Lokaverkefni til BS-prófs
í viðskiptafræði

Do Men Lead and Women Follow?
Review of gender in leadership and followership literature

Vaka Helgadóttir

Inga Minelgaite, lektor
Febrúar 2018
Do Men Lead and Women Follow?

*Review of gender in leadership and followership literature*

Vaka Helgadóttir

Lokaverkefnitil BS-gráðu í viðskiptafræði

Leiðbeinandi: Inga Minelgaite, lektor

Viðskiptafræðideild

Félagsvísindasvið Háskóla Íslands

Febrúar 2018
Do Men Lead and Women Follow?
Review of gender in leadership and followership literature

Ritgerð þessi er 6 eininga lokaverkefni til BS prófs við Viðskiptafraðideild, Félagsvíslasviði Háskóla Íslands.

© 2018 Vaka Helgadóttir
Ritgerðina má ekki afrita nema með leyfi höfundar.

Prentun: Háskólaprent
Reykjavík, 2018
Preface

This thesis is a final project for a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration with an emphasis on Management at the University of Iceland. It is equivalent to 6 ECTS of the total 180 that is required to complete the Bachelor’s degree. It is written by Vaka Helgadóttir in the autumn of 2017 under the guidance of Inga Minelgaite. I would like to thank her for the good guidance.

Furthermore, I would like to thank Birkir Pálmason and Snorri Freyr Snorrason for their help in proofreading and their encouragements.

Gender equality is of great importance to me as a woman looking forward to a long and prosperous career in the field of leadership. From the beginning of my studies I have been determined to write my final thesis on something relating gender equality. I am very happy that Inga directed my focus to followership and am pleased with the final outcome of this thesis.
Abstract

For a quite some time, followers and followership has been accepted as part of leadership. Research into leadership however, has been very leader-centric and followers have been given a passive role as dependent subordinates. Fortunately, researchers are now studying followership to a greater extent.

This review focuses on how men and women are perceived in the roles of a leader and a follower, with a more detailed attention on followership research. It is important to discuss these new studies and see if there have been any positive changes on the stereotypical roles of a leader and a follower. Hopefully changing them will help to further even out the playing field between men and women.

Beginning with an overview of the gender roles and how they are evolving. Moving on to cover the broad field of leadership theories and research into genders in leadership. Finally discussing followership, in particular looking at Uhl-Bien, Riggo, Lowe and Carten’s definition of followership, Kelley’s model of an effective follower and review research into gender in followership.

After reviewing the literature in the field it seems that, still to this day, men and women do not fit either role equally. Men are perceived as more authentic leaders than women. Females, on the other hand, are perceived to fit the role of a follower better than men, despite the fact the traits that make up an effective leader and an effective follower is very similar.
# Table of contents

Preface ................................................................................................................................. 4

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. 5

Table of contents .................................................................................................................. 6

Figures ................................................................................................................................. 7

Tables .................................................................................................................................. 7

1 Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 8

2 Gender in organizational setting ....................................................................................... 10

3 Leadership .......................................................................................................................... 13
   3.1 Gender in leadership ...................................................................................................... 14

4 Followership ....................................................................................................................... 17
   4.1 Effective follower ......................................................................................................... 18
   4.2 Gender in followership ............................................................................................... 21

5 Summary ............................................................................................................................. 23

Bibliography .......................................................................................................................... 25
Figures

Figure 1: Kelley's model for followers (Kelley, 1988). ................................................................. 19

Tables

Table 1: Comparing groups of men, women and managers (Duehr & Bono, 2006)........ 11
1 Introduction

In the last few decades, leadership has been vastly researched and many different theories have been brought forward (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). Research in leadership focuses on different areas such as leadership styles, a leader’s characteristics and more (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). One area of growing interest is the difference in leadership styles between men and women (Van Vugt & Spisak, 2008; Johnson, Murphy, Zewdie, & Reichard, 2008; Eagly A., 2005). This area has focused on how role models, early experiences and personality traits can correlate with the likelihood of a person becoming a successful leader (Fizsimmons, Callan, & Paulsen, 2014). Yet there is still another important area of leadership that, until recently, did not receive much attention from researchers. In recent years researchers have begun investigating and giving followership more interest than before. Followers and followership have always been a big part of leadership and is now being inspected as a separate theory (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014).

