WOMEN *and* LEADERSHIP

DEBORAH L. RHODE

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For Barbara Kellerman

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WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP

1

INTRODUCTION

In the heat of the 2016 presidential campaign, Frank Bruni wrote a *New York Times* op-ed under the title, "If Trump Changed Genders." Bruni concluded the thought experiment with the observation that a "woman with his personal life, public deportment and potty mouth wouldn't last a nanosecond in a political campaign—or for that matter in a boardroom." This campaign speaks volumes about what Bruni called the "utterly and unjustly dissimilar" standards confronting male and female leaders.[1]

Those double standards are longstanding. For most of recorded history, women were largely excluded from leadership positions. A comprehensive review of encyclopedia entries published just after the turn of the twentieth century identified only about 850 eminent women throughout the preceding two thousand years. In rank order, they included queens, politicians, mothers, mistresses, wives, beauties, religious figures, and "women of tragic fate."[2] Few of these women had acquired leadership positions in their own right. Most exercised influence through relationships with men.

Since that publication, we have witnessed a transformation in gender roles. Women now exercise leadership in virtually every part of the private and public sectors. Yet progress is only partial. Despite a half century

of equal opportunity legislation, women's leadership opportunities are far from equal. The most comprehensive survey finds that women occupy less than a fifth of senior leadership positions across the public and private sectors.[3] In politics, women constitute over half the voting public, but only 19 percent of Congress, 12 percent of governors, and 19 percent of mayors of the nation's one hundred largest cities.[4] From a global perspective, the United States ranks ninety-seventh in the world for women's representation in political office, below Slovakia, Bangladesh, and Saudi Arabia.[5] In academia, women account for a majority of college graduates and postgraduate students but only about a quarter of full professors and university presidents.[6] In law, women are almost half of law school graduates but only 18 percent of the equity partners of major firms, and 21 percent of Fortune 500 general counsels.[7] In the nonprofit sector, women constitute three-quarters of staff positions but only a fifth of the leaders of large organizations.[8] In business, women account for a third of MBA graduates, but only 4 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs.[9] At current rates of change, it could take more than a century for women to reach parity in the C suite.[10]

This book seeks to advance our understanding of why women remain so underrepresented in leadership roles, what strategies are most likely to change that fact, and why it matters. The discussion is aimed at several audiences: women interested in leadership positions, organizations interested in increasing their proportion of women leaders, and readers interested in the status of women. To make significant progress, the book argues that we must confront second-generation problems of gender inequality that involve not deliberate discrimination but unconscious bias, in-group favoritism, and inhospitable work-family structures. And it claims that those barriers should be dismantled, both because a just society is committed to equal opportunity and because a competitive economy cannot afford to undervalue half its talent pool.

Unlike much of the popular literature concerning women and leadership, this analysis suggests that the problem cannot be resolved at the individual level; structural and cultural solutions are essential. Although women's choices help account for women's underrepresentation in leadership positions, conventional wisdom too often underestimates the extent to which these choices are socially constructed and constrained.

Because context matters in shaping leadership challenges, constraints, and strategies, subsequent chapters explore in detail the challenges in particular fields.[11] After this overview chapter describes the barriers confronting women in leadership and the societal stakes in addressing them, Chapter 2 reviews obstacles for women in politics and how best to respond. Chapter 3 focuses on women and management, Chapter 4 on women in law, Chapter 5 on women in academia, and Chapter 6 on women on corporate boards. To fill in gaps in the existing research, the discussion draws on data from a survey of approximately a hundred prominent women leaders in academia and the nonprofit sector.[12] To situate the analysis, this introductory chapter explores the rationale for greater gender equity, the reasons for women's underrepresentation in leadership, and the strategies most likely to remedy it.

Equal Opportunity as a Public Good

Women's unequal representation in leadership positions poses multiple concerns. For individual women, the barriers to their advancement compromise fundamental principles of equal opportunity and social justice. These barriers impose organizational costs as well. Women are now a majority of the most well-educated Americans, and a growing share of the talent available for leadership. Organizations that lack a culture of equal opportunity are less able to attract, retain, and motivate the most qualified individuals.[13] Obstacles to women's success also decrease employees' morale, commitment, and retention, and increase the expenses associated with recruiting, training, and mentoring replacements.[14]

A second rationale for ensuring equal access to leadership positions is that women have distinct perspectives and capabilities to contribute. For effective performance in an increasingly competitive and multicultural environment, workplaces need individuals with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and styles of leadership.[15] The point is not that there is some single "woman's point of view," or woman's leadership style, but rather that gender differences matter in ways that should be registered in positions of power.

