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An Overview of Gender-Based Leadership Barriers

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The gender gap in leadership positions has persisted for many decades (Lennon, 2013). Each of us, in our respective fields, were intrigued by the gap and the challenges women face when they do move into executive leadership. As a result, we each embarked on research to examine the challenges women leaders face. Diehl (2013) interviewed women leaders in higher education, while Dzubinski (2013) interviewed women executives in evangelical mission organizations. Upon first discussing our respective research, we expected that our findings would differ significantly given the dissimilarity of our organizations: higher education is generally considered to be progressive and liberal while evangelical religion is quite conservative. Nevertheless, the study participants reported strikingly similar challenges, causing us to consider

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the likelihood that women encounter leadership barriers *because* they lead at the executive level, regardless of the type of organization.

During our research, we each interviewed women who described encountering inexplicable obstacles at work. Diehl (2013) met a 45-year-old single African-American vice president for advancement who ran a successful fundraising operation for a large public university. This vice president worked with a male colleague who often made physical comments about women, to which she would reply, "That's not appropriate." One day, this colleague verbally attacked the vice president at a senior administrator's retreat in front of deans and other vice presidents. In shock, the vice president questioned herself, thinking, "Maybe I'm being overly sensitive, and maybe he really didn't mean to use those words." Next the colleague disparaged her staff and started rumors about the vice president around the university. The vice president began to question her colleague's motives—maybe he was jealous over her fundraising success? Maybe he was trying to make her feel self-conscious or that she did not deserve her position? She even had a conversation with the university president, who acknowledged the behavior yet did nothing to stop it. Finally, as the colleague was leaving the university for another position, he became very flattering towards the vice president. Recalling this unsettling situation a year later, this vice president could not understand what had provoked the attacks or make sense of her colleague's behavior.

Dzubinski (2013) also interviewed women who could not make sense of the challenges they encountered. One woman was asked take a new position as director of missional development in denominational headquarters after seven years as senior associate and executive pastor. Four months later, the board encouraged her to interview for their vacant CEO position. Although the denomination had female pastors and affirmed women in ministry, some people in

the organization did not support women in leadership roles. Even the board had doubts, not being sure that she could make hard decisions or be in charge, since she had always worked as part of a team. And since she was a woman, they wondered if she would succeed at the highest level within the organization and on a global scale. So the board said, “We’ll try this for a year and see how it goes.” Although it would be too late to go back to the director position if the board changed its mind, she decided to take the risk. After a few months as interim, the board offered her a six-year contract, which she gladly accepted. When that time was up, the board replaced her with a man, leaving her out of a role and unsure why.

Both women had a hard time identifying what was happening to them. They had no labels or names for their experiences. They only had the sense that they were not being treated fairly. What were these women experiencing? We argue that their experiences were related to their gender.

Gender Bias

Blatant forms of gender discrimination are increasingly rare due to laws and organizational awareness of the consequences of keeping women out of leadership positions (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2003). However, this does not mean that gender discrimination has been eliminated; instead “it has just gone underground” (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2003, p. 231). Researchers are now focusing on gender bias involving barriers arising “from cultural beliefs about gender as well as workplace structures, practices, and patterns of interaction that inadvertently favor men” (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011, p. 475). These barriers consist of non-reflective acts of bias and exclusion, are subtle and often unintentional, and are supported by gender norms and practices entrenched within institutions (Bird, 2011). Because these

impediments are built into ordinary institutional functioning, they are often invisible to men and women alike. When these barriers accumulate, they can inhibit women's ability to see themselves as leaders and the ability of others to see them as leaders (Ely et al., 2011; Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013).

Based on our cross-sector analysis of women leaders, we will make invisible gender-based barriers visible by identifying and describing them, including the level of society in which they tend to operate most strongly. We will also compare and contrast the barriers between the two sectors studied. Recognizing and understanding embedded gender-based leadership barriers is the crucial first step to eliminating them.

Comparing the Studies

To develop a comprehensive list of leadership barriers, we compared findings from our two qualitative research studies conducted in the divergent sectors of higher education and religion. In the higher education study, Diehl (2013) conducted face-to-face interviews with 26 women presidents, provosts, and vice-presidents in colleges and universities located in the Mid-Atlantic. She sought to understand the types of adversity women in leadership positions in the academy faced and the meaning they made of those experiences. In the religion study, Dzubinski (2013) interviewed 12 women executives in mission organizations, asking how they achieved positions of leadership and how they learned to lead. We both recorded our interviews and personally transcribed our voice recordings.

