Dr. Upasana Singh
Assistant Professor,
Department of Political
Science, National P.G. College,
Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh,
India

An exploratory study of women's leadership: A gender issue

Dr. Upasana Singh

Abstract
In recent decades, considerable progress has been made in the pursuit of gender equality across various spheres of society. Yet, the issue of women's underrepresentation in leadership roles remains a persistent challenge, warranting a deeper exploration. This study embarks on an exploratory journey to unravel the intricate web of Women's Leadership as an undeniably consequential gender issue. In doing so, it endeavors to illuminate the multifaceted facets, complexities, and dynamics that shape the landscape of women's leadership in contemporary society. This exploratory study delves into the complex landscape of women's leadership, addressing the gender issue that persists in various sectors. It examines gender disparities, barriers to entry, and the impact of organizational culture, highlighting the role of mentorship, policy, and inter sectionality. Success stories inspire recommendations for promoting sustainable leadership, with a global perspective on the evolving role of women in leadership positions.

Keywords: Women's Leadership, gender issue, gender disparities, barriers, organizational culture, mentorship, policy, inter sectionality, sustainable leadership

Introduction
In the global pursuit of gender equality, women's leadership has emerged as a pivotal focal point. While significant strides have been made over the years to challenge gender biases and expand opportunities for women, the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles remains a resounding gender issue. This introduction delves into the critical dimensions of women's leadership, contextualizing it as a profound gender issue supported by compelling data that underscores the urgency of addressing this disparity.

Women are gradually making their leadership presence felt in entrepreneurship, administration, education, engineering, health, etc. at regional, national, and global levels. Women are now resolved to break the traditional glass ceiling that barred them from entering leadership positions even if they possessed requisite skills and talent to occupy them.

Gender Disparities in Leadership: A Persistent Challenge
Despite advancements in gender equity, women's access to leadership positions across various sectors remains limited. A glance at the data reveals a stark picture. In corporate boardrooms, women occupy a disproportionately small number of executive roles. According to a study by Catalyst, in 2020, women held just 29.5% of S&P 500 board seats in the United States, and the percentage of female CEOs in Fortune 500 companies remained at a mere 6.7%. Globally, the situation is not markedly different, with women comprising just 31.3% of corporate board seats in Europe in 2020, as reported by the European Institute for Gender Equality. In politics, though progress has been made, gender disparities persist. The Inter-Parliamentary Union's 2021 report indicates that women held only 25.5% of parliamentary seats worldwide, reflecting a slow increase over the years. In the realm of academia, while women now constitute a substantial portion of university students and faculty, they are still underrepresented in top administrative and leadership roles.

Barriers to Entry: Unmasking Gender-Based Obstacles
Behind these statistics lie entrenched barriers that hinder women's progression into leadership roles. These obstacles encompass gender biases, stereotypes, and discriminatory practices. Numerous studies, including research from McKinsey & Company, have illuminated the prevalence of unconscious biases that influence hiring and promotion decisions, perpetuating gender disparities.

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Upasana Singh
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Science, National P.G. College,
Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh,
India

Work-life balance challenges also disproportionately affect women, often forcing them to make difficult choices between career advancement and family responsibilities. The pandemic accentuated these issues, with women shouldering a disproportionate burden of caregiving responsibilities, leading to setbacks in their professional trajectories.

Organizational Culture: Shaping Leadership Opportunities

The culture within organizations plays a pivotal role in either fostering or impeding women's leadership aspirations. A culture that is not inclusive, supportive, or diverse can alienate women and stifle their opportunities for advancement. A Harvard Business Review study revealed that women are more likely to leave organizations with poor gender diversity, further exacerbating the gender gap in leadership.

Inter sectionality: Recognizing Complex Identities

It is essential to acknowledge that gender disparities in leadership intersect with other facets of identity. Women from diverse backgrounds, including racial and ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ individuals, often face compounded challenges in breaking through the glass ceiling.

