



Women in high places: When and why promoting women into top positions can harm them individually or as a group (and how to prevent this)

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Abstract

This contribution focuses on women in leadership positions. We propose that two convictions are relevant to the effects of having women in high places. On the one hand, women as a group are expected to employ different leadership styles than men, in this way adding diversity to management teams. On the other hand, individual women are expected to ascend to leadership positions by showing their ability to display the competitiveness and toughness typically required from those at the top. We posit that both convictions stem from gendered leadership beliefs, and that these interact with women's self-views to determine the effectiveness of female leaders. We develop an integrative model that explains the interplay between organizational beliefs and individual-self definitions and its implications for female leadership. We then present initial evidence in support of this model from two recent programs of research. The model allows us to connect "glass cliff" effects to "queen bee" effects showing that both relate to the perceived salience of gender in the organization, as well as individual gender identities. Each of these phenomena may harm future career opportunities of women, be it as individuals or as a group. We outline how future research may build on our proposed model and examine its further implications. We also indicate how the model may offer a concrete starting point for developing strategies to enhance the effectiveness of women in leadership positions.

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1. Introduction

There is a host of theoretical analyses and research reviews seeking to explain why women are less likely than men to achieve career success. The present contribution takes a different perspective, as we focus on women who have already made it to the top. We present evidence to show that while the increased representation of women in high places may seem encouraging, this does not imply that men and women receive equal treatment in organizations. We additionally argue that having women in top positions in itself does not help resolve the issues these women encounter, nor does it facilitate the career ambitions of other women. Instead, we present an integrative model proposing that the presence of women in high places may even undermine women’s future opportunities individually or as a group, as long as nothing else changes. Understanding the pernicious implications of current organizational realities is a necessary first step to realize and enhance the benefits of having women in high places.

In this contribution we review recent research on the phenomena of the ‘glass cliff’ and the ‘queen bee’ as initial evidence in support of our model. We demonstrate how glass cliff effects may threaten the ability of women to be successful individually, while queen bee effects undermine women’s ability to be successful as a group. The conceptual framework we propose predicts that gender-based beliefs and biased treatment by others in the organization do not have a simple relationship with individual and group success. Rather, gendered leadership beliefs and expectations held within the organization interact with self-defined identity salience and gender identification to elicit different phenomena in the workplace (see Fig. 1). Understanding these different phenomena and how they come

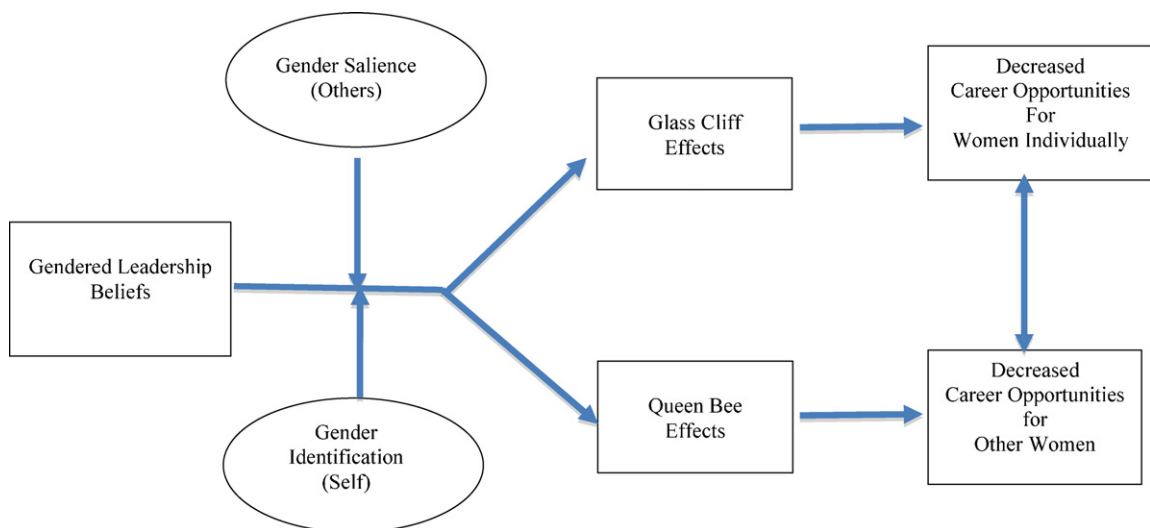


Fig. 1. Schematic representation of how glass cliff effects and queen bee effects emerge due to the interplay between biased treatments of women in organizations and gendered self-views.

about constitutes a first step toward creating a workplace environment that can truly reap the benefits of gender diversity for leadership and organizational performance.

The current contribution is organized in the following way. We start by considering the benefits of gender diversity at work, focusing on women who have achieved career success. We review the relevant literature on gender diversity in organizations, and consider some of the mechanisms that make it difficult to realize the promise of diversity. Specifically, we will examine the role of gendered leadership beliefs in organizations, and how these provide a different organizational reality for male and female leaders. In doing this, we focus on some important mechanisms that impede change in people's beliefs about gender and leadership. In particular, we will discuss the pernicious effects of implicit gender discrimination in the work place and distinguish between different strategies women may adopt to cope with a devalued identity at work. We then propose a model that integrates these different mechanisms, to elucidate how the presence of women in high places tends to reinforce rather than change gendered leadership beliefs in the workplace. We proceed to review two programs of recent research that offer initial evidence in support of our model, and show how gendered beliefs contribute to the two phenomena central to this review – the glass cliff and queen bee effects. We conclude by specifying when and why adverse effects of having women in top management are most likely to emerge and how these can be prevented.

2. Women in high places

Women continue to be underrepresented in top executive positions today (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009). Although the number of women participating in the work force has increased substantially (e.g., to 46.7% in the US; Catalyst, 2012), they are mainly found in lower organizational ranks or work in 'flat' careers as health care or teaching professionals. In the US only 16% of the members of corporate boards of Fortune-500 companies are women (Soares et al., 2011), and in Europe this number is even lower (12%, European Commission, 2011). Similar patterns are found in other sectors of the labor market. For instance, even though women make up 45% of associates in US law firms, only 19.5% are partners. In the largest US banks, only 12% of the executives are women, and only 14% of health care organizations have a female director (Catalyst, 2011). Nevertheless, there is considerable variation in this respect between countries that differ in their economic status or labor policy. For instance, a comparison of over 4000 businesses in 45 countries worldwide reveals that women are better represented in top leadership positions in industrialized countries than in emerging markets (Gladman & Lamb, 2012). Additionally, representation of women in leadership positions is increased when this is the focus of specific initiatives such as gender quota, for instance in Norway (36% of women in top leadership) or France (33% of women in top political offices).

Thus, even though women are still less likely than men to be promoted, there is a steady increase of women in top leadership positions. The new leaders of today are more likely to be women (Fagenson & Jackson, 1993; Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 2006) and as, for example, CEOs or government ministers, they carry a great deal of responsibility and authority. Understanding the ways in which women can participate and contribute to organizational success no longer primarily is about identifying and addressing systemic barriers that prevent women from fully and meaningfully participating in the workforce. Instead, we need to examine and understand those women who have overcome these first barriers to be able to yield the organizational benefits associated with increasing gender diversity in the work force.

2.1. *The benefits of gender diversity in management boards*

Although many organizations have been effective in hiring women, reflecting contemporary changes in the work force (Kossek & Zonia, 1993), these organizations have been less successful in promoting the women that were hired (Blum, Fields, & Goodman, 1994; Goodman, Fields, & Blum, 2003). In most organizations, top positions are still predominantly occupied by men. For this reason, large organizations are pressured by external parties, such as politicians, employer lobby groups and company rankings, to offer highly qualified women equal appointment opportunities. For example in the UK, the official FTSE 100 company ranking report of 2011 stated that the poor representation of women in management positions, relative to their male counterparts, raises doubts about whether board recruitment is truly based on skills, experience and performance. The figures presented in this report demonstrated that at the current rate of change it will take over 70 years to achieve gender-balanced boardrooms in the UK alone.

In addition to the realization that fair treatment is crucial for the career progression of women, there is a growing sense of urgency to understand how and when gender diversity in top management positions may benefit organizations. The most frequently examined organizational outcomes are financial profits, corporate governance practices and customer demand services. Direct causal evidence that organizations benefit financially from gender diversity in their top management teams is not always evident (e.g., Shrader, Blackburn, & Iles, 1997). However a number of correlational field studies amongst US based companies have observed a positive association between the percentage of women in executive positions and firm financial performance (Carter, Simkins, & Simpson, 2003; Erhardt, Werbel, & Shrader, 2003; Krishnan & Park, 2005; Welbourne, Cycyota, & Ferrante, 2007). These effects persist even after controlling for growth in resources. Studies on the effects of legislative measures intended to boost the appointment of women on corporate boards in Spain demonstrate positive short term stock market responses as well as long term increases in firm value due to increased gender diversity on management boards (Campbell & Minguez Vera, 2008, 2010).

Additionally, there is converging evidence for a link between the proportion of female leaders relative to male leaders and corporate governance (Terjesen, Sealy, & Singh, 2009). A substantial amount of correlational research demonstrates that internal processes and conflict of interests are controlled more effectively by organizations who adopt an inclusive human capital policy than by organizations that lack such a policy. Again, this is the case after controlling for company size, industry, and other relevant resources (Carter, Simkins, & Simpson, 2003). Given that most organizations with such an inclusive policy have women (or members of other underrepresented groups) in top positions by now, they are better able to provide a fair representation of the different stakeholders involved. As such, the management boards of these organizations are better able to handle internal processes and cope with the diverse interests of relevant parties.

