/Ambition*). Notably, stereotype threat can emerge even if members of these stigmatized groups do not believe the stereotype themselves.

Stereotype threat can have multiple adverse effects (via multiple mechanisms, and with important moderators; for overviews, see Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Shapiro & Neuberg, 2007; Spencer et al., 2016; Walton et al., 2015). Among others, stereotype threat can negatively affect individuals’ performance in that domain. This is important because it helps explain why members of certain social groups – women and racial minorities working in STEM, for example – may have a particularly difficult time attaining promotions and leadership positions: in part, their performance might seem to suggest they are less competent than their non-stigmatized colleagues (e.g., white men). Critically however, this is not because they are *actually* less competent. Rather, it is because they face unique, disruptive internal states (e.g., additional stress and cognitive labor induced by stereotype threat) that can adversely affect their ability to perform to their fullest potential. By comparison, their non-stigmatized counterparts do not have to deal with this additional barrier to performance. In fact, evidence indicates that when the possibility of stereotype threat is removed from a context or environment, members of stigmatized groups not only perform as well as their non-stigmatized counterparts but tend to perform *better* than them (Walton & Spencer, 2009). Note that some evidence also suggests stereotype threat effects may be smaller than originally thought (Zigerell, 2017).

Related to the concept of stereotype threat are *stereotype lift*, and *stereotype boost*. Stereotype lift is when members of *non*-stigmatized groups experience a boost in their performance as a result of making downward comparisons with a stigmatized group in that context (Walton & Cohen, 2003). Stereotype boost is when individuals’ performance increases as a result of being exposed to a *positive* stereotype about one of their own social groups (Gaither et al., 2015; Shih et al., 2012; though also see Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2000). These effects help further explain the distinct paths to and attainment of leadership positions between different genders and races (e.g., when stereotype lift enhances white men’s performance), and how those paths and attainment rates might be shifted (e.g., when stereotype boost can help enhance the performance of Asian American women [e.g., via salience of positive stereotypes about Asian individuals’ STEM-related competencies]).

### *Internalization of Stereotypes.*

Another disparate internal state is the internalization of commonly held, negative (or positive) stereotypes about one's own gender or racial category. For example, for stereotypically masculine domains including math-related abilities, men and women tend to internalize the stereotypes of their gender, which is reflected both in implicitly held associations (Nosek et al., 2002; Nosek & Smyth, 2011), and in men's explicit *overestimations* of their math abilities, and women's *underestimations* of their abilities (Bench et al., 2015). Moreover, this differing tendency helps explain men's stronger interest in and intent to pursue math-related careers (Bench et al., 2015). Thus, the internalization of stereotypes – for instance, when women internalize the belief that they do not have the qualities needed to thrive in STEMM domains – likely contributes to the disparate career paths that men and women pursue, thereby contributing to their underrepresentation within stereotypically feminine and masculine careers respectively, both overall and in leadership roles specifically. Similarly, research indicates that women tend to characterize themselves in other stereotypic terms, including the idea that they are less assertive and less competent in leadership (Hentschel et al., 2019; also see (Barreto et al., 2010; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014).

### *Motivation/Ambition.*

Discrimination can also affect individuals' internal motivation to pursue leadership roles. For example, when women are exposed to stereotypic representations of women it reduces their motivation to pursue leadership (e.g., when exposed to media images of women in stereotypical roles, or female role models who activate gender stereotypes; Davies et al., 2005; Hoyt & Simon, 2011; Simon & Hoyt, 2013; also see Hentschel et al., 2020). Similarly, when women in traditionally male-dominated professions experience gender discrimination at work, they are less motivated to make sacrifices in other areas of life for the sake of advancing their career (Meeussen et al., 2020). Thus, despite lay conceptions of motivation as a trait-like feature – as if 'some people are motivated to be leaders, others are not' – the level of motivation individuals feel is shaped by external forces, including expressions of gender and racial discrimination. Additional research on this and related topics are available (e.g., Gutsell & Remedios, 2016; McNamara et al., 2010).

