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# Women and Women of Color in Leadership

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## *Complexity, Identity, and Intersectionality*

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*This article describes the challenges that women and women of color face in their quest to achieve and perform in leadership roles in work settings. We discuss the barriers that women encounter and specifically address the dimensions of gender and race and their impact on leadership. We identify the factors associated with gender evaluations of leaders and the stereotypes and other challenges faced by White women and women of color. We use ideas concerning identity and the intersection of multiple identities to understand the way in which gender mediates and shapes the experience of women in the workplace. We conclude with suggestions for research and theory development that may more fully capture the complex experience of women who serve as leaders.*

**Keywords:** intersectionality, labyrinth, gendered racism, glass ceiling, stereotype threat

**T**iger Woods refers to his race as “Cablinasian,” which combines Caucasian, Black, Native American (Indian), and Asian origins; specifically, he is one quarter Chinese, one quarter Thai, one quarter Black, one eighth Native American, and one eighth Dutch. This heritage illustrates how multiple racial and ethnic origins can exert a complex influence to create multiple identities. Moreover, his Black facial features influence others to perceive and treat him only as Black. For example, he was once kept from playing at a golf course in Georgia because he was treated as Black, although he is only one quarter Black. So despite the existence of multiple origins and identities, others often react to only a set of these identities, quite often the aspects of identity that are most visible and are situationally and culturally salient. Given the history of the “one drop” rule during the time of slavery in America, the Black identity will be emphasized by many, which will lead to discrimination. The one drop rule posits that having as little as one drop of blood from a Black or African American ancestor makes one a member of this race (Sweet, 2005).

The example of Tiger Woods illustrates several important issues relevant to women leaders. First, as a man, he has been active in searching for descriptors of his race, and he has been unwilling to let society define who he is. Second, he has acknowledged his multiple identities and emphasized their collective importance by creating a word that includes all of his racial backgrounds. Third, despite the diversity of his background and his history of athletic

achievement, people often respond to him on the basis of only one of his identities, the Black identity. The recent election of President Barack Obama and the manner in which many pundits reacted exclusively to the Black portion of his identity demonstrate that this phenomenon is not unique. Unfortunately, we could not find any multiracial women who have achieved the high levels of recognizability of Tiger Woods and President Barack Obama, so we have used men to illustrate how biracial or multiple-race individuals have been treated.

In this article, we discuss how ideas concerning gender, race, multiple identities, and the intersection of multiple identities—intersectionality—can help in understanding the unique challenges faced by women, and especially women of color, who aspire to positions of leadership. We focus on the perceptions that others may have of these women as they strive to reach leadership positions. We conclude our analysis with recommendations for future research and theory development.

## **Women and Women of Color in Leadership**

Leadership has been defined in many ways, with differences in the definitions often reflecting the professional and personal orientations of the definers. Most definitions have in common a focus on a process of interpersonal influence that uses power and authority to encourage others to act to achieve goals (Yukl, 2009). Although men and leadership have been studied extensively, women, especially women of color, have been largely ignored in this research and theory development until recently (Chemers, 1997). Popular textbooks on leadership, such as that by Yukl (2009), may devote a few pages to research examining women in leadership roles but ignore the influence of race and ethnicity.

A current problem is how to expand the number of women and women of color in leadership positions. Increasing the number of women leaders is important for

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reasons beyond political correctness. At this time, the United States is not producing enough leaders to meet organizational demands, a shortage that is likely to become more acute with the upcoming retirement of the baby boomers (Harris, Moran, & Moran, 2004; Treverton & Bikson, 2003). Women leaders can fill this void. Women comprise 51% of the labor force and provide a significant pool of potential leaders (Catalyst, 2005). Women predominate in lower level managerial ranks and are only marginally represented at the executive levels. Yet research and anecdotal reports suggest that women are highly suited for more advanced leadership positions (Catalyst, 2005; Richardson & Loubier, 2008).

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2007) reported the following percentages of women in managerial positions by ethnicity: Whites, 39%; African Americans, 31%; Asians, 46%; and Latinas, 22%. Currently, women fill only 2.5% of top offices (Catalyst, 2006). It also must be noted that Native American women are rarely mentioned in the leadership literature, as their numbers are so slight (Muller, 1998). Women accounted for only 14.7% of Fortune 500 board seats in 2005; of these positions, 79% were held by White women, and 21% were held by women of color (Catalyst, 2006). Women occupy only 24 (2.4%) of the CEO positions in the Fortune 1000 (Catalyst, 2006). This proportion has remained stable in the past decade, although the situation may slowly be changing (Ragins, Townsend, & Mattis, 1998).