Finally, applied research suggests that there also tends to be a positive relationship between the number of women in high places and customer demand services (e.g., Joy, Carter, Wagner, & Narayanan, 2007). Organizations need to know how to satisfy the needs of customers effectively, and when management has to serve multiple, or fluctuating, markets, a relatively balanced gender ratio in top positions can help achieve this goal (Bilimoria, 2000). There is indeed empirical work demonstrating that in such situations, standard management responses are not enough to reinforce a particular service or brand. The presence of multiple perspectives, provided by men as well as women, can help to cater for the demands of a broader range of customers (Camelo-Ordaz, Hernandez-Lara, & Valle-Cabrera, 2005).

These findings suggest that increasing the representation of women in leadership positions may benefit the organization in very tangible and concrete ways. But why exactly is this the case? There is no direct evidence that the organizational benefits of gender diversity in top management positions are associated with the introduction of a female approach to leadership. Thus, the documented benefits of increased diversity in top management teams – due to an increase of women in high places – should not be seen to suggest that women, more than men, possess the leadership skills necessary to improve financial outcomes, governance practices or customer demand services. Rather, these findings indicate that corporate boards – which have to make complex strategic decisions on a daily basis – can perform better when they make use of a range of different skills, knowledge and experiences (Hoogendoorn, Oosterbeek, & Van Praag, 2011). The most qualified people for the job are likely to come from different backgrounds, and include women as well as men. Combining their expertise to consider different points of view is the key factor that makes diversity a competitive advantage. This point is illustrated in research by Frink et al. (2003), who demonstrate that increases in the representation of women in top positions are related to employee perceptions of organizational productivity and profitability only up to the point when men and women hold an equal proportion of jobs – no higher. In other words, the recipe for increasing organizational success due to increased diversity is not simply to “add women and stir”. This also resonates with the work of social scientists that have addressed the topic of gender and leadership. In several meta-analyses, it has been found that under similar organizational circumstances, male and female leaders, do *not* significantly differ in the leadership style they display, nor in the likelihood that they facilitate the organization’s ability to meet important goals (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995).

Nevertheless, concrete information about different leadership styles or preferred strategies is not always available in advance. In the absence of such knowledge, men as well as women tend to assume that someone who differs from them in terms of gender is likely to display a different approach to tasks at work (Rink & Ellemers, 2006). If the other person then turns out to violate this expectation, this can be a cause for disappointment and dissatisfaction (Rink & Ellemers, 2007a). Conversely, working with someone who has a different approach to work tasks is less problematic if

this is anticipated, and it is clear how this may benefit a successful performance. If this is the case, even differences can fortify a sense of common identity – rather than undermining it. Indeed, a series of experimental studies demonstrated that team members may come to see the differences between them as an important characteristic of their team, which contributes to team effectiveness (Rink & Ellemers, 2007b, 2010). Importantly, people tend to perform in multiple roles, and may adopt a leadership role when at work, that does not necessarily follow from their gender role (Ellemers & Rink, 2005). The added value of gender diversity in top management teams thus does not depend on whether or not men and women actually hold different approaches to leadership or display different leadership styles. Instead, the quality of the collaboration between different people at work as well as their success as a team is enhanced when they explicitly consider the possibility that such differences are present and examine how this might benefit their joint performance (Rink & Ellemers, 2007c, 2008).

At the same time, the absence of significant differences in the leadership approaches displayed by male and female leaders when being situated in similar settings should not be taken to imply that there is no added value in combining male and female leaders in top management teams. Indeed, there is no reason for nominating committees to ignore the gender composition of teams when appointing individuals to important managerial positions – for instance as a way to enact “gender-blindness”. As we will argue below, more often than not male and female leaders *are* placed in different organizational settings. This causes them to experience and enact different organizational realities, which need to be taken into account when evaluating their performance or added value for the organization (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Additionally, there is evidence that despite recent labor market changes, people’s performance expectations continue to depend on the gender of leaders, despite the fact that more women enter managerial roles. As such, gendered leadership beliefs and (implicit) sexism continue to impact on the opportunities and performance evaluations of women, even after they have reached a position in top management (Barreto, Ryan, & Schmitt, 2009). In the next sections, we will examine the pervasive influence of gendered leadership beliefs on the evaluation of female leaders by others and consider how the behaviors that female leaders display are impacted by these beliefs.

2.2. Gendered leadership beliefs

Even though there is evidence that male and female leaders can and do display the same leadership behaviors and role relations in society are changing, stereotypic expectations do not change at the same rate (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The tendency for people to rely on gender stereotypes to define successful leadership in organizations emerges across different national contexts and cultures worldwide (Schein, Mueller, Lituchy, & Liu, 1996). Whereas male leadership is generally expected to be characterized by a focus on task achievement and performance outcomes indicating competence (characteristic for transactional leadership), people expect female leaders to focus on interpersonal relations and work satisfaction characteristic of interpersonal warmth (associated with transformational leadership; Bass, 1985; Bass & Aviolo, 1990; see also Williams & Best, 1990).

Such expectations are not innocuous, but tend to be self-fulfilling and resilient to change, even in the face of evidence to the contrary (Barreto & Ellemers, *in press*). First, this is the case because a priori expectations tend to elicit biased information processing, causing people to seek out and attend to information that is congruent with what they expect to see, while being less attentive to events that might disprove the validity of their expectations. In this sense, gender stereotypes provide an easy heuristic that seems to describe the behavior most likely to be characteristic for male vs. female leaders. In addition, these expectations easily become normative, so that people tend to see those who behave in line with gendered expectations as ‘good’ leaders (Heilman, 2001), while individuals who display counter-stereotypical leadership behavior are considered less effective (Carli, 2001), or less suited for the job. For instance, displays of agentic leadership behaviors by women are known to have adverse effects for their chances of being hired, as well as for their promotion opportunities, salary negotiations, and performance evaluations (see Barreto & Ellemers, *in press*, for an overview).

The belief that women tend to display different forms of leadership often guides people’s expectations about the added value of having women in top management positions. The conviction that effective leadership incorporates a focus on task performance, as well as attention for interpersonal relations, makes people anticipate that the inclusion of more women in top management teams will add a more relationship oriented leadership perspective. However, as we have seen above, even if women in leadership navigate their career under different circumstances than their male colleagues (Eagly & Carli, 2007), female leaders tend to show behavior that is similar to that of their male colleagues. Indeed, the very fact that women clearly constitute a numerical minority in top management teams, conveys to them

that masculine leadership behavior apparently is valued more highly (see also Derks, Van Laar, & Ellemers, 2006). The tendency of newcomers to fit in and adapt their behavior to their observations of existing group members (Rink & Ellemers, 2009) is likely one of the mechanisms that contributes to female leaders adapting to the model of leadership that is most common, causing women in high places to display behavior that is very similar to that of their male colleagues. At the same time, when failing to display the relational leadership behavior that women are typically expected to show, female leaders are likely to elicit disappointment. Indeed, this may even seem to negate the added value of having female leaders.

As we will elaborate below, there are multiple ways in which gendered leadership beliefs impact on people's perceptions of women's and men's suitability for positions of leadership, even if they intend to treat men and women equally (Barreto & Ellemers, *in press*). Importantly, beliefs about the way in which men and women are likely to behave also carry strong normative overtones – dictating how we think male and female leaders should *ideally* behave. As a result, behavior that deviates from gendered stereotypes is unexpected and tends to be devalued or otherwise socially sanctioned (Barreto & Ellemers, *in press*).

3. Why nothing changes – really

Even though women increasingly succeed in reaching positions of leadership in organizations, there are a number of mechanisms that reinforce underlying gender stereotypical beliefs and perpetuate biased organizational realities. We propose that these relate to modern sexist beliefs. While people tend to think that sexist beliefs are characterized by negative attitudes toward women, this is not necessarily the case (Swim & Hyers, 2009). Other types of beliefs about 'men' vs. 'women' that create or promote gender inequality can also be sexist in nature, even if the discriminatory implications of these beliefs are not intended (Swim, Scott, Sechrist, Campbell, & Stangor, 2003). In fact, people may engage in biased treatment of men and women while being unaware that they are holding sexist beliefs, or even when they actively try to suppress such views (Banaji & Greenwald, 1994).

At the same time, men and women alike firmly believe in equal opportunities at the workplace. The desire to maintain the conviction that we live in a just world prevents people from noticing unequal treatment (Stroebe, Dovidio, Barreto, Ellemers, & John, 2011). They prefer not to search for information that might reveal gender discrimination (Stroebe, Barreto, & Ellemers, 2010), especially if they are not personally disadvantaged (Stroebe, Ellemers, Barreto, & Mummendey, 2009). In fact, the belief that gender discrimination is rare causes people to devalue those who complain about unequal treatment, and to consider this inappropriate behavior even if there is clear evidence to support the case (Garcia, Schmitt, Branscombe, & Ellemers, 2010). Thus, the desire to live in a just world and the conviction that career success primarily depends on individual merit makes it difficult to detect, contest, or redress biased treatment (Ellemers & Van Laar, 2010).