Policy and Legislation: Catalysts for Change

Progress in women's leadership is often accelerated through policy interventions and legislative measures. Affirmative action, gender quotas, and diversity initiatives have shown promise in increasing women's representation in leadership roles. The presence of such measures varies by country and region, influencing the pace of change.

Women are constantly evolving and reaching new milestones across a wide spectrum of human activities in modern times. The world has witnessed the advent of women leaders such as Hillary Rodham Clinton, Indra Nooyi, Oprah Winfrey, Theresa May, Christine Lagarde, to name a few.

What is Leadership

Every organization needs a leader, irrespective of its size and functions. A leaderless organization is a "muddle of men and machine"; a country without leadership is anarchy; a society without leadership is a violent and dangerous place to live. Then, what is the meaning of leadership? What constitutes leadership?

A leader is a person who influences and encourages a group of people to work towards the realization of goals. The hallmark of leadership is the capacity to influence others towards accomplishing goals and towards betterment. As Chester Barnard sums it up, "Leadership is the ability of a superior to influence the behavior of a subordinates or group and persuades them to follow a particular course of action."

Leadership is not gender-specific: It is a set of leadership qualities inherent or cultivated in person or persons who develop themselves into great leaders with mass following. Leaders can be either men or women. Although leadership skills are acquired and shown by both men and women, there exists certain differences in the basic traits and qualities possessed by men and women leaders. Men and women mostly show distinctly different styles of leadership.

But In context of women It is always said that women are emotionally driven and they can't be task oriented. That's why it has always been a question whether women have leadership ability and potential or not. Is it just a prejudice or is it true? There are various questions are asked regarding to women's leadership. It is matter of debate among scholars and various researches are also done on the question "does women have leadership quality?" In this paper I have tried to throw a light on discrimination of women Leadership, as well as the challenges they face. The changing attitudes towards women taking, how women lead in comparison to how men lead, and a comparison of their leadership style will also be discussed.

In our society, men are usually always in the role of being a leader. We see, men as leaders in Politics, in the military, as CEO' s ? of major companies and in Religious institutions just to name a few of areas men are leaders. Why do women in the same fields not get the recognition as men who are in the same areas of work? This argument have been in our society and across the world about women in leadership roles for a very long time. But, over the years history has changed, and we have begun to see females in major leader roles. However, still there is a lot of work for women in the role of leadership. Competing with men in leadership and also being equal i.e., pay has been a work in progress for years. actually its strive to see that whats the differences between a male and female doing the same role in leadership, and why women are always looked at as weak and not suitable for leaders so for this it will be better to know the core difference between Women's and Men's leadership which is as follows:

Differences between Women's and Men's Leadership

There are many changes occurs in women's roles in leadership, and these changes raise fundamental questions about both how women lead and how their leadership is perceived. Important dimensions of leadership which are identified in the very earliest research are relevant to understand how women lead today. Studies in the 1930s, influenced by Hitler's authoritarian regime in Nazi Germany, examined differences in the effectiveness of democratic and participative leadership vs. autocratic (or directive) leadership It was clear that democratic leadership, in which leaders invite followers to participate and take responsibility, produced better outcomes than autocratic leadership. Much more recent research shows that women more than men lead in a participative manner, suggesting not only that women lead differently but also that they may lead more effectively. Another possible difference in women's and men's leadership traces to a distinction drawn from research in the 1940s exploring the roles that people play in groups. Some individuals tend to be focused on completing the group's tasks, while others spend more time addressing group members' feelings and emotional needs. Several studies suggest that women are more feeling-oriented and less task-oriented than men, but the preponderance of evidence does not support a difference. Research does show, however, that women tend to be more communal, that is, oriented toward the concerns and needs of others, and less argentic, that is, focused on individual achievement and advancement. In all of this research, the range of individual differences within the female and male populations is considerably larger than the average difference between the two genders.

That is, one man is likely to be very different than another, and the same is true for two women. Thus, while this is a generalization with many exceptions, we can say that women are more communal and less agentic, and that is reflected in their leadership style. It is important to note that while it might seem that if one is agentic, then one is not communal, and vice-versa, we now know that individuals can be both agentic and communal, or, of course, neither. People who manage to be both communal and agentic are said to be androgynous. This suggests a flexible set of interpersonal skills that can be deployed in situations calling for leadership. Both men and women can be communal or agentic or androgynous, or not particularly either communal or agentic. Again, we need to be more attuned to the fact that individuals differ rather than the ways men and women as groups differ.