### **Barriers to the Advancement of Women Leaders**

Different terms have been used to characterize this slow advance of women leaders. Some call this barrier a *glass ceiling* (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). Others highlight

thicker barriers posed by the racism combined with sexism that women of color encounter, using terms such as *concrete wall* or *sticky floor* (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Better-Reed & Moore, 1995). More recently, the term *labyrinth* has been used to describe the uneven path of upward progression for women in organizations (Eagly & Carli, 2007). This trajectory involves diverse challenges, indirect forays, and ventures into foreign territory rather than following a straight line to the top. Women can achieve leadership positions but only by carefully traversing complex paths as they confront issues associated with child care needs, racism, sexism, and discrimination on the basis of identity.

Eagly and Carli (2007) asserted that to successfully negotiate the labyrinth, women are required to demonstrate both agentic and communal skills as well as create social capital. They often must combine assertive agency with the communal qualities of kindness, niceness, and helpfulness. The skill of creating social capital is derived from interacting with colleagues and establishing positive relationships. Women must participate in networking with both other women and men. Mentoring is the final requirement for developing social capital. A mentoring relationship can offer encouragement, acceptance, and friendship, which are key to achieving corporate success (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Barriers do not disappear for women after they reach the top. Haslam and Ryan (2008) examined the types of jobs that women are given when they are senior leaders. These authors observed that women are likely to find themselves dealing with situations that have high risk and that can potentially set them up for failure. Hence they are placed on *glass cliffs* (Hewlett et al., 2008). Hewlett and colleagues observed that many companies appoint a woman to the board after the firm experiences poor performance. Women then are blamed for the firm's decline, which was actually set in motion before they joined the company. Although men are also placed in challenging situations, women, and especially women of color, are typically more isolated, without mentors or a network of support, and are less able to garner the help that they might need when facing extraordinary challenges (Haslam & Ryan, 2008).

### **Gender and Race in Leadership**

Early research on leadership ignored the role of demographic differences such as gender and race, in part because it was largely conducted by White male researchers who were mostly uninterested in such differences. There was also a presumption of gender and racial equality in leadership (Chemers, 1997). This neglect is starting to be addressed with greater attention to the influence of gender and race differences in leadership (e.g., Chin, Lott, Rice, & Sanchez-Hucles, 2007; Eagly, 2007; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007).

Eagly and Carli (2007) asserted that there is a gender bias that exists such that men are associated with being leaders because they more commonly demonstrate assertive masculine traits that connote leadership, such as dominance, whereas women are less apt to be perceived as



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leaders because they are more likely to demonstrate communal qualities such as compassion. The male style of leadership has been deemed to consist of “command and control,” whereas the female style is viewed as “facilitative and collaborative.” Both forms of leadership are important. Many agree that a range of leadership styles is needed, yet women are often expected to lead within a narrow band described as the small range between not too wimpy and not too bitchy (Bronznick & Goldenhar, 2008)—a Procrustean compromise that does not promote their leadership potential. Fletcher (2004) has noted the paradox that women are celebrated for demonstrating a new model of leadership but that they gain little from the celebration. One solution to the problem posed by the circumscribed role for women in leadership is for women to exercise a range of leadership styles. The second solution is to increase the number of women leaders so that the association of leadership style with gender is neutralized (Bronznick & Goldenhar, 2008).

The situation facing women of color is more complex than that faced by White women. Chief among the causes of additional complexity is the manner in which sexism has been emphasized without consideration of other forms of discrimination. White females, who share the same skin color as most male leaders, can more easily focus exclusively on gender discrimination and may overlook the influence of race and ethnicity on perceptions of leadership (Suyemoto & Ballou, 2007). Women of color can also face “gendered racism” when they are unable to separate the individual effects of each aspect of their identities (Blake, 1999). A woman who feels that she is experiencing discrimination must decide if this prejudice is due to race, ethnicity, gender, or some other dimension of her identity. If the woman is disabled or lesbian, the cause of discrim-

ination becomes even more complex (Bowleg, 2008). As a result of such complex attributions, women may be unsure of which aspects of their identities are responsible for the reactions of others and, as a result, may have difficulty determining an appropriate response. Women who have experienced oppression that is due to multiple aspects of their identities carry the burden of complex construals about self that more privileged women do not need to bear. If a woman of color believes that she is experiencing discrimination, she must document and identify the specific form of discrimination (gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation) in order to pursue legal redress. White women can afford to focus on gender differences, whereas women of color must often focus on all of the areas of minority difference for them and how these sources of identity influence their struggle to achieve success and feel comfortable in majority-dominated organizations (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Blake, 1999; Sanchez-Hucles & Sanchez, 2007).