## **Why Gender and Racial Discrimination in Leadership Occurs**

A lot of the discrimination and discriminatory outcomes described in the previous sections, adversely affecting women and racial minorities most notably, occur in professions, roles, and other contexts where women and minorities have traditionally been underrepresented. This is not a coincidence. It reflects the fact that this discrimination is, to some extent, a context-dependent process. Thus, contextual factors are key to understanding why this discrimination occurs (disproportionately so in these realms). In this section we outline key contextual factors (e.g., the role of stereotypes). We also briefly describe other lines of theorizing and research that further our understanding of what fuels gender and racial discrimination in and on the path to leadership.

### *Stereotypes and Perceived Incongruity*

In line with the *lack of fit model* (Heilman, 1983) and *role congruity theory* (Eagly & Karau, 2002), discrimination can emerge when the stereotypes of a gender or racial group (e.g., women are not assertive) seem incongruent with the attributes considered necessary to be successful in a given context or role (e.g., leaders are, and need to be, assertive). Because people often make

inferences about an individual in line with the stereotypes of that individual's gender or race – by ‘filling in the blanks’ or selectively retaining stereotype-consistent information about them – they can end up with biased perceptions of the individual's true qualities and attributes. This includes seeing a female job applicant as less ambitious and less competent, and a male applicant as *more* ambitious and more competent, than she or he actually is. When these skewed perceptions of the individual are then evaluated against the qualities and attributes seen as necessary to be successful in that context or role – those required to be a successful leader, for example (e.g., being ambitious), the result is a biased evaluation of the individual's true suitability or fit for that context or role (in a similar vein, see work on leader evaluations and group prototypicality in the *social identity theory of leadership*; Haslam et al., 2011; Hogg, 2001; Hogg et al., 2012; Steffens et al., 2020). This amounts to disadvantage for some – when stereotypes about their gender or racial group are incongruent with the attributes ascribed to that context or role (e.g., those of women vs. leaders) – and unjustified *advantage* for others – when stereotypes about their gender or racial group are *congruent* with the attributes ascribed to that context or role (e.g., those of men and leaders).

Overall, these stereotypes and a corresponding perception of one's incongruity or lack of fit in certain contexts or roles can contribute to the myriad forms of discrimination discussed in previous sections (e.g., in *Discrimination on the Path to Leadership*), including evaluations of a female employee as less competent or worthy of a promotion compared to an identical male employee, with similar patterns of discrimination occurring along lines of race (and parental status). Moreover, this perceived incongruity, when felt inside, can also contribute to disparate internal states (e.g., stereotype threat, internalization of stereotypes).

For a more detailed discussion of these processes, see for example Heilman (2001, 2012). Notably, theory and research also suggest that discrimination tends to impact individuals who have a certain degree of ambiguity in their merits and qualifications (e.g., for a particular leadership position). When the individual being evaluated is neither exceptionally qualified nor exceptionally unqualified but instead ‘somewhere in the middle’ (arguably where most people are) this is where gender and racial biases tend to creep in and shape an evaluator's perceptions of and behaviors toward that individual (Begeny et al., 2020; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Heilman & Haynes, 2008; Moss-Racusin et al., 2012). This speaks to the often insidious nature of gender and racial discrimination.

Research on related processes is also available, including on the *think manager-think male effect*, *masculine defaults*, and *ambient belonging* (Cheryan et al., 2009, 2017; Cheryan & Markus, 2020; Koenig et al., 2011; Peters et al., 2012, 2015; Schein, 1973). Research cited in previous sections also helps explicate these processes (see *Discrimination on the Path to Leadership*, *Discrimination at the Point of Leadership*, *Disparate Internal States*).

For a more general discussion on the nature and content of stereotypes, including how and why they develop, see literature on the *stereotype content model* (Fiske et al., 2002), *social role theory* (Koenig & Eagly, 2014), and the *developmental intergroup theory of social stereotypes and prejudice* (Bigler & Liben, 2006). Research on the pervasiveness and stability of stereotypes over time and cultures is also available (Diekmann & Eagly, 2000; Eagly et al., 2020; Haines et al., 2016; Heilman & Eagly, 2008; Miller et al., 2015).