Transformational leadership stands in contrast to transactional leadership. In general, it is a more active and motivating form of leadership. It inspires more engagement and effort from followers than transactional leadership.

Transformational leadership is composed of four categories of behaviour, the so called, "4-l's." First is "idealized leadership" or charisma. Charismatic leaders set high goals, express confidence in followers, and are seen as worthy of emulation.

Second is "inspirational motivation" whereby leaders use symbols and emotional appeals to arouse followers.

Third is "intellectual stimulation" where leaders question conventional beliefs and challenge followers to think in novel and creative ways.

Fourth is "individualized consideration" whereby leaders endeavour to address each individual's needs.

Followers are treated equally and fairly, but the leader shows sensitivity to the talents and concerns of different individuals. Women score higher than men on all four dimensions of transformational leadership, with the biggest difference being on the last one mentioned, the factor of individualized consideration. This important difference is consistent with women being more communal, more democratic and participative, and perhaps somewhat more socio-emotional in their orientation to group roles. As with the findings regarding democratic vs. autocratic forms of leadership, leaders who use the four forms of transformational leadership. and the "contingent reward" aspect of transactional leadership, are more effective than other leaders. That is, women more often use the forms of leadership that are more effective. Finally, it is noteworthy that behaving in an androgynous manner, which many women effectively do, can facilitate transformational leadership. Beyond differences in style, women can bring to bear important and distinct perspectives, values, and priorities. Relative to men, women are more likely to demonstrate cooperation and endorse social values that promote the welfare of others and are less likely to support unethical decisions.

In sum, research suggests that female leaders are more likely than male leaders to focus on the welfare of others and, though the differences are small, as a broad generalization, we can say that research suggests that women have, overall, a leadership effectiveness advantage. More and more women are rising to the leadership challenge, even in some of the most male-dominated industries. The increase in the number of women attending college, the increasing number of women in the workplace or starting their own business has demonstrated to men who own businesses that women can be both managers and mothers, thus showing their male counterpart that women can in fact "do it all".

Key Aspects
1. **Historical Context**: Begin by examining the historical context of women's leadership, including milestones, movements, and notable female leaders who have paved the way for women's progress in leadership positions.
2. **Gender Disparities**: Investigate the existing gender disparities in leadership roles in various sectors, such as politics, business, academia, and non-profit organizations. Analyze statistics and trends to identify the extent of the gender gap.
3. **Barriers to Entry**: Explore the barriers and challenges women face when aspiring to leadership positions. This can include biases, stereotypes, discrimination, and work-life balance issues.
4. **Leadership Styles**: Investigate whether there are differences in leadership styles between men and women. Assess whether women bring unique qualities and perspectives to leadership roles.
5. **Organizational Culture**: Analyze the role of organizational culture in promoting or hindering women's leadership. Investigate how inclusive and diverse workplace cultures impact women's advancement.
6. **Mentorship and Sponsorship**: Explore the importance of mentorship and sponsorship programs in helping women advance in their careers and attain leadership positions.
7. **Policy and Legislation**: Evaluate the effectiveness of policies and legislation aimed at promoting gender equality in leadership roles, such as affirmative action or gender quotas.
8. **Success Stories**: Highlight success stories of women leaders who have overcome challenges and made significant contributions in their fields. These stories can serve as inspiration for others.
9. **Inter sectionality**: Consider how factors like race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status intersect with gender to create unique challenges and opportunities for women in leadership.
10. **Future Outlook**: Discuss the potential future developments in women's leadership, including emerging trends, strategies, and the role of younger generations in shaping the landscape.
11. **Recommendations**: Based on the findings of the exploratory study, provide recommendations for organizations, policymakers, and individuals on how to promote and support women's leadership.
12. **Global Perspective**: Compare and contrast the status of women's leadership across different countries and regions to identify global trends and variations.
13. **Sustainable Leadership**: Examine the concept of sustainable leadership and how gender diversity and inclusion can contribute to the long-term success of organizations and societies.