Women of color face additional forms of discrimination in the workplace that White women may escape. Women of color receive lower pay than White men and women as well as men of color, and they must learn to maintain a positive self-image when confronted with “micro aggressions” that could halt promotions, mentoring, and success (Holvino & Blake-Beard, 2004). African American, Asian American, and Latino men and women are more likely to experience covert discrimination and subtle prejudice and to be forced into outgroup status and experience occupational segregation as a result, but women of color also carry the burden of racism and sexism combined (Browne & Askew, 2006; Combs, 2003; Hyun, 2005; Leung & Gupta, 2007).

### ***Underrepresentation of Women of Color in Leadership***

The number of racially and ethnically diverse leaders has increased, but such leaders are still underrepresented (Sanchez-Hucles & Sanchez, 2007). Some of the reasons given for the slow progress of women of color in leadership include lack of line experience, inadequate career opportunities, racial differences in speech and socialization, ethnosexual stereotypes, “old boy networks,” and tokenism (Oakley, 2000). Another reason for the slow advancement of women of color is the use of female stereotypes by male managers (Wellington, Kropf, & Gerkovich, 2003). Stereotypes can affect self-perceptions as well as the perceptions of others. The popular culture and the media perpetuate stereotypes of women of color that can make it difficult for them to be perceived as effective leaders. African women have been viewed as “Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel” (West, 1995), and Asian women as mail order brides (Robinson, 1996).

Women leaders cite stereotyping as a significant barrier to advancement; these stereotypes are especially problematic for racially and ethnically diverse women (Catalyst, 2005). Specifically, aversive racism or individuals’ subconscious feelings of prejudice can alter how individuals relate to women and minorities and who they recom-

mend for leadership roles in the business world (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). Madden (2005) noted that the intersection of race with leadership leads to racial and sexual stereotyping, token status, inaccurate assessment of work productivity, and unrealistic expectations that mitigate against the attainment of higher level positions.

Stereotypes can affect women and women of color in leadership roles because of their influence on perceptions and their elicitation of stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Stereotype threat occurs when one cares about a domain (e.g., one wishes to be an effective leader), one knows that a stereotype about the group of which one is a member can provide an explanation for poor performance in this domain (e.g., women are expected by others to be less effective as leaders), and this stereotype is made salient in a situation requiring performance (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Stereotype threat is more likely with difficult tasks, when ability is evaluated, when a stereotype relates to performance, and when individuals are highly identified with the task. Stereotype threat effects have been demonstrated for race/ethnicity (Steele & Aronson, 1995), social class (Croizet & Claire, 1998), and gender (Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999). Stereotypes do not have to be explicitly induced; simply being in the numerical minority may create a heightened sense of group identity, and stereotype threat may operate if negative stereotypes are associated with that group identity. Performance in mathematics was shown to decline for women in groups in which they represented a token minority; performance declined as the proportion of men in the group increased (Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev, 2003). Performance of women can be reduced even with subliminal priming of stereotypes (Ambady, Paik, Steele, Owen-Smith, & Mitchell, 2004). Stereotype threat may exert a significant influence on the number of women and minorities in leadership, although little research has examined the influence of stereotype threat in the workplace and disagreement exists about the interpretation of these research findings (Sackett, Schmitt, Ellingson, & Kabin, 2001; Steele & Davies, 2003).

Stereotype threat interacts with identity. The impact of stereotype threat may be mitigated by racial identity in that stereotype threats may exert a weaker effect on those who possess strong racial identities (Davis, Aronson, & Salinas, 2006). It seems clear that different aspects of identity are differentially influenced by stereotypes. Moreover, stereotypes of White women are focused less around individual identity and more around skills, whereas women of color face stereotypes first about identity (Brown, 2007). Women and members of racial minorities confront negative stereotypes, but gender and racial stereotypes may produce main effects that may interact and produce further negative effects (Bowleg, 2008). We discuss below how the interaction among multiple sources of identity may exert a powerful influence on the way that women experience the workplace.