3.1. *Implicit gender discrimination*

During the past years, blatant expressions of sexism – such as the statement that women are less suited for leadership positions – have become rare, if only because of the legal sanctions this type of statement might attract. Importantly, this does not imply that people are less likely to endorse sexist *beliefs* – these beliefs are only expressed in more subtle ways (Benokraitis & Feagin, 1995). Thus, in a way different forms of 'modern' sexism have simply replaced 'old-fashioned' expressions of sexism (Barreto & Ellemers, *in press*; Barreto, Ellemers, Cihangir, & Stroebe, 2008). One such modern expression is 'denial of discrimination', in which people emphasize gender equality in career opportunities, while continuing to seek out and valuing 'masculine' displays of leadership. Another form is 'benevolent sexism' (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Here women are seen as fundamentally different from men, because they are thought to be superior to men in specific ways, because of their interpersonal skills and emotional sensitivity. In both cases the pernicious effects and broader implications of these sexist beliefs are masked – even from those holding such beliefs – either because of the overt emphasis on egalitarianism, or because of their positive tone (Ellemers & Barreto, 2009). Unfortunately, this does not imply that such beliefs are harmless. Denial of discrimination causes women who are rejected for the position they applied for to experience anxiety, uncertainty and loss of self-confidence, even if their rejection was due to biased treatment (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005a; Barreto et al., 2008). Likewise, exposure to benevolent sexist beliefs undermines well-being and reduces the leadership aspirations of women (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005b; Barreto, Ellemers, Piebinga, & Moya, 2010). At the same time, both types of beliefs are not easily

recognized as sexist or offensive, and make it less likely that those affected by them engage in protest or collective action to redress unequal outcomes (Ellemers & Barreto, 2009).

How is this relevant to women in leadership positions? We propose that gendered leadership expectations may function as specific instances of modern sexist beliefs. The conviction that a ‘good’ leader displays competitive and agentic behavior communicates denial of discrimination. It allows people to endorse equal career opportunities for men and women, while conveying that the way to be a successful leader is to display stereotypically masculine behavior. Conversely, the expectation that women are particularly good at social–emotional leadership relates to benevolent sexism as this conveys that female leaders should display stereotypically feminine leadership behaviors. Together, these beliefs and expectations put female leaders in an impossible position, where they are damned if they do, and damned if they do not. Adopting a masculine leadership style may yield career success but can be interpersonally damaging when breaching gender-based behavioral expectations. This is illustrated for instance by the famous case of Ann Hopkins, an extremely successful associate of Price Waterhouse who was denied partnership because of her perceived lack of feminine interpersonal skills (see Fiske, Bersoff, Borgida, Deaux, & Heilman, 1991). However, women who focus on social–emotional leadership behaviors to demonstrate their added value to management teams, may ultimately be seen as less effective leaders than those who (also) display masculine leadership behaviors. Furthermore, this typically feminine leadership style may not fit many women’s preferences or personal leadership abilities.

The net result of these different mechanisms is less than ideal. Promoting women in organizations where (modern) sexism and gendered beliefs prevail puts them in one of these two pre-fabricated molds. It either elicits (self-)selection of women who try to fit the dominant masculine model of a good manager, or results in recruitment of women who are willing to display stereotypically feminine behavior as a way to complement and extend the range of leadership behaviors that men are expected to bring to the table. We propose that both these mechanisms impede efforts to seek out the best leaders and prevent the promotion of individual leadership abilities among women as well as men. Indeed, as both mechanisms judge prospective leaders primarily in terms of their gender instead of focusing on their individual potential, neither is very helpful to women in leadership positions nor to the organizations in which they work. Instead, both types of processes unwittingly contribute to the perpetuation of the status quo and prevent management teams in organizations from benefiting from gender diversity, albeit each in their own specific way.

3.2. *Coping with a gendered identity*

If we acknowledge that implicit gender discrimination prevails in many contemporary organizations (Schmitt, Ellemers, & Branscombe, 2003), this implies that women are confronted with specific leadership expectations because of their gender, instead of being evaluated on the basis of their individual achievements or personal leadership abilities. In general, two types of strategies are available to those who are confronted with stereotypical expectations on the basis of their group membership (Ellemers, 1993a; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). One possibility is to display counter-stereotypical behaviors, to convey the difference between the self and other group members, in the hope of being judged as a separate individual. Alternatively, people may seek out and embrace features and behaviors that are characteristic for the group, while at the same time arguing for a reassessment of their value (Ellemers & Van Laar, 2010).

These different strategies might also serve those who are confronted with gendered leadership beliefs in the workplace. Some women actively distance themselves from their gender group in an attempt to escape gendered beliefs about their leadership abilities. Such distancing typically involves enacting stereotypically masculine competencies and behaviors, which are traditionally associated with leadership based on authority and hierarchical influence (Bass, Avolio, & Atwater, 1996; Schein, 1973). We argue that this is an individual-level strategy. That is, while this may help them advance in their personal career, it does little to combat gendered leadership expectations more generally (Ellemers, 2001).

Other women may be more reluctant to display an aggressive leadership style as they are concerned with the backlash often faced by those women who display stereotypically masculine behavior (see also Jost et al., 2009). Indeed, gendered leadership expectations can also impact on the attitudes and beliefs of women (Koenig & Eagly, 2005), who may then emphasize and exaggerate their ability to display relational leadership behavior through processes of self-stereotyping. Such internalization of gendered stereotypes can originate from external factors that characterize personal work experiences. This is the case for instance when women are being called upon to represent the views of female customers or employees, or are expected to introduce a different view on leadership in the top

management team. If others insist on treating women in high places primarily as women rather than as managers, some degree of gendered self-stereotyping is inevitable (Tajfel, 1978). However, one does not actually have to ‘live’ this exemplified work experience to develop such beliefs. Self-stereotyping can also be the by-product of observed social and organizational realities that reflect broad societal expectations about gendered leadership behavior – which then are internalized on the basis of others’ experiences (Rudman & Glick, 2001). To the extent that they engage in such self-stereotyping, women in high places may try to cope with gendered leadership expectations by re-evaluating traditional notions of leadership, placing more value on stereotypically feminine competencies that may contribute to successful leadership (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992; Rudman, 1998). Although this may protect their personal well-being and self-esteem, we argue that this may not enable them to develop their full potential as leaders. In any case, it may not be the most effective way to advance within an organization that continues to value masculine leadership abilities as most important.

Thus, the different strategies that women may implement in response to gendered leadership beliefs in organizations each may backfire in their own way. Indeed, there is substantial evidence to demonstrate that such more subtle and unintentional discrimination against women in the workplace tends to harm their career opportunities, as it undermines their self-confidence, career ambitions, and ability to perform well (Barreto & Ellemers, *in press*; Ellemers & Van Laar, 2010). In response, special programs have been developed to help women achieve more senior positions through targeted career support, and in some cases women are even actively promoted to achieve a particular quota. Thus, the increase of women in high places is seen as the primary solution for improving women’s position at work.

Notwithstanding the importance of continuing to address the difficulties women encounter on their way on the top, we propose that attempts to overcome these so-called ‘glass ceiling’ effects only address part of the problem. That is, we argue that simply placing more women in senior positions without working to combat gendered leadership beliefs or reducing organizational gender bias is suboptimal. In fact, such a strategy is likely to backfire as it may decrease, rather than increase, career opportunities for individual women as well as for women as a group. In the next section we consider the different mechanisms relevant to this issue, with the aim of integrating them into a single model.

4. Toward an integrative model

In this contribution we have argued that despite increasing numbers of women in high places gendered leadership expectations tend to prevail. At the same time, we do not propose that this is a simple explanation for the challenges faced by women in organizations, nor do we think that it is easy to address these issues. To be able to understand the psychological processes at play we propose that we need to consider how organizational realities *interact* with the sense of self that is endorsed by individual women working in these organizations. In this sense our analysis extends current insights on stereotype threat. We build on the notion that group affiliations can represent an important source of self-definition that impact upon people’s outlook on themselves and how they relate to others around them (Ellemers, 2012). Importantly, however, the realization that one belongs to a particular group (such as men vs. women) in itself is not sufficient to raise these responses. Instead, it is the psychological reality that matters. That is, the degree to which people consider a particular group membership subjectively important and self-relevant determines the likelihood that their identity as group members informs their perceptions and behavioral preferences (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Ellemers et al., 2002).

The tendency to self-define as member of a particular group does not seem to be a fixed or stable predisposition of specific individuals. Indeed, given that most people can be seen to belong to multiple groups (e.g., parent, professional, national citizen), they tend to think of themselves in different ways, depending on what seems most relevant to them in the situation at hand. For instance, migrants may focus on their country of origin when speaking to other migrants, while they emphasize their identity as members of the host society when addressing citizens of that country (Barreto, Spears, Ellemers, & Shahinper, 2003). Likewise, the same individual may be perfectly happy to identify as a woman at a parent-teacher meeting, while being reluctant to consider her gender as relevant when at work. However, it is not self-evident that people’s preferred self-views converge with the way they are regarded and treated by others around them, for instance at work (Barreto & Ellemers, 2010; Barreto, Ellemers, & Banal, 2006). The concern that others may evaluate one’s behavior or efforts on the basis of a group membership that is not seen as self-defining in that context, in itself is a source of distress, and decreases people’s ability to perform optimally (Ellemers & Barreto, 2006a, 2006b). For instance, when promotion opportunities are limited, reminding women that other members of their group have rarely been successful in the past undermines their individual ambition and effort (Barreto, Ellemers, Palacios, 2004).

In sum, if the tendency of others to treat someone as a representative of a particular group (e.g., women) does not match the individual's preferred self-views and subjective importance of that group, this is a source of threat (Barreto & Ellemers, 2002, 2003; Ellemers & Barreto, 2006a). This threat stems from the conviction that one is inappropriately *categorized*, and occurs regardless of the value or status afforded to that category (Ellemers et al., 1999, 2002). In fact, the need to have others recognize and respect one's preferred self-views is so strong that people tend to experience threat when treatment by others ignores self-views, even when this yields ostensibly attractive outcomes (e.g., assignment to a desirable task, see Barreto, Ellemers, Scholten, & Smith, 2010).