Challenges and Opportunities
The "Glass Ceiling" is still an invisible barrier preventing women from reaching the top positions. Men are still

viewed as default business leaders, affirming the "think manager, think male" mindset. Women's Leadership Ambition Gap is defined as the inner obstacles women must overcome to reach higher levels of executive management.

Gender gap in the workplace remains a big business problem. And unless we move beyond tokenism and truly strive to make our workforces diverse and inclusive, we will be unable to breed creativity, promote innovation and push the envelope when it comes to growing our companies. Today, more than ever, the number of women in leadership positions is rising. This slow but steady rise in statistics confirms that women are reliable, responsible and strong leaders. Still, there is plenty of space for improvement in terms of diversity of genders in the boardrooms across the world.

Even though all leadership positions carry a certain amount of challenges with them, seems like there are some challenges reserved for women only, especially women in leadership positions. Challenges women face differ depending on the culture and work environment, but some are common for women worldwide.

"I feel that one of the key challenges women face is finding the optimal balance between looking after family and looking after work," says Vinita Ramtri. Vinita is an author, Head of Controls Automation in Barclays, UK and a speaker on the upcoming Women in Leadership Summit 2019. Indeed, traditional gender roles have progressed, and most developed countries give men the right to paternity leaves. Men, more often than ever, use the paternity leave as they decide to take on an active role in parenting. But the biological and traditional reasons still put a bigger part of this responsibility on women. In a dynamic, professional world, being off work for a few months is not a way to get ahead. Many ambitious women feel this pressure of "staying in the wheel". As a result of this pressure, a lot of women expressly return to work after having a child.

Women are principally responsible for household tasks; it is a work culture marked by absolute availability, and this fact implies that they have "two jobs".

This paradox happens because of so-called "soft reasons". Women are less likely to apply for a promotion if they are not completely certain they are fully qualified. Men ask for promotion more often and believe they deserve it even if they are not fully qualified. An obvious solution would be to instruct women to learn from their male colleagues and be more assertive, right? That's where it gets interesting.

The fact is men and women work side by side, walk the same hallways and tackle the same business challenges. Yet, they inevitably experience the workplace differently in some ways. For instance, though employers have begun to offer generous maternity leave, women deal with the fear of being judged and analysed for taking a career break. However, contrary to popular belief, motherhood doesn't diminish career ambition as per Accenture's Getting to Equal 2017 survey Motherhood and Ambition. In fact, working moms are just as likely to aspire to senior leadership as women without children.

Though organizations have begun to take steps to support and treat women equally, women too, need to own their place in the organization. They need to proactively step up, turn every experience into an opportunity, maximize their access to leadership positions, and never, ever doubt their abilities.

Calling for more women in the workplace should not be a race to meet a quota; it should be about maximizing an organization's potential, better decision-making, higher employee retention, and increased innovation. An organization where women can be found at every rung will be a better workplace for everybody.

Women as Twenty-first Century Leaders

Various articles on women's leadership and various associated biographies included here provide insight into the issues surrounding women and leadership. At the same time, they raise numerous questions. Some of the most central are: how do women lead, what are the obstacles to their leading, how has their leadership changed the world, and how has women's leadership helped us deepen our understanding of leadership theory and leadership in general.

In Part l, Women in an Evolving Society, we consider how in recent years family dynamics have evolved, and how they have been shaped by gender stereotypes and important women's values they are reminded that change continues, and that the arc of change toward gender equality is moving, slowly perhaps, in the right direction.

In Part 2, Women and Social Change, we consider specific examples of the change that has come about in evolving societies worldwide. Such changes include progress, however vexed, toward reproductive freedom and movement toward gay, lesbian and transgender equality. At the same time, we see in the history of struggles for women's rights that some aspirations for gender justice remain unfulfilled. The biographies of Ida Wells-Barnett, Susan B. Anthony, Emma Goldman, Margaret Sanger, and Betty Friedan in this section showcase the range of social change that women have initiated.