As both studies were conducted within the social constructivist paradigm, we recognize that our own backgrounds shape our interpretation (Creswell, 2009). We are both indigenous outsiders to our respective studies (Acker, 2001). Diehl has spent 21 years as a female leader of information technology in higher education, while Dzubinski spent 20 years working overseas in

an evangelical mission organization. Yet we also brought our outsider, academic perspectives to the study of our environments (Acker, 2001). Additionally, we consider ourselves to be equalists; that is we believe that all human beings regardless of any socially defined identity category are of equal value and deserve equal access, treatment, rights, opportunity, and freedom in all realms of society (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). In addition, like Fletcher and Ely (2003), we do not view gender as just a concern for women, but instead “as a central organizing feature of social life, with implications for men, women, and how we get work done” (p. 3). Qualitative research gave us the framework to understand ourselves as the research instrument and to recognize and value the knowledge that was co-constructed between us and our participants (Merriam, 2009).

To analyze our data, we started with a list of gender barriers discovered in literature and confirmed their existence in both studies. We discovered additional barriers inductively, by examining and comparing women’s stories from both studies. We then confirmed that all barriers were internally consistent and did not overlap (Patton, 2002).

Gender-Based Leadership Barriers

We identified 27 gender-based leadership barriers, all of which existed in both the religion and the higher education studies. These 27 barriers are organized according to the level of society in which they generally operate most strongly: macro (societal), meso (organizational), and micro (individual), as shown in Figure 1.

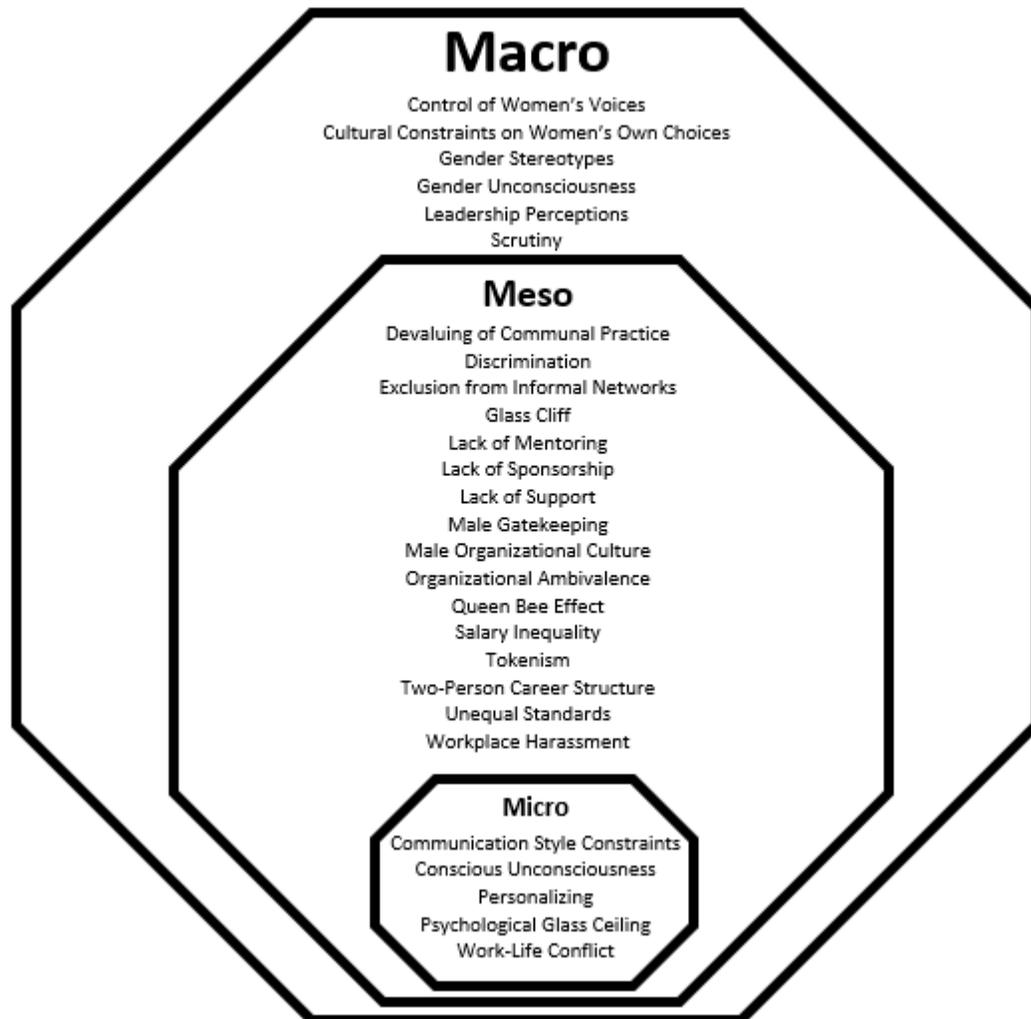


Figure 1. Gender-based leadership barriers by level of society.¹

Macro Barriers

Barriers operating in society as a whole prevent women from advancing or succeeding in leadership. These six barriers make it challenging for women leaders to contribute their leadership expertise and for both women and men to take women leaders seriously.