When we apply these insights on category-based identities and definitions of self to the case of women in high places, the implications are clear. We propose that women may respond in different ways to gendered leadership beliefs in the organization, depending on how well the way they are treated by others matches their own preferred self-views (see Fig. 1). When being addressed by others primarily in terms of their gender, women who embrace their gender-based identity will respond differently than those who think their gender should be irrelevant at work (Schmitt, Ellemers, & Branscombe 2003). Specifically, women who strongly identify with their gender group will be inclined to emphasize and celebrate stereotypically female characteristics. When doing this, however, they run the risk of focusing on their social–emotional leadership abilities only, while neglecting to develop other types of leadership behavior that might benefit their career or make them more valuable for the organization. By contrast, women who resist being considered in terms of their gender will be tempted to emphasize the ways in which they are different from other women in the organization. Their response to gendered leadership expectations will be to distance themselves from the image of the prototypical female leader by displaying masculine and agentic leadership. While this may benefit their own effectiveness as leaders, it does nothing to change expectations about the leadership abilities of other women or to alter stereotypical perceptions of women as a group.

We now elaborate on the implications of this analysis, and present evidence from two strands of research into female leadership as initial evidence in support of our model. We connect work on the “glass cliff” with research on the “queen bee” phenomenon, to demonstrate that promoting women to top positions not always benefits their own career (when glass cliff effects play a role), and does not necessarily help other women advance (due to queen bee effects). We argue that the combination of insights from research on the glass cliff with evidence on the queen bee phenomenon helps develop a broader understanding of these issues. We propose that the continuation of gendered leadership beliefs in organizations plays a key role in this process. However, the pervasiveness of these beliefs and their impact on women in leadership positions may be less than obvious because women can adopt at least two different strategies to cope with such beliefs. Those who respond to gendered organizational leadership beliefs by emphasizing their femininity and capitalizing on stereotypical female traits and leadership styles are susceptible to ‘glass cliff’ effects. Their individual career opportunities suffer as they run the risk of ending up in precarious leadership positions. Those who respond to biased gender expectations by distancing from other women and emphasizing their stereotypically masculine competencies are displaying ‘queen bee’ effects. This deprives them from the support of other women, and undermines the career ambitions and leadership opportunities for women as a group. Either way, as long as organizations are characterized by gendered leadership expectations, having women in high places is likely to harm rather than help gender diversity in leadership. Paradoxically, when women achieve career success despite gendered leadership expectations, this has far-reaching implications for their future career opportunities as individuals or for women as a group.

4.1. *Glass cliff effects*

As we have argued above, stereotypes and beliefs about gender and leadership play an important role in shaping organizational realities for women in positions of power and influence. However, research in this area has tended to ignore variation in the content of these stereotypes *across organizational contexts* (Vecchio, 2002). Is it always the case that it is a man that is seen as the “best man for the job”?

A recent program of research has attempted to acknowledge the role of organizational context by examining the nature of the leadership positions occupied by those women who manage to break through the glass ceiling. This research reveals that women tend to achieve leadership positions under very different circumstances from men, such that women tend to be overrepresented in leadership positions in times of risk and crisis (Ryan & Haslam, 2005, 2007). Building on the metaphor of the glass ceiling, Ryan and Haslam coined the phrase ‘the glass cliff’ to capture the precariousness of such leadership positions and the increased risk of personal failure. Evidence for the glass cliff has

been provided using multiple methodologies, including a wide range of participant samples, and across a number of countries. We will first review relevant research to demonstrate the robustness of the effect, after which we present recent evidence that informs us of the multiple processes underlying this phenomenon.

4.1.1. Empirical evidence for the phenomenon

Initial evidence for the glass cliff effect was provided by an archival analysis of stock-exchange listed-companies. This investigation was triggered by the claim that women's presence on UK boards of directors was 'wreaking havoc' on company share prices (Judge, 2003). After a careful analysis of relevant economic indicators, Ryan and Haslam (2005) found that rather than women causing poor company performance, an alternative causal mechanism was at work. That is, in a more general time of economic downturn, women were more likely to be appointed to board positions at companies that had experienced an extended period of poor share price performance. Thus women were more likely to be placed in leadership positions in companies that were going through turbulent financial times. Thus, Ryan and Haslam argued, they were placed on a glass cliff, where the risk of women being exposed to criticism and failure was much higher than those of their male counterparts, who were appointed under more favorable economic circumstances.

Although this initial work pointed toward the precariousness of women's leadership positions, a similar investigation of CEOs in US Fortune 500 companies failed to reveal a glass cliff effect (Adams, Gupta, & Leeth, 2009). However, a more fine-grained analysis demonstrated that the phenomenon is sensitive to differences in measures of company performance (Haslam, Ryan, Kulich, Trojanowski, & Atkins, 2010). More specifically, the preference for women emerges most clearly when examining share-price performance (a somewhat subjective interpretation of a company's financial position, indicating investor's confidence in the ability of the company to perform well) but not when more objective accounting-based indicators of firm financial performance are used.

The archival investigations of the glass cliff demonstrate the phenomenon in the 'real world', but the complexity of the available performance data and the existence of potential confounds limit the ability to make clear causal claims and to investigate potential explanatory processes. To address these limitations, a series of experimental studies were conducted, to more systematically examine the impact of performance and crisis on the preference for female leaders. A first set of experiments employed scenarios in which differences in organizational performance were manipulated. Research participants were then asked to evaluate male and/or female candidates for a leadership position in this organization (Haslam & Ryan, 2008). Across a range of different samples and scenarios, the results consistently demonstrated gender bias in the appointment process of leaders. That is, women were overwhelmingly preferred for leadership positions in times of crisis (see also Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010) or when the organization was under threat (Brown, Diekmann, & Schneider, 2011).

Importantly, the glass cliff is not limited to women's over-representation on the boards of stock-exchange listed companies in crisis. The precariousness of women's leadership positions has also been demonstrated for lawyers taking the lead on highly risky and criticized legal cases (Ashby, Ryan, & Haslam, 2007), in the political arena where both archival and experimental work converge to show that women are more likely to contest unwinnable seats come election time (Ryan, Haslam, & Kulich, 2010), and with student samples selecting youth representatives for a music festival that was performing poorly. In this way, the glass cliff is not simply a barrier for those few at the top, but instead represents a much broader, and thus more pervasive, phenomenon that may impact on women at many points in their careers.

4.1.2. Underlying mechanisms

While the research that we reviewed so far demonstrates the robustness of the glass cliff effect, it does not inform us about the mechanisms underlying the effect. Recent studies have therefore begun to investigate this question. Results so far suggest that the phenomenon is multi-determined. For example, research exploring the explanations that people spontaneously generate to account for the glass cliff effect uncovered a surprising diverse array of explanations (Ryan, Haslam, & Postmes, 2007). Such explanations include those based on discriminatory processes such as blatant sexism, implicit ingroup favoritism in 'old-boys' networks, and women being set up as scapegoats to take the fall for inevitable failure. Other explanations focused on more structural considerations such as the strategic decisions of organization to demonstrate change by appointing someone who is visibly different from prior leaders – a woman – or assume that women are appointed to leadership positions in an attempt to try something new when all else has failed. Finally, people referred to gender stereotypes to help explain the appointment of women to risky positions, citing the belief that

women are seen to be more likely than men to have the traits and abilities needed to cope with crisis. While there is some evidence for each of these explanations (see for example Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Ryan et al., 2007), it is this final explanation referring to gendered leadership expectations that we will explore in more detail.

As outlined in previous sections of this chapter, stereotypes about gender and about leadership still represent real and ongoing organizational realities for women in leadership roles. The tendency to ‘think manager – think male’ has been shown to be robust across time and across cultures (Schein, 1973; Schein et al., 1996). However, much of the research in this area focuses on the descriptive traits of successful managers – and by implication, the traits of leaders in companies doing well. But what about those companies that are less successful? What is needed from leaders in times of crisis?

A series of studies by Ryan, Haslam, Herby, and Bongiorno (2011) explored how company performance impacted the inclination to ‘think manager – think male’. In a first study they demonstrated that the association between agentic behaviors and leadership held when people were asked to describe leaders in successful companies. However, this was not the case when asked to describe leaders in unsuccessful companies. When describing the leadership displayed by managers in times of crisis people did NOT elicit stereotypically masculine traits or behaviors. This suggests that managers of unsuccessful companies are less likely to hold or display traditionally masculine traits associated with success. A second study moved beyond examining descriptive leadership stereotypes in different types of companies. Here prescriptive leadership stereotypes were captured by asking participants about the traits they thought were *desirable* for leaders of successful or unsuccessful companies. This study revealed that both masculine and feminine traits are seen as desirable for leaders of successful companies. However, when asked to consider an unsuccessful company, traditionally feminine traits indicating social–emotional leadership behaviors – such as being understanding, intuitive, and tactful – were seen as most desirable. The researchers described this association as the tendency to ‘think crisis–think female’. This supports earlier experimental work by Bruckmüller and Branscombe (2010) where gender stereotypes were found to contribute to the occurrence of glass cliff effects (see also Gartzia, Ryan, Balluerka, & Aritzeta, 2012).