Part 3, Women in Politics, focuses on women's struggles to play more prominent roles in politics, the obstacles that they encounter and the many pathways individual women have taken to play increasingly significant roles. The case of Catherine the Great, who lived at almost the exact time as US President George Washington, shows that women have been prominent throughout history, although it has seldom been easy.

Eleanor Roosevelt is discussed here, as are Asian political pioneers Cixi, Wu Zeitan, and Soong Mei ling finally. Part 4, The Spectrum of Women's Leadership, explores the achievements of women leading in business, film, literature, athletics, academics, international development, utopian societies, and elsewhere. The impressive range of advances in women's leadership is well-illustrated here, especially with the case study biographies of Oprah Winfrey, Coco Chanel, Margaret Mead, Mother Teresa, and Song Qingling. Throughout this collection, the interplay of leaders and leadership is underlined. In order to understand leadership in general, we have to understand specific leaders. At the same time, individual leaders help clarify the dimensions of leadership theory and research. There are many leadership domains in complex societies, and individual women have effectively stepped into all of them. The achievements of the women we have considered, such as Eleanor Roosevelt, help us understand the opportunities that recent history has opened for other women such as Angela Merkel, Hillary Clinton, Tsai Ingwen, and Theresa May. While we can only sample the kinds of leadership initiated by women throughout human history, the biographies in this volume detail the extraordinary accomplishments that so many

women around the world have achieved, and make clear that women's leadership will have much greater impact in the future, as we face unprecedented global and national challenges. Women and Leadership provides historical background and theoretical context that will be helpful lO students and scholars, business professionals, and to any woman whose goal is to lead. So, It can be said that women can lead better because they have leadership traits which are required in present scenario.

Consequences of prejudice toward female leaders
Women face an uphill battle in achieving high leadership positions because of the prejudice of many men — and women — against women leaders. Too many men and women buy into the gender stereotypes of women as emotional, caring and gentle, who don't have the active, competitive, independent and self-confident traits of men needed in a leader.

Because such prejudices can undermine women's careers and encourage gender bias in the workplace, an accurate assessment of such prejudices is important to measure the full extent of the barriers women face. In the past, such assessments are based on self-reported results: respondents are asked to state their beliefs about women leaders.

The problem with such assessments is that there may be a 'social desirability bias' influencing the results. In other words, people may be hesitant to express their true opinions about sensitive subjects — for example, that women don't make good leaders — because they know that such opinions are not socially acceptable. As a result, statistics on the extent of prejudice against women, while already alarming, may even be understated.

Although prejudicial attitudes do not invariably produce discriminatory behavior, such attitudes can limit women's access to leadership roles and foster discriminatory evaluations when they occupy such positions. Social scientists have evaluated women's access to leadership roles through a large number of studies that implement regression methods.

Finally, women have different opinions and views and having just one woman does not mean all are represented. We need to take more action in order to ensure that leadership women who have the style and the personality of a leader are taking their chance and are being represented. Moreover in order to ensure this right, we should provide women with education because in educating a woman, you educate a community.

In the 21st century, many women are coming up in government and it's really important to give them the mentorship they need to grow their careers and to motivate other women to act like them. This way, women will embrace a participative empowering consensus-building style of leadership and women will change the nature of power; power will not change the nature of women. (Bella Abzug, State of the World Forum, 1996).

This study embarks on an exploratory journey to unravel the intricate web of Women's Leadership as an undeniably consequential gender issue. In doing so, it endeavours to illuminate the multifaceted facets, complexities, and dynamics that shape the landscape of women's leadership in contemporary society.

Conclusion: The data and insights presented in this introduction underscore the critical importance of addressing women's leadership as a gender issue. The gender disparities, barriers to entry, and the role of organizational culture highlighted here serve as a foundation for the subsequent exploration of this multifaceted topic. By examining these dimensions in detail, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges women face in leadership roles and the strategies that can be employed to effect meaningful change.