African American women may experience greater negative stereotypes as a result of the combined effect of being female and African American (Hoyt, 2007). African American women experience lower promotion rates, more

occupational job segregation, pressures to modify sex and occupational roles, different predictors for advancement than African American men, early pressures to work, and negative career expectancies due to racism and sexism (Combs, 2003). African American women are more likely to experience unfair treatment in training and advancement, disengagement, discrimination, prejudice, and lack of psychosocial and instrumental support (Bova, 2000). These work experiences reduce access to professional networks for African American women leaders.

Besides the influence of stereotypes, women of color in leadership positions face different hurdles than those faced by White women leaders (Parker & Ogilvie, 1996). For instance, White men, who typically hold the highest positions of leadership in organizations, report more acceptance of White women than African American women (Golden, 2002). African American women are also clustered in staff rather than line positions and are therefore unable to gain the valuable line experience that is often required for career advancement (Combs, 2003). Location in the lower ranks of organizations also segregates many African American women and limits their access to individuals who could promote their career advancement. These barriers restrict access to both formal and informal paths to promotion (Cohen, 2002; Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, & King, 2002).

Limited access to informal networks of influence may help to explain why few women of color advance to higher levels; these networks are often vital to career progression (Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 1998). Both sexism and racism may restrict opportunities for African American women leaders. African American women are too different from White women to benefit from their shared gendered status and too different from Black men to benefit from their shared race. Hence, women of color who strive for leadership positions are different even from others who are also different—White women and African American men (Combs, 2003).

Women of color in leadership roles may therefore experience triple jeopardy because of the multiple stereotypes associated with gender, race, and ethnicity that they trigger in others (Sanchez-Hucles & Sanchez, 2007). They are required to display leadership competence while simultaneously conforming to European American prototypes representing traditional ethnic, racial, and gender behavior. But women of color can come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. For example, Black women may identify as African, Caribbean, Spanish, African American, or some combination of those identities; they may speak English, Spanish, Portuguese, or French. Moreover, the style of influence used by women with such complex ethnic and racial backgrounds may reflect self-confidence, independence, direct communication, and use of “strong” influence strategies that are different from those displayed by women of European backgrounds (Parker & Ogilvie, 1996).

Leaders sharing diverse cultural backgrounds must also contend with negative stereotyping (Ferdman & Cortes, 1992; Fernandez, 1981). Studies of Latino, Latina, and Asian leaders show that these individuals are also

likely to be excluded from informal networks of influence and must contend with negative stereotypes (Ferdman & Cortes, 1992; Fernandez, 1981). In recent years, Latinas have become more active in leadership roles; they actually wield more power than Latino men in professional and managerial positions held and exceed them in educational attainment (Research and Markets, 2005). Despite the growth in the numbers of Latina professionals and Latinas running business ventures, these women are often excluded from board memberships and the executive offices of major companies (Floyd, 2003).

Asian Americans have a higher degree of academic and economic success compared with the general population. Their success is often emphasized to suggest that they have not experienced discrimination. But Asian Americans are frequently stereotyped as intelligent and diligent, which are positive leadership traits, as well as passive and reserved, which are not considered “managerial” (Fernandez, 1991). Asian Americans are more likely to be university graduates, yet they typically “overqualify” for management positions, which suggests the existence of a “bamboo ceiling” (Hyun, 2005). Asian culture, because of the influence of Confucianism, emphasizes modesty, humility, and harmony rather than self-promotion, self-assertion, and willingness to provoke conflict in pursuit of one’s goals, values that are more commonly rewarded in American organizations. Asian women who try to act in a manner consistent with the American values of self-promotion and self-assertion are likely to be perceived more negatively than White women of European ancestry because their behavior will be more divergent from expectations based on stereotypes (see Eagly & Karau, 2001).

Turner (2002), in a study of academic leaders, highlighted many of the special challenges faced by women of color. As leaders, these women report being more visible, yet they feel “socially invisible”; they feel greater pressure to conform and make fewer mistakes. They report greater isolation and difficulty being perceived as credible, they state they have limited power, and they have fewer opportunities for sponsorship by senior managers in their organizations. They face misperceptions of their identities and roles, experience greater stereotyping, and endure more stress. The picture is quite different for White women, who are more likely to be seen as members of the dominant group, to be selected for sponsorship, and to be supported for higher level positions. These findings support the assertion that the gains achieved by White women have not been reflected in similar gains for women of color.