Many scholars have made it into their lives work to study leadership. This is a particularly interesting field as so many people seek to become the leader of a group, department or a company. During a period of a workday, most people do play the role of a follower as well as a leader at different times, in different group settings (Kelley, 1988). Observing a person in middle management for example. For the majority of the day she might be organizing tasks for her subordinates while in fact those tasks are dictated by somebody occupying a higher position inside the firm. Therefore, the qualities possessed by effective followers are more often than not the same qualities required for effective leaders and vice versa (Kelley, 1988).

The main objective of this thesis will be to review recent research that takes a close look at how the genders are perceived in the roles of a leader and a follower. History has showed us that men have been the more dominant gender in the role of leaders (Mendez & Busenbark, 2015). This fact caused many researchers to take an interest in why they were so much more successful. Investigating, for example, if any outside factors such as societal norms or inherent bias held by people has made them view men as more
appropriate for the role of a leader (Johnson, Murphy, Zewdie, & Reichard, 2008). Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, examining whether or not some progress is being made towards gender equality in leadership (Duehr & Bono, 2006). Finally it will be of interest to examine the more recent studies of genders in followership and if the roles of genders are simply a reversed from what we know of leadership or if the roles of followers are perceived to fit both genders more equally.

Beginning with gender, I take a closer look at gender stereotypes and how they are developing. Moving on to leadership where implicit theories will be discussed and we further examine the gender in a leadership role, most prominently an overview of Fitzimmons, Callan’s and Paulsen’s childhood theories. Finally, we will put forward Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe and Carsten’s definition of followership and Kelley’s model of an effective follower. Ending with a chapter about gender theories in followership. By doing so attempting to answer the following research questions: How are men and women perceived in the roles of a leader and a follower?
2 Gender in organizational setting

Gender stereotypes determine what people believe to be appropriate behaviors and appearances for both men and women. Features such as submissiveness, caring and good communications have been associated strongly with women while males have been described as the more dominant gender, being emotionless and independent. The male features have, in the past, been significantly more similar to a stereotypical manager’s than female features (Eagly & Karau, 2002). For years these stereotypical traits of the genders have been a problem for female managers due to the fact that when women tried to be genuine and act in a more ‘feminine’ way they ran the risk of being seen as unfit for the title. However, when women acted in a more stereotypically masculine and managerial way they were seen as fake while doing their job (Oakley, 2000).

A more recent study found that these classic gender stereotypes might be changing. In 2006, Duehr & Bono investigated the views towards women and men in general, and as managers. As seen in Table 1, the research compared the viewpoints to an earlier study from 1989 where both managers and students were questioned. In 1989 the views of both groups were closely linked to the stereotypical traits discussed above, where women did not seem to possess many typical traits of a manager. This new study, however, found two interesting results. Most prominently, viewpoints of male managers had changed quite drastically. They had started viewing women as being more confident and independent compared to submissive and passive, as they did before. However when looking at the results from male students little seemed to have changed. When male students described women and successful managers there was little to no similarity between the two, resembling the results given by male managers and male students in 1989. However, when describing men and successful managers there was a much bigger similarity, although it had decreased since the earlier study. Female students had not changed their viewpoints either. In both studies, they described women and successful managers as having somewhat similar traits (Duehr & Bono, 2006).
The research is interesting as it suggests that although young people still hold the same views for genders in leadership, the mindset towards women leaders seems to be shifting in a positive direction for older men already in the workforce. What factors might be at play is hard to say, although looks like things are moving in a positive direction and hopefully slowly breaking down the stigma for women leaders.

This is further highlighted in a research studying counter-stereotypes. They found that people who work with or are regularly around other people who do not fit gender stereotypes, e.g. women engineer or male nurse, seem to show less bias toward others. The study showed that a counter-stereotypical role model had significant affected on an individual when faced with a decision about who to choose for an available leadership position. Participants had notably more negative ideas about a counter-stereotypical candidate before being exposed to a non-prototypical role model (Leicht, Randsley de Moura, & Crisp, 2014).