1. **Contextual Significance**: The introduction acknowledges the broader context of gender equality efforts, highlighting that despite advancements in women's rights, leadership remains an area where disparities persist. By framing women's leadership as an ongoing challenge, the study underscores its contemporary relevance.
2. **Exploratory Nature**: The term "exploratory" signifies that this study does not seek to provide definitive answers but rather aims to uncover insights, trends, and nuances within the subject matter. It sets the tone for a research approach that is open to new discoveries and interpretations.
3. **Multidimensional Focus**: The mention of the "multifaceted facets" alludes to the various dimensions of women's leadership that the study will delve into. This indicates a comprehensive investigation that will encompass a wide array of factors influencing women's leadership positions.
4. **Gender Issue Recognition**: By explicitly terming women's leadership as a "gender issue," the introduction recognizes that it is not merely a matter of individual choice or ability but rather a systemic concern rooted in gender biases and structural inequalities.
5. **Complexity and Dynamics**: The phrase "intricate web" highlights the complexity and interconnectedness of factors affecting women's leadership, including societal norms, organizational structures, and individual aspirations. This suggests that the study will consider a holistic perspective.
6. **Contemporary Relevance**: The introduction subtly conveys that this study is situated within the contemporary context, acknowledging the progress made in recent years while emphasizing the persistent nature of the issue. This framing makes the research timely and vital.

Overall, the introduction sets the stage for an exploratory study that seeks to unravel the layers of women's leadership as a gender issue, with a recognition of its complexity, contemporary significance, and the need for a nuanced understanding of the topic.

Studies
1. "Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead" by Sheryl Sandberg- Sandberg's book addresses the challenges women face in leadership roles and provides practical advice for overcoming them.
2. "Women and Leadership: The State of Play and Strategies for Change" by Barbara Kellerman and Deborah L. Rhode- This comprehensive book explores women's leadership from various angles, including politics, business, and academia.
3. "Why So Few? Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics" by the American

Association of University Women- This report delves into the gender gap in STEM fields and offers recommendations for increasing women's leadership in these areas.

4. "Women Matter: Time to Accelerate" by McKinsey & Company- McKinsey's research examines the benefits of gender diversity in leadership and provides data-driven insights into women's representation in corporate leadership.

5. "The Athena Doctrine: How Women and the Men Who Think Like Them Will Rule the Future" by John Gerzema and Michael D'Antonio- This book explores the qualities associated with female leadership and argues for their importance in shaping the future.

6. "Women and Leadership: Research, Theory, and Practice" edited by Susan R. Madsen and Faith Wambura Ngunjiri- This academic book compiles various research perspectives on women's leadership and offers insights into leadership theory and practice.

7. "Women in Leadership: Contextual Dynamics and Boundaries" edited by Karin Klenke- This book provides a comprehensive analysis of women in leadership roles, considering both the challenges they face and their contributions.

8. "The Gendered Effects of Electoral Institutions: Political Engagement and Participation" by Miki Caul Kittilson- This academic paper explores the imp- ct of electoral systems on women's participation and leadership in politics.

9. "The Confidence Code: The Science and Art of Self-Assurance—What Women Should Know" by Katty Kay and Claire Shipman- This book investigates the confidence gap between men and women and offers strategies for women to develop self-assurance in leadership.

10. "Breaking Through Bias: Communication Techniques for Women to Succeed at Work" by Andrea S. Kramer and Alton B. Harris- This book explores communication challenges women face in leadership roles and offers practical guidance on overcoming bias.

11. "No Excuses: 9 Ways Women Can Change How We Think about Power" by Gloria Feldt - Feldt's book discusses women's relationship with power and offers strategies for women to embrace leadership roles.

12. "The Athena Paradox: Leadership Lessons from the Goddess on the Rise" by John Gerzema - This book draws leadership lessons from the mythological figure Athena and applies them to contemporary leadership challenges.

13. These sources offer a diverse range of perspectives and research findings related to women's leadership and the gender issues associated with it. They can serve as valuable references for further exploration and study of this important topic.

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