Research confirms that female leadership styles have had positive outcomes for organizations with respect to communications, negotiations, structure, and authority (Oakley, 2000). In addition, women are most at risk for stereotyping when they serve in small numbers and when they comprise 15% to 25% of a management level (Gardiner & Tiggemann, 1999). As larger numbers of women move into management, and the proportion of women exceeds 25%, the evaluative norms are expected to change from distinguishing between male and female managers to simply accepting women as managers (Jamieson,

1995; Kephart & Schumacher, 2005; van der Boon, 2003). There has not been any conclusive research supporting the superiority of either male or female leadership styles (Eagly, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Richardson & Loubier, 2008). In the next section, we explore how features of identity such as gender, ethnicity, and race may interact to influence leadership.

## Identity and Leadership

Identity is the aspect of self that stands in relationship to social groups or categories of which an individual is a member (Frable, 1997). Salient features of identity associated with social groups in organizations include gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and disability. These groups are salient in part because legislation, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990, forbids discrimination against members of these groups in employment decisions such as selection and promotion and provides significant financial penalties for such discrimination. Other group memberships such as those based on sexual preference and social class may also exert important influences, although members of these groups do not typically benefit from legal protection (Frable, 1997).

Leadership and identity are closely linked (Hogg, 2001; Hogg & Terry, 2000; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2005). Identity is formed, in part, through interaction with others. In the workplace, informal and formal interaction with coworkers and managers over time shapes identity and reveals perceptions and expectations of others. Because leadership is a social process, the formation of self-identity, social identity, group identity, and gender and ethnic differences may be particularly important (Lord & Brown, 2004; Lord, Brown, & Freiberg, 1999). Leaders play a pivotal role in this process because they convey role expectations and reward performance that fulfills these expectations as well as shape the self-concepts of followers (Lord & Brown, 2004; Lord et al., 1999).

## Multiple Identities and Intersectionality

The intersectionality movement has developed over 30 years (Shields, 2008) and has been fed by the civil rights, antiracism, disability rights, and environmental movements as well as by peace initiatives and quests for indigenous self-determination (Morris & Bunjun, 2007). Activists and thinkers who were members of these multiple movements have pointed out that their concerns and perspectives tended to be excluded by White feminists. It was the women of the Black feminist movement in the United States who first charged that their story was not reflected in the experiences of White, able-bodied, middle-class, heterosexual women (Collins, 1998, 1999). Women of color were overlooked in the initial discussions of feminism, and they asserted that research in this area should explicitly discuss how social positions and group membership change experiences of social identity (Shields, 2008). Other women of color also protested in concert with women with

disabilities, women with mental health issues, and women who were lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and intersexual, who fought on behalf of the woman's movement without recognition (Morris & Bunjun, 2007). These protests forged a more inclusive feminist movement as researchers added models of marginalized status (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008) and began to add transformative research on intersectional identities in relation to one another (Crenshaw, 2000). This research incorporates multiple axes of oppression that challenge the whiteness of women, the maleness of all people of color, and the heterosexuality of all (Risman, 2004).

Also relevant to organizations and leadership is the complexity associated with the intersection of the multiple identities that result from identification with more than one salient social group, as noted earlier. Cross-cultural psychologists have long been aware that socialization in more than one culture (being bicultural or multicultural) changes a wide variety of fundamental psychological processes such as perception, personality, cognition, attributions, social interaction, and identity formation (Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002; Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000; Kim, 2007; LaFramboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; Vera & Quintana, 2004). Bowleg (2008) showed how gender, race, and sexual preference aspects of identity may combine in complex ways.

Research has historically focused on only one aspect of the lives of women leaders. But simple categorizations along a single dimension do not capture the dynamics of women's experiences. For the past several years, there has been greater focus on the complexity associated with multiple and diverse identities and how they can pose barriers and challenges at work. Most research to date on leadership has focused singly on gender or racial/ethnic differences and paid little attention to investigating them in combination (Holvino & Blake-Beard, 2004). Historically, research tends to pathologize some categories of people, such as those with "diverse sexual orientation," as though the people who identify in this manner have a problem. Instead, researchers should focus on the systems that have produced hardship and discrimination for such people (Richardson & Loubier, 2008). Researchers have begun to investigate multiple identities by studying ethnic identity (e.g., Asian American women, Kawahara, Esnil, & Hsu, 2007) in combination with other aspects of diversity, such as sexual orientation (Baker & Greene, 2007) or disability (Banks & Mona, 2007). These dimensions of diversity mediate decisions to become leaders, styles of leadership and collaboration, and how women leaders perceive themselves and are recognized by others (Sanchez-Hucles & Sanchez, 2007).