Control of women's voices. Women may be restricted in when and how they contribute to the conversation. One form of this control is low tolerance for women who express opinions that differ from the group. An academic leader explained, "The women. . . are consistently criticized for expressing any disagreement or dissent to what's been decided or what's been

done.” Women leaders may also find it challenging to communicate in ways accepted by men. A mission executive explained the conversational dynamics of her leadership team in which she was the only woman:

I found it hard to even be heard in this room full of strong guys. I almost had to be aggressive, and that’s not who I was, in order to get my viewpoint heard. ... That was really difficult for a while. I almost gave up.

Cultural constraints on women’s own choices. Women’s choices regarding their field of study and career may be constrained by society. Some women in the higher education study found their choice of college major was affected by societal expectations. One had to overcome the assumption that she would go to a local junior college if she went to college at all. Her high school guidance counselor attempted to dissuade her: “Why do you want to go so far away? And why do you want to go to a college? Why don't you go to a community college?” Married mission executives were expected to raise their children before moving into leadership roles. One explained the viewpoint of her male colleagues: “[Married women] are busy being moms right now; we won't bother them.”

Gender stereotypes. Women leaders may suffer negative consequences from relatively fixed and oversimplified generalizations held by society, as one university president stated:

In our society we still don't view presidents as women. Or even vice presidents as women. And that must have an unintended effect on those of us who are women. Or those of us who are hiring vice presidents and presidents.

Even when stereotypes are subtle, they may create insurmountable barriers. For example, one African-American provost was a finalist for three presidencies but was unable to land a presidential position. She reflected on the questions that the trustees had asked her: “Do you

think you could relate to our alums?” and “Do you think that you can work with advancement, ask for money?” In every case, a white male was hired. One mission executive described the reactions of some male colleagues the first time she was asked to take a leadership role: “In their minds it was a man’s role, and what was a woman doing in that role?” They threatened to leave the organization, and a man was chosen as leader instead.

Gender unconsciousness. Gender unconsciousness is a lack of knowledge or awareness of the role gender plays in the workplace. Some women truly do not realize that gender issues still exist in the 21st century workplace. A mission executive explained, “We don’t have in [our organization] someone who is working on this—women’s ministry, empowering women, because there’s not a felt need for it.” Although it may seem incomprehensible that some executive women do not recognize the role of gender within organizations, those with male support from the top may not have experienced barriers due to gender. As one university president stated: “The glass ceiling didn't operate at any level in my career. ... The people who nominated me again and again for positions were all men. ... I didn't feel that it was a challenge to [break the ceiling]. It just happened.”

Leadership perceptions. Traditionally leadership has been associated with masculinity. Such perceptions disadvantage women’s promotion into leadership roles and their agency when they do become leaders. When new people come into one university president’s office, they frequently assume the president is “the oldest male in the room.” During foreign field work, one mission leader was relegated to serving tea, while her husband (also a field leader) was invited to fully participate in governmental meetings.

Scrutiny. Scrutiny involves intense or hypercritical examination of women in leadership, including everything from appearance to performance. Scrutiny may come from other women as

well as men. For example, one higher education executive described a female colleague who would not take a female job candidate seriously because “she didn’t have on pantyhose.” Several mission executives discussed the need to monitor what they wore even outside of work. One mission executive described the extent of such self-monitoring:

I do try and be very careful and aware and intentional about how I approach things. I really tried to think through how I present myself, in what I would say and even what I would wear. “Does this look professional enough?”

Meso Barriers

Sixteen gender-based leadership barriers operate within groups and organizations. These barriers represent ways of discounting women’s leadership contributions and limiting their organizational effectiveness. Given that leadership takes place within groups and organizations, it makes sense that many barriers occur at this level.