Taken together, evidence from this series of studies suggests that gender stereotypes play an important role in the appointment of women to precarious leadership positions. Although no research to date exists that directly compares the success rates of male and female leaders in crisis situations, one could argue that the tendency to ‘think crisis–think female’ is functional given all the strife and emotional upheaval in an unsuccessful company. In this way, the fact that women’s ‘unique talents’ are being acknowledged as being particularly useful in times of crisis can be seen as a positive aspect of the glass cliff phenomenon. However a follow-up study by Ryan et al. (2011) demonstrates the drawbacks of this approach to female leadership, as they show that the preference for female leaders very much depends on the type of crisis at hand, and what seems to be required from the leader. That is, the preference for feminine leadership behavior was most clearly apparent when there was little to gain for the leader. This was the case, for instance, when a leader was sought to be a scapegoat for inevitable failure, to simply ride out the tough times, or to manage the staff through the crisis. However, a different leadership preference emerged when more active crisis management was required from the leader, and there might be something to gain, for instance by turning the crisis around or acting as a spokesperson. Under these conditions thinking of a crisis no longer elicited the desire for stereotypically female leadership abilities. In fact, there was even a slight preference for traditionally male (agentic) leadership traits. These findings are important, as they suggest that the leadership positions assigned to women in times of crisis are not always attractive. Indeed, the reason women are appointed to these positions does not necessarily indicate a recognition of their special skills, nor does it automatically convey special value to socio-emotional leadership abilities.

In sum, research on the glass cliff phenomenon demonstrates a general tendency to seek out those who display stereotypically feminine leadership abilities for positions of leadership that are relatively precarious. This can have severe implications for women who strongly identify with, and value, their own gender group. Women who respond to gendered leadership expectations in the organization by emphasizing the importance and added value of their stereotypically feminine leadership abilities, run a greater risk of being placed in leadership positions in times of company crisis where it may be more difficult for them to succeed (see Fig. 1). Thus, they may unwittingly limit their further career opportunities.

4.1.3. *Differential availability of resources*

The research reviewed so far demonstrates the general phenomenon of the glass cliff and its underlying principles. However, it characterizes the precariousness of glass cliff positions in rather simplistic terms. Factors that have

contributed to past organizational failure or current crisis indicate unsatisfactory organizational performance, and at the same time set up the organization for future failure, for which female leaders then are held responsible. Yet despite the preferential selection of women for leadership positions in times of poor organizational performance, the reality is that the majority of organizations are still led by men – also in the current crisis. This observation raises the question of what exactly constitutes precariousness for leaders. In other words, how can one distinguish a glass cliff situation – a precarious leadership position for which women are believed to be more suitable candidates than men – from the other, more common, situation where leadership positions are occupied by men, who continue to guide the organization during a crisis? To shed more light on this issue, we now turn to recent research aiming to offer a more nuanced analysis of the *nature* of crisis situations. This work further elucidates some of the reasons why the top positions to which women are appointed during a crisis are relatively precarious, again connecting to gendered leadership expectations in the organization (Rink, Ryan, & Stoker, 2012).

Our prior conclusion that the tendency to ‘think crisis–think female’ only seems to emerge under specific, yet relatively difficult, crisis circumstances (Ryan et al., 2011, Study 3), indicates that the overreliance on female leaders in times of crisis is not the only factor that is potentially problematic for them. In addition, these results suggest that women who engage in crisis management do so under organizational circumstances that do not resemble the realities faced by male leaders. As a result, men and women are likely to be confronted with a fundamentally different leadership experience. This possibility inspired further research to examine the possibility that male and female leaders are expected to rely on different types of resources. Specifically, a series of studies was conducted to assess the extent to which female leaders are expected to operate under the absence of *social resources*. This might offer an additional reason why the crisis positions to which women are appointed are relatively precarious (e.g., Ryan, Haslam, & Postmes, 2007).

Social resources refer to the support that one receives from colleagues and relevant stakeholders within the larger organizational network (Hunt, Boal, & Dodge, 1999; Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005). Social resources are not only crucial for personal career advancement (Ferris, Jagannathan, & Pritchard, 2003; Williams, Barclay, & Schmied, 2004), they are also a necessity for leaders to function effectively. One can define the absence (vs. presence) of social resources as a property of a crisis situation. Social resources are lacking, for example, when the decision by higher management to appoint a new (male or female) leader during a crisis, is not supported by relevant stakeholders and relevant networks (Rink et al., 2012). Two studies compared whether having such social resources present or absent affected people’s evaluations of, and preferences for, female and male leaders in a crisis situation. It was proposed that for women, leading an organization during a crisis would not only be difficult because they need to turn the company around to achieve success, but also because they, would preferably be placed in leadership situations where the social resources necessary to achieve such turnaround are lacking (Ryan et al., 2007).

The results of both studies confirm that female leaders were indeed preferred over male leaders in leadership positions with low social resources. In fact, due to gendered leadership expectations, female leaders are expected to be less in need of such social resources as they are seen to be able to build these themselves. Importantly, this implies that women run a greater risk than men do of being placed in leadership positions where they cannot rely on the approval of, and support from, relevant stakeholders within the larger organizational network. A lack of social resources is particularly problematic for leaders in crisis conditions, when current practices need to be changed and when acceptance needs to be established among all employees (Hunt et al., 1999; Pearson & Claire, 1998). The availability of social resources implies that leaders receive support from relevant organizational partners, have access to inside information, are able to acquire material resources, and can rely on strategic advice on how to manage difficult circumstances. To the extent that men are preferably placed in positions where they are more likely to receive such support, they simply have more resources at their disposal that may help them be successful leaders (Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005). This puts women in high places at a disadvantage, and makes it more difficult for them to be successful even if they display the same leadership abilities and skills as men do.

In sum, the availability of social resources is not merely another crisis characteristic that contributes to the precariousness of glass cliff positions. Instead, it represents an important mechanism associated with the biased preference for female leaders during organizational crisis. That is, only when a crisis context is coupled with a lack of social resources do people prefer female leaders over male leaders (Rink et al., 2012). Only under such relatively severe crisis conditions people appear to value stereotypical feminine leadership abilities. On the one hand, this may seem a good thing, as it indicates that people recognize the importance of a leader who is understanding, cooperative and has the interpersonal skills to create acceptance among the employees for sometimes dire measures that have to be

taken to combat the crisis. On the other hand, it is bad news for women that they are only considered suitable leaders when circumstances are particularly dire and success is highly unlikely.

These findings also help understand why women in top positions still tend to be socially isolated. This tends to be explained by arguing that female leaders constitute a numeric minority in most organizations (Hersby, Ryan, & Jetten, 2009). Additionally, we propose that this is the case because female leaders (more often than male leaders) are placed in unsupportive work environments, especially when they are seen to possess feminine traits (Rink et al., 2012; Ryan et al., 2011). This constitutes another reason why we propose that women who emphasize their stereotypically feminine traits and abilities as a way to cope with gendered leadership expectations in the organization, may be disproportionately situated in relatively unattractive leadership positions that embody a high risk of personal failure.

4.1.4. *Are women to blame?*

The research examining the absence of social resources as a relevant characteristic of an organization in crisis, addresses the glass cliff phenomenon from the perspective of the organization to explain why different leadership abilities are sought out under different circumstances. However, so far we have not considered the role of (prospective) leaders themselves, and the extent to which men and women may be personally attracted to precarious leadership positions. As a final step in our analysis, we focus on the possibility that women and men evaluate the attractiveness of a leadership position during organizational crisis differently, depending on whether or not social resources are available. That is, as a consequence of gender identification and self-stereotyping, women may themselves contribute to their overrepresentation in unattractive leadership positions. Indeed, others have argued that women may be more likely to accept glass cliff positions that are offered to them than men (Mano-Negrin & Sheaffer, 2004). In this line of reasoning, the argument is that – given the continued barriers women face in the workplace (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Lyness & Heilman, 2006) – women may be inclined to consider such precarious offers because these represent the only option to achieve leadership that is available to them, in view of the biased nature of organizational realities (Lyness & Thompson, 2000; Ryan et al., 2007).

As a final step in our review of research on the glass cliff phenomenon, we therefore examine whether women and men are sensitive to different aspects of a crisis situation. When women in high places show strong gender identification, processes of self-stereotyping may induce internalized beliefs about their gendered leadership abilities and suitability for specific leadership roles. As pointed out above, sometimes such beliefs stem from personal work experiences, as when female leaders are devalued when they display stereotypically masculine leadership behaviors. Alternatively, they may stem from a more implicit awareness of gender stereotypes in the workplace, causing female leaders to believe that their influence is derived primarily from their interpersonal skills (Carli, 1990). In both cases, women who have managed to ascend to high places despite continued endorsement of gendered leadership beliefs in the organization, may be inclined to place more value on feminine notions of leadership than on more traditional notions of leadership relying on hierarchy and authority (Bass, Avolio, & Atwater, 1996; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Rudman, 1998).

Because both men and women will tend to be aware that social resources can facilitate effective leadership, both are likely to consider these resources when evaluating glass cliff positions. However, due to processes of gender identification, they may estimate the importance of being able to elicit such resources differently. While women, looking through the lens of self-stereotyping, may be particularly concerned about their ability to live up to communal expectations of a precarious leader role, men are likely to place more value on their ability to fulfill agentic aspects of leadership. These gendered self-views should in turn inform their evaluations of glass cliff positions. As a result, when social resources are lacking, women may feel unable to fulfill communal notions of leadership (Carli, 1990; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004). When examining whether the gender identities of men and women make them evaluate the same leadership position differently this indeed turned out to be the case (Rink, Ryan, & Stoker, *in press*). Women more than men were more focused on the availability of social resources when evaluating a leadership opportunity in times of crisis. This aspect of the situation also weighed more heavily in the decisions of women compared to men when estimating whether they would be able to achieve their leadership goals (Rink et al., *in press*). These results thus attest to the psychological reality of gendered leadership expectations, and suggest that women are quite aware that they are expected to display stereotypically feminine (communal) leadership behaviors.