### ***Other Mechanisms Underpinning Discrimination***

Though outside the scope of this article, there are other lines of theory and research that also contribute to our understanding of how and why discrimination and discriminatory outcomes emerge. This includes literature on *aversive racism* (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000), *modern sexism* (Swim et al., 1995), *ambivalent sexism* (Connor et al., 2016), *social dominance theory* (Pratto et al., 2006), *system justification theory* (Jost, 2019), and *realistic-, symbolic-, and prototypicality threat* (Danbold & Huo, 2017; Rios et al., 2018).

### **Critical Directions for Advancing Research on Gender, Race, and Leadership**

Several emerging lines of research will be essential for advancing our understanding of gender, race, and leadership. Overall, there are at least two critical directions for future research. These include: (i) examining leadership processes from a more precise intersectional lens, rather than examining gender or race in isolation; (ii) developing and rigorously testing strategies to address the underrepresentation of women, racial minorities, and members of other underrepresented groups in leadership; this will also mean carefully scrutinizing the efficacy of popular strategies now being employed (e.g., implicit bias training).

### ***Utilizing Intersectional Approaches***

There is now a sizable body of research that examines the implications of gender and race for leadership. However, individually, most studies only examine one or the other: the implications of gender *or* race. Research considering gender *and* race together remains relatively scant. Considering leadership processes as a function of both individuals' gender and race is an important direction for research to go in. This will yield a more precise and accurate understanding of individuals' experiences in and on the path to leadership (e.g., the experiences of Black and Latina women) – a matter that is becoming ever more urgent by the growing diversity in workforces, academic institutions, political spheres, and other social domains. Such an understanding will also provide a more solid basis for developing effective interventions for addressing inequities in leadership (e.g., by providing insights on whether an intervention is likely to be most effective, or equally effective, for white, Black, and/or Latina women).

Fortunately, there is some previous work to build from, along with important theoretical and empirical insights at the intersection of gender and race more generally, which is ripe for being applied to the study of leadership (e.g., Cole, 2009; Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). This includes work on intersectionality theory. The tenets of intersectionality theory are rooted in Black scholar activism and critical race theory, and the term was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1990), a legal scholar who critiqued the single category-framework that dominated anti-discrimination law (e.g., the idea that companies could be liable for systematic bias against hiring Black individuals, or bias against hiring women, but could not be liable for systematic bias against hiring Black women). She illustrated through legal cases that Black women plaintiffs, while at times experiencing discrimination that was similar to white women or to Black men, also experienced discrimination that reflected a unique combination of practices that discriminated by race and gender. From this, Crenshaw described three ways in which multiply marginalized individuals may experience discrimination: additively (e.g., at times experiencing discrimination for being Black, other times experiencing discrimination for being a woman), multiplicatively (e.g., when the discrimination one faces for being Black is

exacerbated by the fact that they are also a woman), or through experiences specific to their status as multiply marginalized (e.g., experiences of discrimination that are not simply a function of being Black, or of being a woman, but those that arise specifically as a function of being a *Black woman*). All of these are posited to be viable articulations of discrimination at the intersections of multiple marginalized social identities. At its heart, intersectionality theory calls for an examination of the interactions of overlapping sources of identity-based stigma, and an examination of how social structures and systems of power shape individuals' experiences. In this section, we describe different lines of research that utilize an intersectional perspective on gender and race, which shed light on leadership processes.

#### *Unique Gender-by-Race Stereotypes.*

Intersectionality calls for an understanding that the stereotypes of two or more social identities are not simply a combination of stereotypes associated with each of those identities. For example, the stereotypes of Black women are not simply a combination of stereotypes associated with "Black individuals" and "women." Rather, certain stereotypes are unique to Black women, including the stereotype of being assertive (for a descriptive list of gender and racial stereotypes, see, e.g., Ghavami & Peplau, 2013; also see Bowleg, 2008). As discussed earlier, "women" – but mainly reflecting *white* women – are stereotyped as relatively *unassertive*, which affects how they are evaluated in terms of their suitability and effectiveness as a leader, as well as their susceptibility to experiencing backlash. Yet because this stereotype does not carry over in the same way to Black women, the ways and conditions under which Black women are evaluated relatively positively or negatively differ. For instance, evidence indicates that Black women may experience less backlash for being assertive, but also be less likely to receive positive evaluations or promotions compared to white women (for a more detailed discussion, see Hall et al., 2019; also see Livingston et al., 2012; Opara et al., 2020; Rosette et al., 2016, 2018).