Devaluing of communal practice. Although women’s communal contributions produce outcomes embedded in other people and help keep organizations running smoothly, they are often devalued. These relational activities may be rendered invisible when the organization has no language to describe them. Examples include helping a colleague to improve a project, taking notes in meetings, cleaning the office refrigerator, and other office housework. One higher executive found her communal work devalued when serving as interim director for her department earlier in her career. Denying her promotion to the permanent position, her boss said, “You’ve done a great job for the last three months, and you’re going to be the support system that keeps this office going.” Similarly, a mission executive was told it was her job to act “as a buffer” between her male boss and the staff, thereby enabling him to be seen as the “visionary” while she handled his relational responsibilities behind the scenes.

Discrimination. Although there are laws protecting women from blatant bias, both subtle and overt discrimination continues to impede women's success at work. Some higher education participants experienced the double or triple whammy of sexism combined with racism and ageism, some considered too young, others too old. For example, a board member routinely called one higher education vice president "kiddo" and "young lady" while another university board trustee advised an African-American vice president not to personally fundraise in the southern part of her state. Participants in both studies also experienced overt bias. For example, when one mission executive inquired about a director position, she was told that the director had to be a man and the only female the organization would allow into the all-male department was the director's wife.

Exclusion from informal networks. Women in organizations have long had limited access to men's unofficial social events, which impedes their ability to know what is going on in the organization, participate in decision making, and develop sponsoring and mentoring relationships. Early in her career, one university vice president was excluded from annual dinners celebrating the end of yearly audits. She stated that the audit partner "would specifically exclude me, and I was the one that ran the audit. My boss and his boss . . . wouldn't stand up to him and say, 'She's got to come, she did the whole thing.'" In other cases, participants found men's networking events to be unpleasant. For example, one mission leader was invited to a meal at her boss's home after a long day of strategic planning. While the rest of the team (all men) went outside to smoke cigars around a fire, this executive faced the dilemma of joining an undesirable, but critical networking activity or acquiescing to the boss's wife who wanted her to stay inside.

Glass cliff. Women may encounter a glass cliff when placed in a high-risk role with a strong likelihood of failure. A mission executive explained, “They have given me a task that numerous males seem to have failed at. And, personally, that makes me feel like I will die before I call it quits here.” A higher education executive told the story of being moved into a leadership role in which serious financial misconduct had occurred under her predecessor. Even though she refused the role, she was told, “you will do it.” She explained that she and her team were “held accountable to the point of almost termination.” For these women, failure to fix the problems would have resulted in the loss of their jobs.

Lack of mentoring. The lack of a significant mentoring relationship is an impediment to women’s career advancement. Even though they had risen to executive ranks, leaders in both studies described the challenges of not having a mentor, especially a female mentor. In many cases, participants were the first women in their executive-level positions, which meant that women mentors were scarce. One college president regretted not having a mentor’s support: “Some of [the adversity I encountered] was unnecessary...and I very much feel the absence of a mentor.”

Lack of sponsorship. Many qualified, competent women lack a sponsor to recommend them for leadership or further promotion. One 57-year-old provost in the higher education study lacked a sponsor throughout much of her career: “If I were a man, I would have been president 15 years ago.” Women who do get promoted may have spent “many more years sitting in limbo” than men, as a mission executive noted.

Lack of support. Women may experience lack of support when organizational leadership withholds or removes resources and support needed for her job. Women in both studies told stories of having legitimate decisions overturned. For example, a higher education

executive fired someone who needed to be fired, but “the president stepped in and undid it.” In another case, a female mission executive was not supported when a man refused to report to her. As she stated, “When it came down to me being his leader, he threatened to resign from the mission.” The reporting lines were changed so he could report to a male.

Male gatekeeping. Men in organizations may control both which women have access to leadership positions and the extent of women’s authority. In some organizations, male leaders are careful to choose certain types of women for leadership, usually those perceived to be willing to fit into the male culture and not cause trouble. A mission executive thought the male leaders chose her because “they felt like they knew me and could work with me.” She explained that a good relationship with the executive men seemed to be the most important qualification for women to join the leadership team. Organizations may also limit how many women move into leadership, as an academic leader explained:

When I was hiring a controller, who sits directly beneath me, I had board members tell me directly that I should be seeking an older man to complement me. ... It was just a nightmare for me because what that meant was “we want what you aren't.”

Male organizational culture. In a strongly male-normed organizational leadership culture, women have to work very hard to fit in and show they belong. When asked about obstacles, a higher education executive described the exclusion she routinely experienced:

The male dominant, “we don't need to include her,” kind of exclusion. I can't tell you how many times my boss will invite me last minute to the meeting. “Oh, we forgot about you.” “Oh, we didn't think until we started talking that you really needed to hear this.”

Because I don't golf with them. I don't talk about their car. I don't care about those things.