A wide array of research underscores the value of diversity in leadership contexts. For example, some studies indicate that diverse viewpoints

encourage critical thinking, creative problem solving, and the search for new information; they expand the range of alternatives considered, and counteract "group think."[16] Men's and women's differing knowledge and experience can affect how they seek and evaluate information, which affects their decision-making processes and "collective intelligence."[17] When individuals hear dissent from someone who is different from them, it provokes more thought than when it comes from someone who looks the same.[18]

Some studies also find a correlation between diversity and profitability in law firms as well as in Fortune 500 companies.[19] Having more women in top management is associated with greater market revenue.[20] Of course, correlation does not establish causation. Financial success may do as much to enhance gender equity as gender equity does to enhance financial success. Organizations that are on strong economic footing are better able to invest in diversity initiatives that promote both equity and profitability.[21] But whichever way causation runs, there are strong reasons to support gender equality. Inclusiveness in leadership signals a credible commitment to equal opportunity and responsiveness to diverse perspectives.[22] As subsequent discussion makes clear, many policies that level the playing field for women, such as those involving work-family accommodations, mentoring, and equitable work assignments, are all likely to have other organizational payoffs.

The societal stakes are substantial. More than three-quarters of Americans say that the country has a crisis in leadership, and confidence in leaders has fallen to the lowest level in recent memory.[23] The nation can ill afford to exclude so many talented women from positions of influence, particularly given the growing body of evidence suggesting that women bring distinctive strengths to these roles.

The Difference "Difference" Makes

Assumptions about gender differences in leadership styles and effectiveness are widespread, although as Alice Eagly's pathbreaking work notes, the evidence for such assumptions is weaker than commonly supposed.[24] Reviews of more than forty studies on gender in leadership find many more similarities than differences between male and female

leaders.[25] Not only are those gender differences small, they are smaller than the differences among women.[26] So too, in the Pew Research Center's recent survey on women and leadership, a large majority of the American public sees men and women as similar on key leadership traits such as intelligence, honesty, ambition, decisiveness, and innovation.[27] The main differences that emerged were compassion and organization, and on those traits women were rated as superior to men.[28] The only gender differences that are consistently supported by evidence on performance are that female leaders are more participatory, democratic, and interpersonally sensitive than male leaders.[29] Eagly notes that women "attend more to the individuals they work with by mentoring them and taking their particular situations into account."[30] Leaders interviewed for this book often spoke of being more collaborative than their male counterparts.[31] According to Debora Spar, president of Barnard College, "recent research shows that as women, we are more likely to help out in the workplace . . . [and] that helping behaviors can greatly improve business outcomes."[32]

In effect, women are more likely than men to engage in transformational leadership, which stresses inspiring and enabling followers to contribute to their organization.[33] This approach holds advantages over traditional transactional leadership, which focuses on exchanges between leaders and followers that appeal to followers' self-interest. Women tend to use a transformational style because it relies on skills associated with women, and because more autocratic approaches are viewed as less attractive in women than in men.[34] A transformational style has obvious advantages because it enables women to establish a level of trust and cooperation that is essential to effectiveness. Janet Napolitano, former Arizona governor, cabinet secretary, and currently president of the University of California, notes that one critical leadership characteristic is helping others accomplish their mission: "People need to know you are investing yourself in doing what you need to do so they can succeed. It is a big mistake to parachute in with a prepared plan about who will do what. I've seen guys do this all the time."[35] Although transformational leadership is generally viewed as the most effective approach, it does not fit all organizations.[36] Some highly male-dominated settings invite a top-down style, and women who were firsts

in those settings, such as Margaret Thatcher, Golda Meir, and Indira Gandhi, led in ways that were as commanding as those of men.[37]