Still, more research is needed. This includes a more thorough understanding of stereotypes that exist at the intersections of important identities, and not just at a descriptive but also a prescriptive and proscriptive level – key to understanding the conditions under which they may experience backlash, for instance. This also includes studies that directly examine leadership evaluations of Black women compared to individuals with other intersecting identities (e.g., white women, Black men; Livingston et al., 2012; Livingston & Pearce, 2009; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010) and under varying conditions that illustrate an individual's adherence to, or violation of, certain racial or gender stereotypes (e.g., evaluations based on a leader's tendency to show emotions).

#### *Gendered Races.*

Research on *gendered races* also illustrates ways that the stereotypical content of individuals' gender and race are intimately bound together, with implications for how they are perceived and evaluated. It shows that racial groups have a gender-stereotypical content to them, such that Asian individuals are stereotypically feminine (compared to whites) and Black individuals are stereotypically masculine (compared to whites; Galinsky et al., 2013; Hall et al., 2019). This gendered content of race is also impacted by an individual's own gender. For instance, Black women are perceived as more masculine than white or Asian women, and *equally* masculine to Asian men (Hall et al., 2015).

Among other implications, this means individuals of different races and genders are evaluated differently in terms of suitability for certain roles. For instance, for stereotypically masculine leadership roles (e.g., those requiring an individual to be highly competitive), Black women are more likely to be nominated for these roles than white or Asian women (Galinsky et al., 2013).

Importantly however, this research also shows that despite Black men being more stereotypically masculine than white men, they are not more likely to be nominated for masculine leadership roles. If anything, they are *less* likely to be nominated than white men. Thus, there is not a simple linear effect of an individual's perceived masculinity on their evaluated suitability for masculine roles (Galinsky et al., 2013). Other elements of gender and racial stereotype content may be at play. For example, despite being perceived as more masculine, Black men may be less likely to be selected for masculine leadership positions compared to white men because they are also stereotyped as unintelligent (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013).

#### *Intersectional Invisibility.*

Another important line of work is on *intersectional invisibility*. This is the idea that being a non-prototypical member of a stigmatized social group results in being 'socially invisible,' which creates a "distinctive mixture of advantages and disadvantages" (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008, p. 380). For instance, Black women are neither prototypical of their race (because of their gender) nor their gender (because of their race), which increases the likelihood that they will be 'overlooked' in various circumstances. In other words, the combination of their gender and race mean that they do not readily map on to others' pre-existing cognitive conceptions of a Black individual (the prototype is instead of a Black *man*), nor of a woman (the prototype is instead of a *white* woman), and so everything from their face to their behaviors to the ideas they share are more readily forgotten, misremembered, or overlooked.

For example, relevant to understanding how women of different races may experience discrimination on the path to or at the point of leadership, research on intersectional invisibility shows that Black women's contributions during discussions are more likely to be overlooked than those of white women, Black men, or white men. Specifically, their statements during conversation are more often incorrectly attributed as being said by someone else (Sesko & Biernat, 2010). Being overlooked in this way may hinder Black women in or on the path to leadership, as they are not given credit for their contributions. Further research is needed to assess whether this pattern of misattribution differs as a function of the quality of individuals' contributions (e.g., high vs. low quality contributions). This will be important for discerning whether the tendency to be overlooked has a mixture of positive and negative implications (e.g., if both high and low quality contributions are overlooked, or if just high quality contributions are overlooked). Additional research on the contextual nature and dynamics of intersectional invisibility is available (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Goff et al., 2008; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019; McMahon & Kahn, 2016; Thomas et al., 2014).