A mission executive described the masculine culture of her organization: “Almost every meeting I go to is all men, and the culture of the room I walk into is guys talking about guy stuff. It’s so hard to quantify, I think that’s why it’s difficult to address.” Whether explicit or covert, male norms may dominate organizational culture.

Organizational ambivalence. An organization’s words or actions may show lack of confidence in a women’s leadership. A higher education executive told the story of her former boss’s ambivalence towards her leadership when she requested a promotion to a vacant development position:

I asked him for his backing. He said he would. And at the 11th hour, he made a decision that he was going to split the department into two. We were going to have a VP for donor services and a VP for development, and he thought I'd be better suited for the VP for donor services. And I said to him, “So are you saying to me that I don't have the opportunity to be the VP for development? I have to be in this role?” And he said, “Well, you can do whatever you want to do, but I'm going to hire this other person for VP for development.” So there was really no choice for me.

Organizational ambivalence also occurs when a woman is placed in an interim role even though she is fully qualified for the job. For example, a mission executive explained that since being placed on the executive leadership team, she had only been given temporary assignments:

I wound up spending three years to make [a ministry] sustainable, and we found someone else to lead it. Then another big hole came up... and I've been doing that since April. I am even temporarily serving as senior director of [a region] because someone died, and things had to be shifted suddenly.

These kinds of behaviors give a clear message to the woman that the organization is ambivalent about her leadership.

Queen bee effect. Women who are already at the top may fail to help, or even actively block, the promotion of other women. For example, a female executive blocked an expanded role for a female mission leader. As the mission leader explained, “I was directing a camp ... and was asked to begin a family camp. The female CEO wouldn’t let me.” Superficially this may look like one woman’s bad behavior. However, usually it stems from the reality that there is space for very few women at the executive level, and one must leave before another can enter. As an academic leader explained, “I think we can get too easily threatened by women coming behind us.”

Salary inequality. Women continue to be paid less on average than their male counterparts. Women executives from both studies noted their own experience with pay disparities. One university president stated, “I’ve never made [the salary] the male people ahead of me made and what the male people after me make.” Some mission executives thought they got their positions because they were less expensive than a man would have been. As one explained, “We were here, so we wouldn’t have to be relocated, and we had some [external funding] to put toward my salary, so the salary wouldn’t have to be totally funded by the organization.”

Tokenism. Women may have difficulty gaining acceptance or having their voice heard when they have token status, making up less than 15% of a workgroup. A mission executive explained that she may have been placed into her role as a token: “They needed a woman, because it doesn’t look good when an organization’s executive leadership team has no women.”

A higher education executive described how tokens need the support of others for their voices to be heard:

I'm around the [executive management] table, and there are very few women around the table ... You want to have other women ... or other minorities around the table who can at least back you up when you're making points or challenging things.

Two-person career structure. Institutions may place both formal and informal demands on both spouses, even though only one is employed by the organization. A university president explained that “to be a presidential spouse ... is a major sacrifice because your whole life is about this. Despite the fact that [my husband] is a pretty shy guy, he had to interview with me.” Mission executives were strongly impacted by this barrier. One explained, “In a marriage, the woman’s role is less of a factor in the couple’s choice to move on to something else. The woman follows her husband.” Another said, “There has been the tendency of thinking of the man as the main leader and his wife as the complement. Despite [organizational policy], what we really mean is he’s the director and she’s the director’s wife.” Yet another described how the CEO tried to appoint her and her husband as co-directors of a school, despite the fact that she had the degree and credentials for the director position, while her husband did not.

Unequal standards. Women are often held to higher performance standards than their male counterparts. A higher education executive explained, “A man can call his friend and say, ‘Hey, can you help me?’ For women, it’s more how well you did, that you’re persistent, and that you’re organized and you apply yourself and you can show everything that you did.” One mission executive explained that it would be better for the organization if men were held to the same standards as women when it comes to decision making:

It doesn't help to pull out the I-flag for leadership. It's better for me to present a well-thought-through reason for my decision, as opposed to saying, "I'm making this because I can make this decision." A lot of men do that because that's an easier thing to do. [Explaining the rationale] makes it a little harder, but I think it's the better thing to do.