Intersectionality—the manner in which multiple aspects of identity may combine in different ways to construct social reality—may be of signal importance for studies of leadership in the workplace (Cole, 2009; Shields, 2008). Stewart and McDermott (2004) explained how the influence of multiple aspects of identity may mask the influence of single identity characteristics in ways that are relevant to organizations. White women may experience

gender discrimination, whereas African American women may experience both gender and racial discrimination. The joint possibility of gender and racial discrimination makes it impossible for African American women to make accurate causal attributions concerning potential discrimination if they are passed over for leadership development opportunities. Gender and education parity in pay discrimination illustrates another important reason to consider multiple identities in organization research. When pay and gender parity are analyzed in terms of either gender (women vs. men) or race (Blacks vs. Whites), the unique experience of Black women is impossible to detect. The higher pay of White women masks the lower pay of Black women relative to White women; the lower pay of Blacks masks the lower pay of Black women relative to Black men despite Black women's greater education.

Although we could find no documenting research, we expect that the leadership experiences of Black women and Black men will be different as well, particularly given the importance of assertiveness in leadership style among Black women leaders (Parker & Ogilvie, 1996) and the fact that this assertiveness is viewed negatively because of its role incongruity and inconsistency with White female stereotypes (Eagly & Karau, 2001). Because sexism and racism are parallel processes (Smith & Stewart, 1983), such assertiveness may also elicit negative reactions because of stereotypes and role incongruity among African American men and women who display the dominance that is expected of leaders. Considering the influence of individual and multiple identities in this manner will enrich leadership theory and research. Organizations should recognize and be sensitive to multiple identities and manage them through leadership training and development.

Consideration of the intersection of multiple aspects of identity provides a richer and more nuanced understanding of diverse leaders. Intersectionality is an analytical tool for studying, understanding, and responding to how gender intersects with other identities and how these intersections contribute to the unique experiences of oppression and privilege (Symington, 2004). Multiple aspects of identity mutually construct one another—being female influences one's experience as an African American, and being African American influences one's experience as a female—thus emphasizing the importance of understanding the intersection of multiple identities (Collins, 1998). Analysis of the intersection of multiple identities helps to reveal the disadvantage and discrimination that accrues from the combination of identities (Morris & Bunjun, 2007). The combination of identities is not simply additive; they interact to produce a substantively distinct experience for women leaders (Symington, 2004).

This theory is especially appropriate to examining leadership because intersectionality reveals the connections between multiple identities and personas of social actors; it suggests that the analysis of complex social situations should not be reduced to singular categories but should include connected roles and situations (Richardson & Loubier, 2008). An intersectional approach does not treat race, class, gender, ability, and sexuality as autonomous catego-

ries but seeks to examine their interaction in understanding leadership identity, behavior, and effectiveness.

### **Debates in the Intersectionality Literature**

An interesting debate in the intersectionality literature (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008) is whether individuals with multiple subordinate-group identities (ethnic minority women, White lesbian women) experience more prejudice and discrimination than individuals with single subordinate-group identities (ethnic minority men or White gay men). It has been argued that *androcentrism* (defining the standard person as male), *ethnocentrism* (defining the standard person as a White American in the United States), and *heterosexism* (defining the standard person as heterosexual) may lead individuals with intersecting identities to be regarded as nonprototypical members of their constituent identity groups and thus cause them to experience intersectional invisibility (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008).

The status of this invisibility may offer leaders with multiple identities both advantages and disadvantages. Leaders who appear less prototypical may avoid prejudice and discrimination, as may those individuals who look more Eurocentric. Ethnic minority women and White lesbians may escape the discrimination that ethnic minority men and gay men face. However, research also shows that nonprototypical individuals who aspire to be leaders are less likely to exert influence or become leaders (Hogg, 2001). The link between prototypicality, leadership, and social influence can contribute to the marginalization of those with intersecting subordinate-group identities (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). This intersectional invisibility has been a factor in the marginalization of women of color in the civil rights struggles and in feminist activism (Collins, 1999).