#### *Considering Other Social Identities.*

Future study of these processes will also need to consider other potentially relevant social identities, including those relating to sexuality, social class, religion, ability and neurodiversity, physical appearance, age, marital/relationship/family status, nationality and immigration status. Each of these identities have associated stereotypes, and it will be important to consider how the

stereotype content of each: (i) varies at the intersections of other identities, and (ii) ultimately shapes the way that an individual is viewed, both by others (e.g., as a capable leader) and by themselves (e.g., as having leadership potential). Similarly, going forward, it will be important to consider the leadership experiences of gender minorities. This includes how transgender and gender non-conforming individuals are perceived, evaluated, and treated when in or on the path to leadership. These lines of research will be able to build from some of the important insights that have already surfaced on the experiences of gender minorities and individuals with multiple marginalized identities (Doyle et al., 2021; Handron et al., 2017; Niedlich et al., 2015; Petsko & Bodenhausen, 2019; Warner & Shields, 2013).

Additional research on this and other related topics are available (e.g., on racialized genders; Bowleg, 2017; Fielden et al., 2010; Levin et al., 2002; Mukkamala & Suyemoto, 2018; Nicolas et al., 2017; Shields, 2016).

Helping to facilitate these lines of intersectional research further, some have developed guidelines and ‘best practices’ for conducting research from an intersectional perspective (McCormick-Huhn et al., 2019; Parent et al., 2013; Warner, 2008). Scholars similarly advise psychologists not to passively ‘study intersectionality’ but to actively engage with and consider the legitimacy of existing dynamics of social power and privilege (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017).

### ***Developing and Testing Strategies for Addressing Gender- and Race-based Inequities***

Efforts are underway to develop strategies to address discrimination against and the underrepresentation of certain genders and races in and on the path to leadership. Indeed, this constitutes the start of another critical direction for advancing research on gender, race, and leadership. Although it is not feasible to describe all of the strategies and interventions that have been considered in previous research, some of these will be discussed briefly.

#### ***Diversity Messaging and Cues***

Within an environment there can be a range of subtle cues, if not more overt ones, that signal whether underrepresented groups *belong* in that space, which can have downstream effects for establishing and maintaining diversity in those environments, including in work organizations. In particular, these cues play a vital role in signalling the extent to which an organization recognizes and values underrepresented, socially marginalized, or generally diverse groups (Apfelbaum et al., 2016; Dovidio et al., 2007; Wolsko et al., 2000). For example, allocation of physical space to underrepresented groups (Kirby, Tabak, et al., 2020), diversity or inclusion statements (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008; Walker et al., 2012), and having a range of groups represented in an environment (Murphy et al., 2007; Unzueta & Binning, 2012) can all send signals to marginalized groups that symbolically validate their identities and improve their sense of belonging and performance – all of which can support individuals’ motivation and access to leadership positions (e.g., Gündemir et al., 2017).

Diversity cues can vary in terms of the exact message they send about how an organization manages or views diversity (i.e., their *diversity approach* or ideology). For example, some organizations favor an “identity-blind” approach that deemphasizes group differences in favor of focusing on people’s similarities as humans, rather than their differences (e.g., an organization communicating that they ‘don’t see race or gender, they just see ‘employees’’). This approach

may be seen in their diversity statement, in the types of initiatives they implement, or more broadly in the culture (e.g., how colleagues in an organization discuss diversity; Apfelbaum et al., 2012; Wolsko et al., 2000). This approach may have some benefits for women because it works against gender stereotypes and bias, and increases confidence and agency (see Koenig & Richeson, 2010; Martin & Phillips, 2016, 2017), which could have implications for women's leadership ambitions.

On the other hand, some organizations favor an “identity-aware” approach that instead emphasizes and celebrates group differences, potentially seeing these differences as valuable to the organization. This approach can be beneficial for racial minorities by helping to fulfil a desire for group-based recognition and affirmation (see Arends- Tóth & Vijver, 2003; Gündemir, Martin, et al., 2019; Huo et al., 2015; C. S. Ryan et al., 2007, 2010; Verkuyten, 2005; Wolsko et al., 2006).