Similar points are applicable to gender differences in leadership priorities. Women are particularly likely to cite assisting and empowering others as leadership objectives, along with promoting gender equality.[38] In a 2015 Pew survey, 71 percent of women believed that having more women in top leadership positions in business and government would improve the quality of life for all women.[39] Of course, not all female leaders are advocates on women's issues. Some are at pains to distance themselves from gender concerns. As Marissa Mayer famously put it, "I'm not a girl at Google, I'm a geek at Google."[40] Other women have internalized the values of the culture in which they have succeeded, and have little interest in promoting opportunities that they never had. They have "gotten there the hard way," and they have "given up a lot"; if they managed, so can everyone else.[41] On the whole, however, women's greater commitment to women's issues emerges in a variety of contexts. For example, most evidence indicates that female judges are more supportive than their male colleagues on gender-related issues.[42] And many women judges, both through individual rulings and collective efforts in women's judicial organizations, have addressed women's concerns on matters such as domestic violence, child support, and gender bias training.[43] The same is true of women in management and public service. For some female leaders, their own experiences of discrimination, marginalization, or work-family conflicts leave them with a desire to make life better for their successors.[44] Because these women have bumped up against conventional assumptions and inflexible workplace structures, they can more readily question gender roles that men take for granted.[45] Their perspective deserves a hearing in leadership contexts.

As to leadership effectiveness, most research reveals no significant gender differences. Success in leadership generally requires a combination of traditionally masculine and feminine traits, including vision, ethics, interpersonal skills, technical competence, and personal capabilities such as self-awareness and self-control.[46] Contrary to popular assumptions, large-scale surveys generally find that women perform equally with or slightly outperform men on all but a few measures.[47] One recent study found that women scored higher than men on twelve of sixteen

leadership competencies.[48] Some evidence also suggests that women are less subject than men to the arrogance and overconfidence that contributes to leadership failures, and are better decision makers under stress.[49] Such differences prompted the quip by the International Monetary Fund's managing director, Christine Lagarde, that the global financial crisis would have played out quite differently "if Lehman Brothers had been 'Lehman Sisters.'"[50] However, women cannot be effective unless others accept their leadership—and context matters. One meta-analysis found that men's effectiveness as leaders surpassed women's in roles that were male-dominated, but that women's effectiveness surpassed men's in roles that were less masculine.[51]

Taken as a whole, these findings on gender differences should come as no surprise. Gender socialization and stereotypes play an obvious role; they push women to behave in ways that are consistent with traditional notions of femininity. Yet these differences in leadership contexts are generally small because advancement often requires conformity to accepted images of leadership. And some traditional differences have been blurred by recent trends in leadership development, which have encouraged both sexes to adopt more collaborative, interpersonally sensitive approaches.[52] It is also unsurprising that some studies find superior performance by women leaders, given the hurdles that they have had to surmount to reach upper-level positions and the pressures that they have faced to exceed expectations.[53] To the extent that female leaders gravitate toward a collaborative, interpersonally sensitive approach, it is because that style proves an asset in most leadership settings. Whatever else can be inferred from this research, it is clear that a society can ill afford to exclude so many talented women from its leadership ranks.

Women's Underrepresentation and Women's Choices

What accounts for this underrepresentation of women in leadership roles? One common explanation involves women's choices. As Sheryl Sandberg has famously put it, not enough women "lean in."[54] In a widely cited cover story in the *New York Times Magazine,* Lisa Belkin claimed that women's underrepresentation is less because "the workplace has failed women" than because "women are rejecting the workplace." "Why

don't women run the world?" asked Belkin. "Maybe it's because they don't want to."[55] Harvard professor Barbara Kellerman similarly raises the possibility that many women "do not want, or at least they do not badly want what men have . . . Work at the top of the greasy pole takes time, saps energy, and is usually all-consuming. Maybe the women's values are different from men's values. Maybe the trade-offs [that] high positions entail are ones that many women do not want to make."[56]

Such observations capture a partial truth. Women, including those with leadership credentials, do on average make different choices from men. In a 2015 study by McKinsey & Company and Leanin .org of nearly thirty thousand workers, 54 percent of men but only 43 percent of women wanted to be a top executive.[57] In a 2015 *Time* magazine poll, only 38 percent of women, compared with 51 percent of men, described themselves as very or extremely ambitious.[58] Another 2015 study by Harvard Business School researchers found that compared to men, women had more life goals, placed less importance on power, associated more negative outcomes with high-power positions, and were less likely to take advantage of opportunities for professional advancement.[59]