Workplace harassment. Women in both studies reported experiencing sabotage, verbal abuse, bullying, intimidation, sexual harassment, and other behaviors intended to provoke, frighten, intimidate, or bring discomfort. The goal of such behavior was to exert power over the women. A higher education study participant described the verbally abusive behavior of her supervisor: "He would call and my stomach would turn, because ... it was like he was trying to beat me into submission." Similarly, a mission executive described working for a controlling boss who sabotaged her:

The reasons he gave for downsizing my role were [that] my network was too large, and my influence too broad. ... This bullying went on for about 1.5 years ... increasingly controlling me. He tried to cancel my trips that [had been] approved. He was undermining me. He sabotaged my workshop that I was leading by changing the time it was offered but not changing the published schedule, so when people showed up for it, it had already happened. I finally realized all this was direct, intentional attack.

Micro Barriers

Five gender-based leadership barriers operate at the level of the individual and include the individual's daily interactions. Although these barriers primarily involve the woman herself and place an extra burden on her beyond what is normally required of male leaders, the roots lie in cultural and organizational expectations for women's behavior.

Communication style constraints. Women leaders may find that they must carefully

monitor what they say and how they say it. Using a directive communication style breaks female gender norms, while using tentative or emotional language breaks norms for competent leaders. As a mission executive expressed, “I have learned to influence men pretty carefully. You can't come across with too much feeling, or take too long to say something, or fail to use hard facts when stating a case.”

Conscious unconsciousness. Some women choose not to notice or challenge the role gender plays at work. These women may be acutely aware of the issues, but ignore them, often for pragmatic reasons. A mission leader commented, “I don't say, ‘Look, I have rights,’ or ‘I know I have to work three times as hard to get the same recognition.’ It's all true, but I never play the female card. I just choose not to.” Similarly, an academic leader, when told by her boss to try to hire a woman, commented, “If [the best qualified person] is a woman, great, ... but to have women in leadership roles just because they're women is just so wrong.” Women may realize that aligning with women's causes may damage their own reputation within the organization.

Personalizing. Sometimes women may assume personal responsibility for system or organizational problems. This happens partly because women see that the men around them do not have certain challenges and therefore assume that the problems they encounter are due to something personal about them. The mission women in particular reported this challenge. One said:

I just kept trying to please [my male colleague] and blamed myself for the situation. I grew up in a dysfunctional home and had some tolerance for abuse. I tried to talk with my boss about it and he dismissed me, [so] I was blaming myself more than the other person. Similarly, an academic leader whose team was held accountable for audit findings attributable to

her predecessor explained “I personalize and feel responsible for my team [and] the permanent damage that they suffered.” Neither woman was to blame for the events, but each took personal responsibility.

Psychological glass ceiling. When women internalize society’s expectations for acceptable behavior, they may be unwilling to appear assertive and may undervalue their own abilities. Thus they are deterred from negotiating for what they want or need and may even advocate against themselves. One academic leader, now a university president, explained how she initially believed that executive leadership was beyond her capacity: “[The president] called me in and said, ‘I want you to be provost.’ And I said, ‘Susan, you’re bananas, that’s stupid. There’s other people that you should choose because I’m not big enough to do this.’”

Work-life conflict. Balancing professional responsibilities with personal or family responsibilities has long been discussed as a challenge for women. A mission executive explained, “It’s hard if you’re pulled in two directions, to try to give your best in two worlds at the same time.” Conventionally, work-life conflict is considered an individual woman’s problem, having nothing to do with the workplace. In reality, the roots derive from the gendered nature of organizations built on the male life norm and the assumption of someone at home caring for domestic responsibilities. In addition, this barrier can limit advancement, as an academic leader noted: “It can be quite a balancing act to raise your children while you’re pursuing a career, and I think that is something that often impacts on a professional’s ability to advance.”

Cross-Sector Comparison

The similarity in experiences of women leaders from the two sectors is striking, given that higher education has more women in top leadership than religious organizations (Lennon, 2013). One highly salient feature is the hidden and unconscious nature of these barriers. For

women in both studies, the barriers were present and often tacitly accepted as par for the course. The main difference appeared in terms of barrier strength, in that seven barriers appeared more salient in the religious organization study, while only one appeared more salient in the higher education study. We determined the relative strength of each barrier based on both the number of participants who mentioned it and the extent to which it played a role in their leadership stories.

Similarities

Given inherent differences between higher education and religion, the barriers experienced by women in the two studies were unexpectedly similar. It is notable that examples of all 27 barriers were present in the interview data of both studies. For example, participants in both realms reported working with powerful but insecure women who exhibited bullying and marginalizing *queen-bee* behaviors. Both studies had examples of *conscious unconsciousness*, women who chose not to notice or challenge gender disparities in the workplace. The reason may be for self-preservation and to not be perceived to align with groups opposing dominant organizational culture and power structures. Although it may seem like *control of women's voices* would not be as prevalent in higher education, it occurred in both environments.