Importantly however, each diversity approach may not be effective in all contexts (Apfelbaum et al., 2016), nor for all members of a marginalized group (e.g., individuals' responses to a particular diversity approach may differ depending on how strongly they identify with their marginalized group; Kirby, Rego, et al., 2020; Kirby & Kaiser, 2020; for an overview of diversity approaches from targets' perspectives, see Gündemir et al., 2019).

Diversity cues can also have unintended and pernicious consequences. For example, the presence of organizational diversity cues can lead to the *presumption* that those environments and their procedures are generally fair and non-discriminatory – even when there is evidence of bias in the environment (Brady et al., 2015; Dover et al., 2020; Kaiser et al., 2013; Kirby et al., 2015). Thus, going forward, careful assessment of an organization's diversity initiatives – including their potential benefits and pernicious consequences – will be key to advancing our understanding of gender, race, and leadership (also see Caleo & Heilman, 2019; Leslie, 2019).

#### *Overview of Other Strategies.*

Though additional research is needed to fully understand the benefits, limitations, and potential consequences of different strategies, there is some research to build from. Table 1 outlines several strategies proposed and/or tested, with resources for further reading. The strategies are organized into two general types: those that focus on “changing the individual” (e.g., changing individuals' own implicit biases) and those that focus on “changing the environment” *around* the individual (e.g., policies and procedures that limit the capacity for biases and discriminatory behaviors to creep in).

Given the limited testing of these strategies, it is hard to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of each. Still, some appear more promising than others. For example, one-off courses in implicit bias training are popular – implemented in over 8,000 Starbucks stores, for instance (Belluz, 2018). However, the effectiveness of these and other similar awareness-raising interventions appear quite limited (Bezrukova et al., 2016) and may have very little to no actual effect on individuals' tendency to exhibit discriminatory behavior (Forscher et al., 2019). In fact, implicit bias training may cause more harm than good (Payne & Vuletich, 2018; Pritlove et al., 2019). Similarly, campaigns imploring women to “lean in” and overcome their own “internal barriers” (lack of confidence, sense of being an ‘impostor,’ etc.) have become popular (Dickerson, 2019;



Sandberg, 2013). However, these “fix yourself” strategies, often espoused as a method of empowerment, perpetuate victim blaming – reinforcing the belief that the “problem” exists squarely within the individual (a problem of “internal barriers”) and so it is the individual’s responsibility to “fix” themselves; this misses the fact that ill confidence, impostor feelings, and other “internal barriers” often exist because of *external barriers* – exposure to stereotypes and discriminatory treatment – that lead women and other marginalized group members to question their value and worth (Feenstra et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2018).

By comparison, the more effective strategies appear to be those that focus on “changing the environment.” This includes developing systems and policies that increase equity in individuals’ access to mentorship and support, and developing clear and transparent goals for addressing underrepresentation, including through the use of quotas and affirmative action plans (though these strategies can also have certain drawbacks; Kalev et al., 2006; Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018). There also appears to be potential in pairing strategies that “change the environment” with those that aim to “change the individual” directly, especially when those “change the individual” strategies are implemented over long periods of time – not a brief, standalone event – and focus on providing individuals with tools for monitoring and improving their own everyday behavior (e.g., during interracial interactions) – not simply raising awareness about their own biases (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Kalev et al., 2006).

#### *Resources for Implementing Strategies.*

Building from this body of evidence, there are now some empirically-based resources for the use of certain strategies (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020). It is important to recognize, however, that these guidelines remain limited by the availability of evidence, if not also their scope (e.g., focused on improving gender-related discrimination and outcomes, without an equal and integrated consideration of racial dynamics).