More women than men also cut back on paid employment for at least some period. In a study by the Center for Work-Life Policy of some three thousand high-achieving American women and men (defined as those with graduate or professional degrees or high-honors undergraduate degrees), nearly four in ten women reported leaving the workforce voluntarily at some point over their career. The same proportion chose a job with lesser compensation and fewer responsibilities than they were qualified to assume, in order to accommodate family responsibilities. By contrast, only one in ten men left the workforce primarily for family-related reasons.[60] Although other surveys vary in the number of women who opt out to accommodate domestic obligations, all of these studies find substantial gender differences.[61] Almost 20 percent of women with graduate or professional degrees are not in the labor force, compared with only 5 percent of similarly credentialed men. One in three women with MBAs are not working full-time, compared with one in twenty men.[62] The overwhelming majority of these women do, however, want to return to work, and most do so, although generally not without significant career costs and difficulties.[63] Increasing numbers of women appear ready to make

that sacrifice. More married millennial women (42 percent) planned to interrupt their careers than baby boomers (17 percent).[64]

Yet women's choices are an incomplete explanation of women's underrepresentation in leadership positions. Most surveys of men and women in comparable jobs find that they desire leadership opportunities equally.[65] In one recent study, almost the same percentage of mid- or senior-level women wanted to reach top management as men (79 vs. 81 percent).[66] Moreover, to blame women's choices for women's underrepresentation ignores the extent to which those choices are socially constructed and constrained. Before they have substantial caretaking responsibilities, women are not significantly less ambitious than men. In a recent study of Harvard MBA graduates, women's career aspirations did not substantially differ from men's.[67] Pew survey data found that more women than men age eighteen to thirty-four say that having a successful, high-paying career is very important or the most important thing in their lives.[68] In a McKinsey survey of workers age twenty-three to thirty-four, 92 percent of women and 98 percent of men expressed a desire to advance professionally. But by middle age, only 64 percent of women, compared with 78 percent of men, expressed such a desire.[69] Similarly, a Bain & Company survey of one thousand women and men in a mix of American companies found that women started out with slightly more ambition than men, but for those with more than two years on the job, aspiration and confidence among the female workers plummeted.[70]

What happens in the intervening years is often a combination of women's disproportionate family responsibilities and a workplace unwilling to accommodate them. In the Harvard study, many women who expected to have careers of equal priority with their spouses, and to share child care responsibilities equally, ended up with less egalitarian arrangements.[71] Yet even for Harvard MBAs, differences in family arrangements and the extent of labor force participation did not explain women's lower number of leadership positions compared to men.[72] Only 11 percent were full-time stay-at-home parents.[73] And even the women who did leave their jobs after becoming mothers did so "reluctantly and as a last resort, because they [found] . . . themselves in unfulfilling roles with dim prospects for advancement."[74]

One woman's experience was typical: she quit after being "mommy tracked" when she came back from maternity leave.[75] As Anne-Marie Slaughter notes, "Plenty of women have leaned in for all they're worth but still run up against insuperable obstacles created by the combination of unpredictable life circumstances and the rigid inflexibilities of our workplaces, the lack of a public infrastructure of care, and cultural attitudes that devalue them the minute they step out or even just lean back from the workplace."[76] Explanations that focus solely on women's choices obscure the influence of men's choices as husbands, policy leaders, and managers. As subsequent discussion indicates, if women aren't choosing to run the world, it may in part be because men aren't choosing to share equally in running the household.

Gender Bias

> Men are too aggressive when they bomb countries. Women are too aggressive when they put you on hold on the phone.
>
> —Laura Liswood [77]

One of the most intractable barriers to women's advancement is the mismatch between the qualities associated with leadership and the qualities associated with women. Most of the traits that people attribute to leaders are those traditionally viewed as masculine: dominance, authority, assertiveness.[78] These do not seem attractive in women.[79] Four fifths of Americans think decisiveness is essential for leaders, and over a quarter believe that women are less decisive than men (a belief unsupported by research).[80] Although some evidence suggests that these stereotypes are weakening, people still more readily accept men as leaders.[81] Women, particularly women of color, are often thought to lack "executive presence." In studies where people see a man seated at the head of a table for a meeting, they typically assume that he is the leader. They do not make the same assumption when a woman is in that seat.[82]

Most individuals prefer a male to a female boss.[83] In one study, not a single legal secretary preferred working with female attorneys over their male counterparts. Half preferred working with men. Some believed that

female lawyers were harder on their female assistants because these lawyers "feel they have something to prove to everyone."[84] Women often internalize these cultural biases, which diminishes their sense of themselves as leaders and their aspirations to positions of influence.[85] Women underestimate (while men overestimate) their leadership abilities compared to ratings received from colleagues, subordinates, and supervisors.[86]