Finally, it is critical to note one further point about leadership and multiple identities. Strolovitch (2007) stated that managers are more active in addressing issues affecting those with a single subordinate identity than issues affecting those with multiple intersecting identities. Organizational members with single identities may be more successful, garner greater resources, and achieve more attention than those with multiple identities.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Research on leadership reveals both good news and bad news for White women and women of color. The good news is that despite barriers, women are increasingly achieving positions of leadership and are effective once they do (Eagly, 2007). However, despite convincing evidence of the effectiveness of female leaders, (a) people often prefer male bosses, (b) it is still harder for women to be promoted into leadership roles than it is for men, (c) it is more difficult for women to be seen as effective leaders than it is for men, and (d) leadership hurdles are higher for women of color than for White women and for men (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Holvino & Blake-Beard, 2004).

### **Potential Areas of Inquiry**

The historical impediments to women's advancement described by the terms *glass ceiling*, *sticky floor*, and *concrete ceiling* have been captured in the concept of the *labyrinth*, which emphasizes the diverse challenges posed by child care needs, sexism, and discrimination on the basis of identity (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Betters-Reed & Moore, 1995; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). Women must learn to master both agentic and communal skills as they simultaneously develop social capital. Researchers must now direct their attention to the issues of difference for women and men leaders and note how these areas of difference can actually represent assets to women. Specific strategies must be detailed to explain how to successfully negotiate labyrinths as a leader so that women can emerge as top executives. Women must also develop the ability to refuse "glass cliff" appointments to leadership positions that set them up for likely failure (Hewlett et al., 2008).

Research informs us that role expectations predict gender differences in leadership style but not in leadership effectiveness (Eagly, 2007). Women emerge as social and democratic leaders, and men as task leaders (Eagly & Karau, 1991). However, recent work highlights the value of the stereotypically feminine traits of cooperation, mentoring, and collaboration (Eagly, 2007). As more diverse and globally connected organizations are increasingly being created, more creative and diverse types of leadership will be required. Leadership style diversity will need to match global diversity.

Unfortunately, despite the need for the leadership styles often demonstrated by women, organizations too often expect leaders to be dominant, assertive men. Women, and particularly women of color, are disadvantaged when they lead with masculine characteristics (Bell & Nkomo, 2001). Additional research must be conducted to explain the conundrum that women show advantages in leadership skills but are disadvantaged in actually securing and maintaining leadership roles. Researchers must investigate why these barriers persist, and managers must dismantle them for women. Stereotyping that negatively impacts women of color must also be examined and dismantled (Brown, 2007). Multiple aspects of identity that elicit stereotypes—for example, gender, race, sexual orientation, and ethnicity—also need to be investigated. In addition to the study of African American women, we encourage study of Asian Americans, Latinas, and Native Americans.

Multiple aspects of identity yield different workplace experiences and connections to the organization. For example, gender and race/ethnicity are differentially related to organizational commitment and intention to leave the organization; both are influenced by the organization's climate for diversity (Gonzalez & DeNisi, 2009). Individuals with multiple identities often have unique and novel ways to solve problems (Richardson & Loubier, 2008). We encourage researchers to study the manner in which identity and intersectionality influence leader emergence and

effectiveness. Cole (2009) has suggested that researchers must focus on who is a member of each identity group, the role played by inequality for members of each group, and the extent to which commonalities exist across differences that are due to identity group membership.

We think that the following issues provide additional points of focus for researchers who wish to include identity in leadership research and to gain a comprehensive understanding of the manner in which women, and particularly women of color, experience the workplace and the challenges they face as they aspire to positions of leadership. To start, researchers must include in their research designs variables that represent aspects of identity. At the very least, they must collect information about identity from research participants. Most important, characteristics of identity must be examined together—the intersectionality of identity must be considered in theoretical models and research designs used to test fit these models. When considering identity, researchers must go beyond the past emphasis on “master identity” and examine gender and race/ethnicity individually. They should as much as possible include consideration of “emergent identities”; that is, multiple aspects of identity should be explicitly described in research questions and hypotheses as combined identities, for example, African American women (Shields, 2008). A recent meta-analysis examining the success of leadership development interventions illustrates what could be gained from such an approach (Avolio, Mhatre, Norman, & Lester, 2009). Avolio and colleagues examined the moderating effect of gender and found significant differences in effect sizes among training groups with different gender compositions (all men, all women, majority men, majority women) as well as gender differences in effectiveness for type of leadership training (e.g., cognitive). These results show that leadership development interventions do not affect men and women in the same way, and they provide support for our suggestion that aspects of identity such as gender must be coded in leadership research. This recommendation is further supported by the fact that over half of the studies that examined leadership development interventions did not report the gender of the participants, which led to the exclusion of those studies from the meta-analysis (only 57 studies out of 200 reported gender). A meta-analysis intended to examine the influence of race/ethnicity in two of the most popular theories of leadership, full range leadership theory and leader–member exchange theory, was unable to discover a sufficient number of studies that coded for race/ethnicity, so this aspect of identity had to be dropped from that analysis (Oborn & Spain, 2007).