Differences in Strength

While every barrier named in this study was present in both the higher education and mission organizations, the strength of some barriers differed. Seven barriers were more salient in the religious organization study, while only one seemed more salient in the higher education study.

First, *cultural constraints on women's own choices* were more salient in the religious organizations. While women from both studies found that societal expectations affected their choice of college major, the married mission executives were also expected to stay home to raise

children. Such constraints appeared to be a central organizing principle of the mission executives' experiences. The combination of gender-role prescriptions from both society and their religious faith was an overwhelmingly powerful force that mission executives could not successfully resist or even articulate.

Second, *gender unconsciousness* was also more salient in the religious organization study. Many voices of authority in the evangelical faith tend to be suspicious of and even reject feminist thought, teaching women that their place is supporting, not challenging, male authority (Dzubinski, 2016). This may be why women executives in the mission organizations were unaware of gender disparities in the workplace.

Third, *personalizing*, or blaming themselves for organizational problems, existed in both studies but was particularly salient for women in the mission organizations. Although most mission executives understood that problems stemmed from their socialization as girls, they still took responsibility. The combination of organizational and religious pressure to comply with gender stereotypes may lead women to hold themselves personally responsible for organizational problems (Dzubinski, 2013; Scholz, 2010).

Fourth, the negative aspects of a *two-person career structure* were more frequently discussed in the religious organization study, as several participants began as the unpaid member of a two-person career. In the mission organizations, the women were expected to first support their husband's career and only later, once he was established and the children were grown, could they enter leadership.

Fifth, while there was some control of the bounds of women's leadership in the higher education study, *male gatekeeping* was more entrenched in the mission organizations. Mission executives described examples of men choosing certain women to fill leadership roles. Male

gatekeeping was even extended through family relationships, as some mission organizations would first gain permission from a woman's husband prior to approaching the woman for a leadership position.

Lastly, *exclusion from social networks* and *lack of mentoring* were noticeably stronger in the mission organizations. In both cases, the difference seems attributable to the lack of women leaders and to women's conformity to stereotypes. The evangelical mission industry has such low numbers of women at any leadership level (16%; Reynolds, 2014) that women mentors are scarce. Outside their own organizations, there is little in the way of networking, mentoring, and other types of support; within their own organizations, they are typically the only woman (Dzubinski, 2013). In addition, the religious requirements of moral purity make it easy, even acceptable, to keep women and men strictly segregated (Dzubinski, 2013). Women in the mission study conformed to gender roles by taking responsibility for removal of any behavior that could be construed as sexual, even to the point of exclusion from leadership events. As such, the single women in the mission study described how they were careful to make friends with their male colleagues' wives and to maintain distance from the men.

Only *workplace harassment* appeared to be more salient in the higher education study. Several higher education participants described sabotage, verbal abuse, intimidation, bullying, and even sexual coercion. Only one mission executive reported experiencing harassment. One reason may be that the higher education executives were more likely to break gender norms in their environment than were the mission executives. Thus the higher education executives could have drawn punishment for displaying stereotypical masculine characteristics such as assertiveness, dominance, and independence because workplace harassment "is driven not out of a desire for women who meet feminine ideals but out of a desire to punish those who violate

them” (Berdahl, 2007, p. 434). Another possibility is that the pressure of gender role stereotypes makes it more difficult for mission executives to recognize harassment, since evangelical women are socialized to conform to those expectations and accept male authority as beneficent.

Thus our findings suggest that although all the barriers affect women leaders in both conservative-leaning religious organizations and liberal-leaning higher education institutions, certain barriers are more salient in the religion sector. Women in the highly male-dominated world of evangelical mission organizations were more strongly impacted by barriers requiring conformity to gender-role stereotypes, while these barriers seemed somewhat weaker but never totally absent for women in the higher education study.

Implications

As we have shown, many often-invisible practices across all three societal levels contribute to gender bias. In order for organizations to create lasting improvement for women’s leadership, the first step is to recognize that women encounter barriers at all three levels and that macro and micro barriers impact women’s ability to see themselves as leaders as well as others’ ability to consider them for leadership roles. Organizations therefore need to develop strategies that extend beyond the walls of the workplace to impact societal and personal perspectives on women. We offer four interventions which may change work culture and reduce barriers at multiple levels of society.