An important question remains whether the awareness of what is expected from them makes women seek out or avoid precarious positions where communal leadership is required. Here it turned out that women are quite reluctant to accept the leadership positions without social resources typically offered to them in times of crisis. In fact, leadership

positions that were precarious due to the crisis the organization was in and where social resources were lacking turned out to be the type of positions that women wish to *avoid* (Rink et al., *in press*). That is, they seemed to be acutely aware that their success as leaders in these positions depended on their ability to create acceptance among subordinates. As a result, they were quite reluctant to engage in crisis leadership when the social resources necessary to perform well in this role were lacking. Indeed, when they are offered a leadership position which is precarious because the organization is in crisis and the leader role is lacking social resources, women think it will be difficult to fulfill their gendered leader role, and are doubtful whether they will be able to establish acceptance among their subordinates (Rink et al., *in press*). This research corroborates prior work demonstrating that both women and men react negatively to work situations in which the dominant characteristics are incompatible with their own gender-based leadership role (e.g., Oswald, 2008; Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008).

To conclude, this research suggests that the presence of women on the glass cliff cannot simply be attributed to a failure of women to recognize the precariousness of such positions. There is no evidence that women are more (or less) attracted to precarious leadership positions than men are. This finding adds weight to the argument that the glass cliff phenomenon is bound up in gendered organizational expectations and appointment processes, not in the preferences of female leaders themselves (Ryan & Haslam, 2007).

In sum, the research available to date suggests that female leaders are likely to be placed in glass cliff positions that lack social resources, because they are seen to possess stereotypical female leadership abilities. This is the case even though these women in fact find these positions highly unattractive, indicating that they are well aware of the liabilities involved in accepting such a precarious leadership position (see also Oswald, 2008; Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008). As such, the appointment process as well as women's and men's own evaluations of glass cliff positions are guided by broader gendered expectations about leadership, together with the likelihood that they endorse gender stereotypical self-views due to their inclination to identify with their gender group. An important implication of these findings is that even for women who feel that they have to accept a precarious leadership position – as it provides them with the rare opportunity to advance to the top of the organization – this may in fact still undermine rather than advance their individual career progression.

4.2. *Queen bee effects*

We now turn to another strategy women may employ to cope with gendered leadership expectations in the organization. Here we address the possibility that women in high places feel compelled to downplay their gender identity and to display the same leadership abilities as men do as a way to be successful. We consider this response pattern as indicating the “queen bee” effect. We argue that the process of demonstrating that one is different from other women – as an attempt to lift up the self – may unwittingly put down other women in the organization or harm women as a group (Ellemers & Barreto, 2008a, 2008b). Indeed, the term “queen bee” has been adopted to refer to the phenomenon that solo women who have been successful in male-dominated organizations tend to behave in ways that hinder rather than help the advancement of other women (Kanter, 1977; Staines, Tavriss, & Jayaratne, 1974).

At first sight, one might expect the presence of women in leadership positions to empower and inspire other women to achieve the same. By the same token, it may seem that their ability to participate in the management of the organization should increase the chances that women in leadership positions take an active role in combating sexist practices in the organization. However, our program of research on the “queen bee” phenomenon indicates that these beneficial effects of women in leadership positions are by no means self-evident. We will now review empirical results demonstrating that queen bees do not display solidarity with other women. Instead, they emphasize having masculine competencies and characteristics, distance themselves from other women and more often than not oppose rather than support the advancement of female subordinates (see also Ely, 1994, 1995; Stroebe et al., 2009).

4.2.1. *Empirical evidence for the phenomenon*

Several studies have found that, compared to men, women tend to be less supportive of the advancement of other women (Garcia-Retamero & Lopez-Zafra, 2006; Mathison, 1986), express more gender-biased perceptions of other women's career commitment (Ellemers, Van Den Heuvel, De Gilder, Maass, & Bonvini, 2004), and become less supportive of equal-opportunity programs as they advance in the organization (Ng & Chiu, 2001). Moreover, women who achieved success in gender-biased contexts may deny the existence of sexism as their personal experiences make it more difficult to connect with and understand the difficulties faced by other women (Stroebe et al., 2009).

In our research, we have tried to understand the psychological mechanisms underlying these responses by applying insights from social identity theory that distinguish between different strategies people can use when their group is devalued by others (e.g., Ellemers, 1993a). We argue that due to gendered leadership expectations decision makers in organizations tend to underestimate the career ambitions and leadership abilities of women as a group. Additionally, generic meritocracy beliefs and denial of discrimination contribute to the belief that setting the self apart from the group (instead of challenging biased practices) is the best way to escape gendered leadership beliefs (Ellemers & Van Laar, 2010). As a result, women in high places may feel compelled to distance the self from women as a group, in order to escape negative gender-based expectations others may have of them. Especially for those who feel their gender identity should not be relevant to their work, displaying the ability to enact stereotypically masculine traits and leadership abilities may seem a useful way to advance in one's career. Our research not only addresses how women in high places see themselves in view of gendered leadership expectations, but also examines how this affects the way they perceive and respond to other women in the organization.

A first study was conducted among male and female full professors employed at any one of the universities in the Netherlands. At the time of this study (in 1992) female professors were very rare: a total number of 72 (about 4%) of all full professors in the country were women. Almost half of this population participated in the study; they were compared with their male colleagues who were matched in terms of their job level, as well as their scientific discipline and university where they were employed (Ellemers, 1993b). When comparing these two groups of study participants, no differences were observed between male and female full professors in terms of their age, the progression of their career, their administrative responsibilities, number of work hours, or number of publications. In this sense, then, these female professors showed that they were just as able as their male colleagues to display the abilities and achievements needed to succeed in an academic career.

However, male and female professors reported having realized their achievements under different circumstances. For instance, while most of the male professors had a partner and a family, this was only the case for about half of the female professors. Female professors were more likely than male professors to feel that having children impedes one's career progression, that women are unwanted at the university, and that it is easier for men than for women to advance in their academic career. At the same time, they experienced women at the university as relatively disinclined to support each other and they reported being reluctant to work together with other women. This suggests not only that men and women experienced different organizational realities, but also that the women in our study tended to negotiate the difficulties they encountered as individuals. For instance, they indicated that they gave up the possibility to have a family life to be able to give priority to their academic career, instead of joining forces with other women to achieve equal career opportunities for women at the university.

The female participants in this study not only felt differently about their career opportunities at the university, they also felt differently about themselves. That is, when asked to characterize themselves in gender stereotypical terms, these women were just as likely as their male colleagues were – or even more so – to consider stereotypically masculine traits (such as dominant, aggressive, ambitious, competitive) as self-descriptive. Additionally, they emphasized even more than men the importance of work as a source of meaning in their lives. In other words, these female professors described themselves as different from 'regular' women not only in their personal and career choices but also in the traits and behaviors they displayed. Again, this is consistent with our analysis and confirms that women who are confronted with gendered leadership expectations may respond by distancing themselves from their gender group. This is a first indicator that women in high places may become "queen bees".

A further investigation was carried out to examine the second implication of the "queen bee" phenomenon, by assessing how women in high places perceive and respond to their female colleagues at work. In this research we examined male and female PhD students and full professors at a single university in the Netherlands (Ellemers, Van den Heuvel, De Gilder, Maass, & Bonvini, 2004; Study 1). We compared levels of career and organizational commitment, work satisfaction, publication record and time expenditure reported by male and female PhD students to the way these were perceived by male and female professors. Although male students indicated spending relatively more time on their academic work compared to female students, who reported spending more time on household tasks, both male and female students indicated having equal publication records. Additionally, male and female PhD's reported equal levels of work satisfaction and commitment to their academic career and the university organization. This was also reflected in the way they were perceived by male professors. However, and in line with our queen bee analysis, female professors tended to think that female PhD's are less committed to their career and the university organization than male PhD's are.

We conducted a follow-up study among PhD students and faculty members at a university in Italy (Ellemers et al., 2004; Study 2) to examine the robustness of this observation. Here too we found no difference between male and female PhD students in their publication records or work satisfaction, nor in terms of their self-reported levels of commitment to an academic career or to the university organization. Again, however, perceptions of more senior faculty offered evidence in line with the queen bee phenomenon. That is, whereas male professors perceived male and female PhD's as equally committed to their career, female professors thought that female PhD's are less committed to their career than male PhD students.

In sum, the results of these three studies are consistent with predictions derived from our model and offer initial evidence for the “queen bee” effect. That is, in a setting where women are very rare at the highest organizational levels, those few women who have been successful in this context present themselves as different from other women by emphasizing their stereotypically masculine traits and leadership abilities. Additionally, these women in high places are inclined to endorse gender-stereotypical expectations of the abilities and ambitions of other, more junior women. This is all the more striking, as men in senior positions do not differentiate between men and women when making such judgments. These data converge with our analysis that women may cope with gendered leadership expectations by setting themselves apart from women as a group, and that this affects their self-views as well as the way they perceive and respond to other women.