Table 1  
*Proposed Strategies for Addressing Issues of Bias, Discrimination and/or Underrepresentation\**

<b>Strategies Focused on ‘Changing the Individual’</b> (incl. the perpetrator or the target of bias/discrimination)	<b>Further reading</b>
Implicit Bias Training & Other Awareness Raising Efforts e.g., education on the benefits of diversity, increasing ‘bias literacy’ (knowledge of extant forms of bias and related processes)	Carnes et al., 2015; Forscher et al., 2019; S. M. Jackson et al., 2014; Payne & Vuletich, 2018; Pritlove et al., 2019
Skills-based Training e.g., how to practice stereotype replacement, perspective taking	Bezrukova et al., 2016; Carnes et al., 2015
‘Lean in’ or ‘Self-Empowerment’ Strategies e.g., encouraging women and other targets of discrimination to be more confident (in line with <i>assimilation</i> approaches)	Kim et al., 2018
<b>Strategies Focused on ‘Changing the Environment’</b>	<b>Further reading</b>
Diversity Messages & Cues e.g., an organization’s ‘diversity statement’	See previous subsection on this topic
Quotas & Affirmative Action	Kalev et al., 2006; Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018; Shaughnessy et al., 2016
Equity-focused Approaches to Recruitment e.g., using gender-fair language in job advertisements	Gaucher et al., 2011; Hentschel et al., 2020; Horvath & Sczesny, 2016; Sczesny et al., 2016
Structured, Transparent, and/or Blind Evaluation Procedures e.g., removing applicant names [signalling gender or race], using pre-set interview questions, using transparent evaluation criteria that are predetermined and pre-weighted in terms of importance	Behaghel et al., 2015; Goldin & Rouse, 2000; Heilman & Caleo, 2018; Johnson & Kirk, 2020; Levashina et al., 2014; Uhlmann & Cohen, 2005
Inclusive and Supportive Family/Care Leave Policies (optional, mandated, and/or [un]paid)	Engen et al., 2012; Gault et al., 2014; Hyde et al., 1996; Vinkenburg et al., 2015; also see Morgenroth & Heilman, 2017; Rudman & Mescher, 2013; Williams et al., 2016
Increased Access to and Support of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs, or affinity groups)	Foldy, 2019; Welbourne et al., 2017; also see Begeny, 2019; Begeny et al., 2021; Begeny & Huo, 2017, 2018; Huo et al., 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2016
Increased Access to Role Models & Other Sources of Support, Guidance	Cheryan et al., 2011; Dennehy & Dasgupta, 2017; French et al., 2018; Morgenroth et al., 2015; Stout et al., 2011
Redefining Prototypes e.g., redefining ‘what it takes’ to be successful, or what ‘the ideal person’ looks like, in a particular role or profession	Danbold & Bendersky, 2018, 2019

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**Changing Stereotype-Laden Climates**

e.g., removing objects, symbols, group practices signalling that the space ‘belongs to’ or is normative for a specific group, such as stereotypically masculine objects or practices signalling that the role or profession is a ‘man’s job’

Cheryan et al., 2009; also see Cheryan et al., 2017; Heilman & Caleo, 2018

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\* While these strategies are conceptually discrete, in practice they may influence one another (e.g., increasing representation of women and racial minorities via quotas may change stereotype-laden climates and group prototypes over time).

### **Conclusions**

Several lines of theory and research demonstrate how, and why, gender and race are intimately connected to the study of leadership. This includes theory and research that help explain who tends to get placed in leadership roles (e.g., men, whites), what individuals’ experiences are like while in those roles (e.g., experiencing disparate pay, glass cliffs), and what barriers they may face on the path to leadership (e.g., discriminatory hiring/promotion practices, biased evaluations of competence, backlash effects, motherhood penalties, inducement of disparate internal states).

Despite this wealth of literature, there is still much to be done in the study of gender, race, and leadership. This includes understanding leadership processes from a more precise, intersectional lens (rather than studying the implications of gender *or* race in isolation). Other relevant social identities also need to be carefully considered (e.g., related to class, religion, sexuality, ability and neurodiversity). Additionally, it will be important to develop effective strategies for addressing the underrepresentation of women, racial minorities, and other social groups in leadership. In part this will mean carefully scrutinizing strategies already being employed (e.g., implicit bias training). Ultimately, tackling issues of discrimination and a lack of diversity in leadership will be key to ensuring that organizations and other groups match the increasingly diverse populations they are embedded in, and embrace the full potential of their group members (both current and prospective). Moreover, tackling issues of discrimination and a lack of diversity in leadership will be essential for addressing broader issues of social inequity.

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