Gender-Equity Workshops

First, organizations can hold gender-equity workshops to help leaders and employees understand how organizations are gendered and the resulting barriers for women. Such workshops should make gender-based leadership barriers visible by naming and describing them and provide a safe space for discussion of how the organization can move toward equalism with

specific action steps as outcomes. Additional objectives are to help organizational leaders reduce gendered leadership beliefs within their own ranks and ensure appointments to leadership positions are based on candidate skills and qualifications instead of gendered associations, such as “think manager-think male and think crisis-think female” (Bruckmüller, Ryan, Rink, & Haslam, 2014, p. 223). Such workshops would be useful in combatting gender-based leadership barriers at all three levels: macro: *gender stereotypes, gender unconsciousness, leadership perceptions, and scrutiny*; meso: *glass cliff, male organizational culture, and tokenism*; micro: *communication style constraints and conscious unconsciousness*.

New Norms

A second way organizations can revise work culture is to establish and communicate new workplace norms. For example, performance expectations can be tied to goals instead of time spent at work. Workplace norms around decision-making and levels of authority should be made transparent and adhered to consistently. In addition, employees can be encouraged and even required to take compensatory time off when they must work on projects outside of normal working hours. Norms can also be established to name, recognize, and reward communal practices for both men and women. Similarly, norms to name, recognize, and stop attempts to silence or control women can be established. Such new norms could also affect barriers at all three levels: macro: *control of women’s voices*; meso: *devaluing of communal practice and lack of support*; micro: *work-life conflict*.

Community Group Partnerships

A third approach is to form partnerships with community groups which seek to eliminate gender barriers for girls and women. Women are particularly underrepresented in certain fields of study, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) (U.S. Department

of Education, 2012). By the time these women graduate it is typically too late to get them into male-dominated career paths. Although the gender gap in leadership is much more than just a pipeline problem, in the case of STEM and other male-dominated fields, it begins with the pipeline. Until more women choose to study and work in these fields, men will likely continue to dominate future leadership opportunities in these industries. To combat this issue, organizations need to take a long-range view and work towards systemic solutions such as supporting community-based groups which introduce and encourage girls to pursue careers in fields currently dominated by men. An example is the Girls Who Code non-profit organization which works “to inspire, educate, and equip girls with the computing skills to pursue 21st century opportunities” (Girls Who Code, 2016, Mission & Vision section, para. 1). Partnering with organizations that promote educational choices for girls is one way for organizations to communicate that they are serious about eliminating the gender gap in leadership. This would address three barriers: macro: *cultural constraints on women’s own choices* and *gender stereotypes*; micro: *psychological glass ceiling*.

Recognition of Spousal Contributions

Our last approach is the recognition of spousal contributions. The leader’s spouse may be handling duties that could be delegated to others, such as event planning, committee work, and running work-related errands for the employed partner (Oden, 2007). Organizations should strive to eliminate expectations for unpaid organizational work performed by the leader’s spouse. Alternatively, spouses of leaders could be brought on as compensated employees to recognize the role that they play. While the non-employed spouse may serve as an ambassador for the institution (Oden, 2007), compensating the spouse or delegating tasks to others will set an example of equalism at the top which is a critical step towards organization culture change and

will help eliminate the meso-level barrier of the *two-person career structure* and reduce the macro-level barrier of *gender stereotypes*.

Potential Outcomes

As organizations become aware of the multiple levels at which gender barriers operate, they can develop interventions to address the issues on all three levels within their own organizations. In addition, as individuals begin to produce and reproduce new norms within organizations, they likely will carry these new norms into the home and society. Because organizational performance depends on engaging the full expertise of all leaders, (Swanson & Holton, 2009) not just males, making these invisible barriers visible and working to overcome them holds great promise for creating organizational environments in which both men and women can thrive. Improved organizational environments may lead to improvements in society as well.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to present the results of a cross-sector analysis of leadership barriers encountered by women in executive leadership in higher education and religious organizations. The divergent nature of the two sectors combined with the striking similarity of leadership barriers the women discussed led us to examine the likelihood that the barriers are traceable to being a woman in executive leadership, regardless of the type of organization. Furthermore, we have developed and presented a comprehensive framework that shows how these barriers operate at the macro, meso, and micro levels of society. A number of these barriers will be examined in chapters within this section: for example, *work-life conflict* in Chapter 19, *queen bee effect* in Chapter 21, and *gender stereotypes* in Chapter 22. In analyzing the barriers, we have argued that they are deeply embedded in organizational structures and functions, rendering them at times virtually invisible. Organizational processes and systems

affecting women in leadership and potential solutions for inclusiveness will be explored in more depth in Chapter 18, while the unconscious nature of the bias will be discussed in Chapter 20. To fully incorporate the potential leadership capacity of both women and men, organizations must develop broad strategies to first make the barriers visible and then eliminate them.

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