Women who do seek leadership positions are subject to double standards and double binds. What is assertive in a man seems abrasive in a woman, and female employees risk seeming too feminine, or not feminine enough. On the one hand, they may appear too "soft"—unable or unwilling to make the tough calls required in positions of greatest influence. On the other hand, those who mimic the "male model" are often viewed as strident and overly aggressive.[87] In the words of a Catalyst research report, this competence-likeability trade-off means that women are " 'damned if they do and doomed if they don't' meet gender-stereotypic expectations."[88] An overview of more than a hundred studies finds that women are rated lower as leaders when they adopt authoritative, traditionally masculine styles, particularly when the evaluators are men, or when the role is one typically occupied by men.[89] Autocratic or power-seeking behavior that is acceptable in men is penalized in women.[90] Female supervisors also are disliked more than male supervisors for giving negative feedback.[91] Women who come on too strong evoke labels such as "bitch," "ice queen," and "iron maiden."[92]

The intersection of racial and gender stereotypes compounds the problem. As one Asian woman explained, "I am frequently perceived as being very demure and passive and quiet, even though I rarely fit any of those categories. When I successfully overcome those misperceptions, I am often thrown into the 'dragon lady' category. It is almost impossible to be perceived as a balanced and appropriately aggressive lawyer."[93] This double bind was apparent in the unsuccessful 2015 lawsuit brought by Ellen Pao against a leading Silicon Valley venture capital firm. Pao was faulted both for being too "passive and reticent" in board meetings, and for speaking up, demanding credit, and "always positioning" herself.[94] Such assertiveness was not viewed as disabling in a male colleague who was promoted. As she testified at trial, "The frustration I have is that behaviors that were acceptable by men were not acceptable by women."[95]

Attitudes toward self-promotion and negotiation reflect a related mismatch between stereotypes associated with leadership and with femininity. Women are expected to be nurturing, not self-serving, and entrepreneurial behaviors viewed as appropriate in men often seem distasteful in women.[96] Self-promoting behaviors provoke backlash.[97] They appear "tacky and shameless" and "leave a bad taste in people's mouth."[98] Women are also penalized more than men for attempting to negotiate favorable employment treatment.[99] The result is to discourage women from engaging in conduct that is useful in obtaining leadership opportunities.[100] In effect, women face trade-offs that men do not. Aspiring female leaders may be liked but not respected, or respected but not liked, in settings that require individuals to be both in order to succeed.[101]

Many women also internalize these stereotypes, which creates a psychological glass ceiling. On average, women appear less willing to engage in self-promoting or assertive behaviors.[102] And as one comprehensive overview of gender in negotiations puts it, "Women don't ask."[103] Numerous studies have found that women negotiate less assertively on their own behalf.[104] An unwillingness to seem too "pushy" or "difficult," and an undervaluation of their own worth, often deters women from bargaining effectively for what they want or need.[105] In workplace settings, the result is that female employees are less likely than their male colleagues to gain the assignments, positions, and support necessary to advance. A wide array of evidence also documents the effects of what psychologists label "stereotype threat." Awareness that others are evaluating them based on stereotypes can focus individuals' attention on the negative aspects of those stereotypes and undermine achievement.[106]

So too, despite recent progress, women, particularly women of color, often lack the presumption of competence enjoyed by white men, and must work harder to achieve the same results.[107] In one Gallup poll, only 45 percent of women believed that the sexes have equal job opportunities; in a 2015 Pew survey, four in ten Americans thought that women seeking to climb the ladder in business or politics have to do more than their male counterparts to prove themselves.[108] Leaders interviewed for this book often offered variations on the quip that women have to "work twice as hard to get half as far."[109] Research confirms what these perceptions suggest. Studies in which participants evaluated job applications

that were the same except that some had female names and others had male names find that men are preferred for masculine and gender-neutral jobs, women for feminine jobs such as secretary.[110] The role of bias in orchestra auditions became apparent when screens were introduced to shield the identity of musicians; women's success rate after that change rose by 50 percent.[111]