4.2.2. *Underlying mechanisms*

Although these observations are in line with what we would predict on the basis of our model, in themselves these do not offer conclusive support for the operation of the “queen bee” phenomenon. That is, on the basis of these findings alone we cannot exclude the possibility that aggressive and non-prototypical women self-select for these leadership positions or that they seek out organizational contexts where women in high places are exceptional. Indeed, the queen bee phenomenon has been cited as providing evidence that women are their own worst enemies. The data reviewed above do not allow us to rule out that women are more likely than men to show rivalry toward each other overall, or are generally reluctant in allowing or supporting other women to advance in their professional careers (Dobson & Iredale, 2006). Some however, have argued that the disapproval of such behavior among women – while this is seen as healthy competitiveness when displayed by men – in itself is an indicator of gender bias (see also Mavin, 2006, 2008).

In fact, there is some evidence to suggest that women are particularly critical of the success of other women. For instance, female workers have been found to be more inclined to prefer a male over a female boss (Elsesser, 2011), and tend to hold negative evaluations of women who have been more successful than they are (Parks-Stamm, Heilman, & Hearn, 2008). However, this does not necessarily imply that women have a general inclination not to support each other at work. For instance, the attitudes of women to female leadership appear to depend on their own gender role identity, with non-traditional women being more positive about female leadership than traditional women (Cooper, 1997). If we connect this conclusion to the observations reviewed above, this still does not explain why the successful women – who described themselves in a non-traditional gender role – might be reluctant to acknowledge the career aspirations of other women. Furthermore, it is important to note that most studies that have documented critical attitudes of women toward their own gender group have examined how women at lower ranks in the organization respond to women who are placed above them. Our current interest however is to examine the reverse relation: are women in high places inclined to devalue the career ambitions and leadership abilities of other women, and if so, why is this the case?

When examining how women who have reached leadership positions respond to more junior women and their career ambitions, the picture is less clear. For instance, some studies show that male and female executives are equally as likely to support and be mentors of more junior professionals in the organization, and hold equal expectations of mentoring outcomes (Ragins & Scandura, 1994). Other studies demonstrate that the willingness of more senior women to engage in mentoring activities depends on their beliefs about the pervasiveness of gender discrimination in the organization (Hersby, Jetten, Ryan, & Schmitt, 2011). Indeed, the willingness vs. reluctance of women in high places to support more junior women seems to be associated with their token position in combination with their inclination to identify with their gender group, instead of reflecting a more generic tendency (Duguid, Loyd, & Tolbert, 2012). That is, the fact that they form a small minority of those with high prestige in the organization elicits the concern that they are seen as representing women as a group, and that the lesser abilities of other women may reflect badly upon them. These concerns are less salient for women who are not positioned as successful token representatives of their gender (Duguid, 2011).

Our own research also suggests that the queen bee response pattern is not necessarily characteristic of women who aspire to leadership positions, but is due to the conditions under which they pursued their own career. Initial evidence to this effect was obtained when we conducted additional analyses among the sample of Italian professors (Ellemers et al., 2004; Study 2). We distinguished between different generations of professors, as we assumed that with the older generation in particular it would be exceptional for female scientists to ascend to the role of full professor, while this was likely to be a more common career path for younger generations of women. When making this comparison, it turned out that only the older generation of women displayed a queen bee response. That is, they underestimated the extent to which female PhD's would be committed to their academic career. At the same time, the older generation of female professors also tended to describe themselves more in stereotypically masculine rather than feminine terms. Neither of these responses were observed among the younger generation of female professors. These reported a balanced gender identity, and thought that female and male PhD students were equally committed to the pursuit of an academic career.

Taken together, these results suggest that the queen bee effect should not be seen as stemming from a general tendency of women to be more critical of each other than men are. Instead, they are consistent with our analysis as well as observations of others (e.g., Duguid, 2011; Hersby et al., 2011) that the queen bee response depends on the degree of representation of women in high places and the experience of gender bias in the organization.

4.2.3. *Differential treatment of women*

While these results suggest situational circumstances and personal career experiences are likely to contribute to the development of queen bee responses, we wanted to examine this relationship more directly. We collected a broad sample of women occupying senior positions in a range of private, public, and semi-public companies in the Netherlands. Among these women, we assessed whether their own career paths and discrimination experiences would predict their inclination to perceive themselves as different from other women (Derks, Ellemers, Van Laar, & De Groot, 2011). Specifically, we asked participants in this study on the one hand to look back on their own career to indicate the extent to which they identified with other women at the start of their career, as well as the extent to which they had experienced gender discrimination while advancing in the organization. We then used these reports of prior experiences to predict their current self-views and perceptions of other women. In this way we attempted to find out whether the tendency of women in high places to describe the self in masculine terms as well as their inclination to endorse gender stereotypical views of other women depended on how they had coped with the biased treatment of women in the organization.

The results of this study (Derks et al., 2011a) yielded evidence in line with our reasoning while ruling out a number of potential alternative explanations. We were able to establish, for instance, that there were no differences in background characteristics or level of gender identification between women who reported having experienced gender discrimination and those who did not report such experiences. Instead, the results consistently showed that the queen bee phenomenon was triggered by the differential treatment of women vs. men that our research participants had witnessed during their own careers. That is, women who were disinclined to identify with their gender group but had nevertheless experienced gender based discrimination were more likely to describe themselves in stereotypically masculine terms. At the same time, they were most inclined to endorse stereotypical views of other women in the organization. That is, while they saw themselves as highly committed to their own career, they distanced themselves from other women. Indeed, the women who had suffered gender-based treatment in their own careers despite their preference not to be considered in terms of their gender identity were most inclined to think that women as a group are less committed to their careers than men are.

These data offer more direct evidence for the notion that the queen bee phenomenon emerges when the way one is treated by others (i.e., the experience of bias due to one's gender) does not converge with preferred self-views (i.e., the conviction that one's gender identity should not be relevant at work). It is this combination of conditions – rather than some inherent aggression or overall critical attitude toward other women – that elicits attempts to escape gendered leadership expectations by emphasizing one's personal ability to display agentic leadership behavior while acknowledging that other women may not have similar career ambitions.

4.2.4. *Are women to blame?*

Prior research on the queen bee effect has attempted to determine what it is about women that makes them into queen bees. This work has addressed individual-level risk factors such as low self-esteem, dependence on men and acceptance of traditional gender roles (Cooper, 1997; Cowan, Neighbors, DeLaMoreaux, & Behnke, 1998). In a way, focusing on

these explanatory variables implicitly puts the blame for unequal outcomes at work on women themselves. It also perpetuates the stereotypical assumption that women should display solidarity toward each other, where men are expected to compete for the best jobs (Mavin, 2006, 2008). Because the studies reviewed so far rely on actual experiences that women had, and cannot fully rule out that those with a propensity to become queen bees were most likely to successfully cope with biased leadership expectations, we conducted a final study to determine the extent to which queen bee responses are associated with organizational experiences rather than resulting from individual differences.

In this final study on the queen bee effect, we used an experimental methodology to more unequivocally establish the causal direction of our findings. Among a sample of senior police women we used an experimental priming manipulation to randomly induce the salience of different organizational realities (Derks, Van Laar, Ellemers, & De Groot, 2011). Half our research participants were instructed to think of a situation in which they had experienced gender bias at work. The other half was invited to think back to a work situation in which they had been evaluated on the basis of their individual merit. The results of this experimental study were consistent with our findings among other samples of women in high places, and corroborated our theoretical analysis. That is, they clearly indicated that the salience of career experiences indicating organizational bias against women contributes to the emergence of queen bee effects.

When we asked senior police women who were disinclined to consider their gender as relevant to their work to consider work experiences in which they had suffered from gendered leadership expectations, this elicited a pattern of responses characteristic for the queen bee effect. They indicated a more masculine self-presentation and emphasized ways in which they are different from other women. At the same time, they – ironically – declined the possibility that gender discrimination might be a problem for other women at work (Derks et al., 2011b). Importantly, these queen bee effects did not emerge among police women who were randomly invited to think of career experiences where they were only rated in terms of their individual merit. Again, this points to the crucial role of gendered expectations in the organization – rather than some inherent feature of female leaders – as the key factor in the emergence of these effects.

These data are consistent with our reasoning that biased treatments by others in the organization constitute a source of threat, and that women may cope differently with such threat depending on the extent to which their gender identity is relevant to them in the workplace. Specifically, this research shows that women who are confronted with instances of gender discrimination in their career while being disinclined to see their gender identity as relevant to the work context are most likely to emphasize that the gender stereotype does not apply to them. They try to escape the gendered expectations that would disadvantage their career by displaying masculine self-descriptions, stereotyping other women, and distancing the self from women as a group – all indicators of the queen bee effect (Derks et al., 2011a,b). Thus, due to queen bee effects, successful women tend to reproduce or sometimes even actively support maintenance of the status quo in which men take the majority of leadership positions, and female leaders are the exception. At the same time, the fact that women – not men – endorse work practices that disadvantage other women makes it less likely that this is acknowledged as a form of bias against women (Barreto & Ellemers, *in press*). Since gender stereotypical views expressed by women are less likely to be detected as sexist (Baron, Burgess, & Kao, 1991), and since their denial of existing gender discrimination constitutes a powerful legitimization of the status quo, women who turn into queen bees restrict the career opportunities of their female subordinates.