We hope that in the future, leadership researchers will collect all identity information from participants that may be relevant to the leadership phenomenon being studied; at the least, gender and race/ethnicity information should be collected in every leadership study because of its empirically established importance. For some leadership phenomena, such as leader–subordinate relationships and use of upward influence strategies, other features of identity such as disability status, social class, and sexual preference may

be important as well. Journal editors could contribute substantially to this effort by requiring relevant aspects of identity to be included in descriptions of sample participants.

Explicit consideration of intersectionality can allow leadership research to go beyond examining women or Blacks and instead examine Black women, an identity that is mutually construed by race and gender but conceptually and experientially exceeds the boundaries of each. As demonstrated by Bowleg (2008), explicit treatment of intersectionality in research reveals work experiences that are hidden when each aspect of identity is examined in isolation. Related to this point is the type of research and statistical analysis that are employed. Analysis of variance research designs are the traditional means for examining the influence of specific identity characteristics; features such as gender and race/ethnicity are examined as main effects and in interaction (Shields, 2008). Multiple aspects of identity do not combine experientially in a linear fashion but instead merge to yield a qualitatively unique identity. In the language of multilevel theory and research in organizations, the combination of multiple identities is not homologous with each of its constituent identities (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000). For leadership research, we believe that  $\text{Black} + \text{Woman} \neq \text{Black Woman}$ . Bowleg (2008) provided several recommendations for how to use quantitative and qualitative research methods to study intersectionality and to unpack the richness that underlies it.

Decisions about which aspects of identity to include in research are not value free. To ignore aspects of identity as unimportant is to tacitly privilege the leadership behavior of the dominant group in the organization under study, most commonly White men from North America and Western Europe. Moreover, because organizations are by nature hierarchical and leadership by definition is the accumulation and exercise of power and authority, to ignore aspects of identity is to ignore the unequal manner in which hierarchies and systems of power provide opportunities for leadership. Status and power influence leader emergence and definitions of leader effectiveness. Explicit consideration of power and social class differences in leadership research will yield more nuanced theories of leadership emergence and effectiveness. Bond (2007) described a multiyear organizational intervention in a chemical manufacturing firm that demonstrates the usefulness of such considerations when planning and implementing organizational change that includes leadership development. Research and theory on leadership must consider this “matrix of domination” if they are to fully encompass the lived experience of everyone in the workplace, not just those at the top (Collins, 1990).

The idea of intersectionality challenges individuals to examine what it means to have marginalized status within a marginalized group. Social psychological research on ideologies and identity will allow us to better predict who will be defined as intersectional subordinates and with what consequences for leadership. The goal of future study should be to develop general models of intersectional experience with the potential to demarginalize the study of

intersectionality (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Equally important are efforts to unpack intersectionality in order to reveal the variables and causal relationships among them that underlie it. Training in performance management and leadership development that emphasizes the intersectionality of multiple identities may produce acceptance of a wider range of acceptable leadership behavior. Greenwood and Christian (2008) showed that participants primed to assess intersectionality developed more accepting attitudes of others who were culturally different from them in gender and religion.

### Summary

There is an urgent need for more attention to be focused on the experiences of all women leaders and for more sophisticated and multifaceted definitions of race and other dimensions of identity. Researchers need to make use of the concepts of multiple identities and intersectionality to create respectful and inspiring solutions to the problems faced by women with complex and diverse identities who aspire to leadership. This also requires the identification of factors that are closely associated with economic resources, political decision making, and social inclusion and exclusion. Following lines of power, authority, and financial success will also indicate who is privileged and who is not. Those who are privileged are accepted, and those who are not are often defined as a problem because of some aspect of their identities (Morris & Bunjun, 2007).

As we think of the vignette on Tiger Woods in our introduction, we can envision women and women of color articulating their diverse visions of who they are and what they can do. Increasingly, these women will become more effective in using their multiple identities as pathways to success. Organizations will benefit as a result of being able to draw from a deeper well of talent. As leadership theory develops to more accurately match the complexity and needs of modern organizations, greater attention will be paid to these important aspects of identity. The findings of these studies will help increase the number and diversity of female leaders, an outcome that would benefit everyone.

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