Women's work is also held to higher standards than men's.[112] In one study, half of participants evaluated the resumes of a female applicant with more education and a male applicant with more work experience, and the other half evaluated a male applicant with more education and a female applicant with more work experience. Participants gave less weight to whichever credential the female applicant had.[113] To overcome these presumptions, people must receive clear and unambiguous evidence of a woman's substantial superiority over men before judging the woman to be better at a task.[114] So too, male achievements are more likely to be attributed to individual capabilities such as intelligence, drive, and commitment, and female achievements are more often attributed to external factors such as chance or preferential treatment, a pattern that social scientists label "he's skilled, she's lucky."[115] In a recent example, a *New York Times* profile of Sheryl Sandberg wrote that "everyone agrees she is wickedly smart. But she has also been lucky."[116] The more subjective the standard for assessing qualifications, the harder it is to detect such biases. Because subjective criteria are particularly significant in upper-level positions, women are particularly likely to be underrepresented at the top. Gender stereotypes are especially strong when women's representation does not exceed a token level, and too few counterexamples are present to challenge conventional assumptions.[117] In contexts where men can be promoted based on potential, women must show performance.[118] They are also more likely than men to be punished for mistakes, which may discourage them from taking risks that would demonstrate leadership abilities.[119]

Women of color are particularly likely to have their competence questioned and their authority resisted, resented, undermined, or ignored.[120] In one Catalyst survey, 56 percent of African Americans, 46 percent of Asians, and 37 percent of Latinas believed that racial or

ethnic stereotypes existed at their organization.[121] Sixty-six percent of African American women, and 40 percent of Asians and Latinas, believed that diversity policies have failed to address racial bias, and a wide array of research finds a basis for this perception.[122] In one study involving identical resumes, an applicant named Lakisha was less likely to get callbacks for interviews than an applicant named Emily.[123] Lakisha had to have eight additional years of experience in order to get the same number of callbacks as Emily.[124] Another study found that whites are judged as being more effective leaders and as possessing more leadership potential than individuals of color.[125] A common assumption is that women of color are the beneficiaries of affirmative action rather than merit selection.[126] So too, black women are rated more harshly when things go awry than either black men or white women.[127] Asian American women are thought to be too demure and submissive to exert leadership authority.[128] Backhanded compliments speak volumes about the lingering effects of racial assumptions. One black woman was told that she spoke so well that no one would have known that she was African American.[129] Latinas report similar experience with their competence being questioned, or being greeted with surprise. One recalled a colleague who "went on and on about how authoritative and articulate I was at a meeting. It was the funniest thing, and I mean funny in a sad, sad way."[130]

Many women report such "microindignities" or "microaggressions," the terms that researchers use to describe commonplace behaviors, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate "hostile, derogatory or negative... slights and insults."[131] The cumulative effect of these incidents is to lower self-esteem, increase frustration, and compromise morale.[132] Janet Napolitano recalls a typical example. In an out-of-court legal proceeding, the opposing lawyer "was being very dismissive and condescending, and at one point said something like, 'Well, little girl, that's not a real objection.' "[133] Targets of such indignities often face a catch-22 in determining whether to respond. If they object, they may be seen as confrontational and overly sensitive; if they remain silent, they may experience guilt and resentment. African Americans are particularly wary of the need to avoid being seen as an "angry black woman."

Devaluation of women's competence is also particularly pronounced for mothers. Having children makes women, but not men, appear less qualified and less available to meet workplace responsibilities. In one experimental setting, a consultant who was described as a mother was rated as less competent than a consultant described as not having children.[134] In a related study, subjects evaluated applications from equally qualified candidates who differed only in parental status. Mothers were penalized on a host of measures, including perceived competence, commitment, and starting salary. Fathers suffered no penalty and on some measures benefited from parental status.[135] When résumés were sent to employers who advertised job openings, mothers were called back half as often as childless women.[136] Even when mothers were described as exceptional performers, they were rated lower in likeability, which produced fewer job offers.[137] Like mothers, pregnant women are often viewed as ill-suited for managerial positions.[138] It is revealing that the term "working" is rarely used and carries none of the adverse connotations of working mother.

Other cognitive biases compound the force of these traditional stereotypes. People tend to notice and recall information that confirms their prior assumptions; they filter out information that contradicts those assumptions.[139] For example, when employers assume that a working mother is unlikely to be fully committed to her career, they more easily remember the times when she left early than the times when she stayed late. So too, those who assume that women of color are beneficiaries of preferential treatment, not merit-based selection, will recall their errors more readily than their insights. Similar distortions stem from what psychologists label a "just world" bias.[140] People want to believe that individuals generally get what they deserve and deserve what they get. To sustain this belief, people will adjust their evaluations of performance to match observed outcomes. If women, particularly women of color, are underrepresented in positions of prominence, the most psychologically convenient explanation is that they lack the necessary qualifications or commitment. These perceptions can, in turn, prevent women from getting assignments that would demonstrate their capabilities, and a cycle of self-fulfilling predictions results.[141]