In sum, our review of research on the queen bee phenomenon shows that the presence of women in high places does not resolve gendered leadership beliefs but may unwittingly reinforce biased expectations of other women. That is, women who successfully negotiate their career despite gender bias in the organization may feel compelled to distance themselves from other women to demonstrate their suitability for a position of leadership. Lifting up the self in this way may result in a reluctance to promote junior women in the organization or to support policies that intend to help other women advance in their careers. Importantly, the results from different studies indicate that this response is triggered by the career experiences and organizational realities they have to confront, rather than stemming from an inherent tendency of women to be critical of each other. Indeed, we argue that although the queen bee phenomenon emerges as a strategy that may help individual women advance in an environment that tends to devalue female leadership, it at the same time backfires against women as a group, as it makes it less likely that sexist practices are acknowledged, or that junior women are inspired or supported to achieve success in their own careers.

5. Reaping the benefits of diversity

We have begun our analysis by noting that there is no added value in increasing gender diversity in top management as a goal per se. Simply having women in high places while continuing to endorse and communicate gendered

leadership expectations is of no benefit to the organization or to these women. We have argued that implicit discrimination by denying the existence of gender bias or ascribing specific positive qualities to women amounts to the neglect of self-preferred professional identities. This is not a way to benefit from diversity, but confronts women with an either-or choice. Under these circumstances, one possibility to succeed is for women in high places to emphasize their agentic leadership qualities. We have presented evidence from research on the queen bee effect to show that this adaptation to organizational requirements may not do justice to their personal strengths – and might even compel them to make unreasonable life choices when they conclude that their career does not allow them to have a family life. It also is likely to undermine rather than promote the career opportunities of other women – raising the notion that women themselves are to blame. Alternatively, women who are confronted with gendered leadership expectations may feel compelled to display their added value to the organization by exhibiting social–emotional or communal leadership. We have argued and presented evidence from research on the glass cliff phenomenon to show that this puts them at risk of only being considered for leadership positions that are relatively precarious in times of crisis.

The added value of our model is that it combines these different research strands, and allows us to consider seemingly distinct outcomes as alternative ways in which gendered organizational realities are likely to undermine successful female leadership. We gained these insights by going beyond existing analyses that address each of these processes as separate explanations for gender differences in career success. Furthermore, as our model focuses on women in high places, and the difficulties they face, it makes clear that the benefits of gender diversity in leadership positions do not stem from the mere fact that more women are promoted to leadership positions. Indeed, such benefits will not be achieved as long as the potential of individual women or of women as a group to contribute to the achievement of organizational goals is not recognized due to gendered leadership beliefs. By conceiving the difficulties associated with female leadership in this way, our model specifies the impact of organizational policies and practices in this process. This makes clear what organizations might do to actually reap the benefits of gender diversity, instead of focusing on gender representation as a goal in itself.

A true diversity climate permits men and women in the organization to hold multiple identities and to display the leadership style that best suits their individual abilities and personal preferences. It should focus on individual merit, instead of allowing for the perpetuation of gendered beliefs and stereotypic expectations. Organizations that wish to benefit from increased gender diversity in top management need to diversify their career paths as well as standard career requirements. Only when opening up different routes, time frames and strategies for career advancement will they enable men and women to introduce different perspectives and complementary practices into their managerial roles. This requires that important decision makers in the organization are aware of the pitfalls of gendered expectations, as they actively search for different ways of assessing merit, and are open to alternative ways of defining ‘good’ leadership. Truly inviting differences and providing for heterogeneity among individuals working in the organization is the key to realizing the promise of diversity.

5.1. Directions for future research

In this review we have argued that gendered leadership expectations in organizations can cause women in high places to either develop into queen bees, or to be placed in precarious leadership positions. While we have presented initial evidence to support the validity of our reasoning, future research is needed to address further implications of our analysis. Indeed, the model we have developed may be used to set an agenda for future research aiming to test whether and how changing the reliance on gendered leadership expectations can effectively reduce discrimination experiences for women at work. We will now specify some of the relations between model variables that merit further consideration.

Our model focuses on gendered leadership expectations and the way these interact with the gender identities of women at work, to determine the ways in which they are most likely to pursue career success. We argued that those who identify strongly with their group are most likely to cope with gendered leadership expectations by displaying the feminine traits that are seen as contributing to communal leadership. By contrast, women who see their gender identity as less relevant to their ability to perform well at work should be more inclined to cope with gendered leadership expectations by emphasizing how they differ from other women. Although the empirical evidence we have reviewed is consistent with this analysis, these represent two different strands of research that have developed relatively independently of each other. Thus, there is added value in more specifically addressing the moderating role of gender identification in determining whether women are likely to respond to gendered leadership expectations by displaying responses associated with the glass cliff, or by demonstrating queen bee behavior.

Another implication of our model that merits further research is our reasoning that glass cliff and queen bee effects each may backfire in their own way. The phenomenon of the glass cliff – associated with high gender salience in the workplace – is likely to be detrimental to the career success of the individual women as they focus on their feminine leadership abilities. Queen bee effects – displayed by women who distance from their gender identity at work – should be harmful to the career opportunities of women as a group. Again, while this is an implication of our analysis that is consistent with the empirical evidence available, it would be important to more directly test the implications of glass cliff and queen bee effects for the career opportunities of individual women as well as for the career success of women as a group. This may include longitudinal research in organizations as well as experimental studies that include more specific measures aiming to assess further individual and group-level consequences of glass cliff and queen bee phenomena. These may include tests of individual leadership performance (to examine implications for the self) and observed attempts to acquaint other women with leadership responsibilities (to examine implications for women as a group).

Future research may also test the effectiveness of specific policies that address these issues as a way to facilitate the career success of individual women, and career expectations about women as a group. The most obvious focus of such research would be to examine the impact of specific measures designed to counter gendered leadership expectations. At the same time, it may be of value to recognize that it is not always possible to change organizational realities, or to avoid women being discouraged by evidence of difficulties encountered by members of their gender group in the past (Barreto et al., 2004). This is why we need to develop and test alternative approaches to help those who are confronted with these organizational realities, so they can cope in the best possible way. Our observation (Derks et al., 2011b) that women can be encouraged to respond differently by inviting them to recall different types of work experiences seems encouraging in this context. Indeed, in addition to reminding women of situations in which they were treated on the basis of individual merit as a way to combat queen bee responses, it might be possible to enhance their willingness to identify with women as a group as a way to invite them to identify and confront instances of gender bias in the organization at a more general level. Our observation that women who report strong gender identification seem more inclined to work toward equal opportunities and collective action when confronted with gender bias at work suggests that this may be an effective strategy (Derks et al., 2011b). Still, women may be reluctant to perform in this role, and further research is needed to examine whether this is sufficiently viable and effective as a strategy to combat gender bias in organizations.

5.2. *Practical implications*

Based on our analysis and review of the relevant literature we propose that promoting women into top management positions does not necessarily benefit them individually nor does it help advance the career prospects of women as a group. In a way this may seem a rather discouraging conclusion. Should organizations then still strive to help women advance in their careers? It would seem that they are damned if they do, just as they are damned if they do not. In this section we aim to offer some hope and scope for organizations or policy makers that are committed to providing equal opportunities for men and women at work (see also Ely & Meyerson, 2010). Importantly, the insight that gendered leadership expectations and gendered identities of female employees play a role in this process does not imply that organizations cannot address and try to prevent the pernicious effects documented in research on the glass cliff and queen bee effects. Exactly because women face the challenge of these gendered expectations in the higher echelons of organizations, it is important that organizations continue to recognize the necessity of providing equal career opportunities to men and women.

In our analysis external leadership expectations and biased treatment of men and women in the organization are key factor in the threat women are likely to experience and the difficulties they tend to encounter. Their gendered identities (which may be imposed on them by others) only determine which strategy women are most likely to choose to cope with the threat of biased treatment. Also, over time the way women are treated is likely to impact upon the gender identities they develop and find relevant at work. Thus, any measures that ensure equal treatment of men and women, and avoid reliance on gendered leadership expectations should alleviate the threat typically experienced by women who try to advance at work, making it less necessary for them to either emphasize feminine leadership traits or to distance themselves from other women.

Lay analyses – as we have noticed in our conversations with personnel managers, governmental policy makers and CEO's of large companies – tend to view the strategies typically displayed by women to cope with gender bias at work

as stemming from ‘free choice’ or ‘personal preferences’ of specific individuals. Acknowledging the systematic character of these responses and realizing that the part that women play in this process is a *response* to organizational realities as much as it may seem a personal choice is important. Our analysis is helpful in this very practical sense as it makes clear that managers and policy makers can and perhaps should influence the choices and preferences typically displayed by women in the organization. This not only puts them more in control of the developments they witness, but also reminds them of their own role and responsibilities in creating conditions that are attractive for men as well as women in the organization.

5.3. Conclusion

Our review of recent data from experimental studies as well as field research suggests that glass cliff effects as well as queen bee effects may stem from the way gender identities of women at work relate to gendered stereotypes associated with female leadership. Specifically, we have argued and shown that both phenomena are elicited by gendered stereotypes of leadership and bias against women in organizations. Whether women are placed in a glass cliff position or display queen bee behavior once they become leaders depends on how the gender stereotypical views that others hold of women interact with their own self-views and the strategy that they employ to cope with such bias.

When organizational conditions, such as lack of support or a crisis, heightens gender salience in general, women are more likely to be seen as feminine – independently of their own level of gender identification. This increases the likelihood that they are seen as suitable for precarious leadership positions, making it more difficult to be successful as individuals (the glass cliff effect). Those women who – because of this biased treatment – become less gender identified and emphasize their masculine (task-related) skills, set themselves apart from other women and undermine perceptions of the abilities of women as a group (the queen bee effect). Our model helps understand and address these issues, and sets out an agenda for future research.

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