Even though some studies are showing positive signs, others suggest that things are moving slowly regarding prejudice against women. This is clearly shown in a research discussing the consequences of portraying anger in the workplace. The study found that men displaying anger at work were seen as being angry about a circumstance or targeted situation. Women, on the other hand, were seen as being angry in general and therefore

Table 1: Comparing groups of men, women and managers (Duehr & Bono, 2006).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Groups being compared</td>
<td>Woman and managers</td>
<td>Men and managers</td>
<td>Women managers and managers</td>
<td>Men managers and managers</td>
<td>Successful women managers and managers</td>
<td>Successful men managers and managers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>.63**</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.52*</td>
<td>.79**</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.62*</td>
<td>.72*</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td>.61**</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.40*</td>
<td>.51*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.66**</td>
<td>-.74**</td>
<td>-.96**</td>
<td>-.71**</td>
<td>-.68**</td>
<td>-.88**</td>
<td>-.71**</td>
<td>-.68**</td>
<td>-.78**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.53**</td>
<td>-.97**</td>
<td>-.99**</td>
<td>-.95**</td>
<td>-.95**</td>
<td>-.95**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Data from this study are presented in mean, in data Columns 4, 7, 9, and 11.
*p < .01, **p < .001.*

The research is interesting as it suggests that although young people still hold the same views for genders in leadership, the mindset towards women leaders seems to be shifting in a positive direction for older men already in the workforce. What factors might be at play is hard to say, although looks like things are moving in a positive direction and hopefully slowly breaking down the stigma for women leaders.
displaying a negative personality feature. Moreover, men were given a higher employee status after showing this emotion while women were lowered in rank by displaying anger, regardless of their position (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008).

The studies discussed above, as well as other research focusing on gender equality (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Van Engen, 2003), seem to be showing a gradual positive change towards gender equality in the workplace. Research indicates that exposure to counter-stereotypes and variety of role models can help diminish preconceptions and bias. This can explain why men, with some work experience, showed less bias than students.
3 Leadership

Leadership theories have been shown increased interest in the last few decades. Altogether 66 leadership theories have been formed and as of now, there is no single dominant theory that exists (Dinh, o.fl., 2014). Leadership research has been centered around the leader, how leaders are perceived, what characteristic they need to portray and what ultimately makes up effective leaders (Riggio, 2014).

Implicit theories have been successful in describing both the ideal and general person of a group. In leadership, implicit theories are used to paint a picture of the general beliefs and expectations of the perfect or typical leader (Braun, Stegmann, Hernandez Bark, Junker, & van Dick, 2017). Followers are given the task of evaluating their leaders and sorting different traits to existing characteristics, such as good or bad and effective or inadequate (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). These researchers have identified concrete traits that often make up a good leader. The most prominent characteristics being inspirational, decisiveness and effectiveness, amongst others (Braun, Stegmann, Hernandez Bark, Junker, & van Dick, 2017).

Other research has focused on the authenticity in leadership. This type of research focuses on the importance of the connection formed between leaders and their followers. This is a hard-sought quality but an important one if the relationship between leaders and their followers is to be successful. Researchers have found that forming a strong relationship requires having shared values that showcase that the objectives of a leader aims to benefit all employs as well as the company as a whole. It is thus important that followers are not only aware of the leader’s beliefs and plans for the company but also agree and trust that their leaders are trustworthy and able to finish what they set out to do (Eagly, 2005).

Leadership has been vastly researched as mentioned above and has taken many different forms. It is apparent though that leaders have much to think about when it comes to fulfilling their requirements. Forming relational bonds, being authentic as well as charismatic and inspirational whilst running a company can be a tough challenge to take on.
3.1 Gender in leadership

Above I briefly covered the difference in the actual and perceived traits of genders. Another, and perhaps more complex research area is how the genders are perceived and expected to behave in the leadership roles. This research area can be tricky to cover as men and women are not only expected to have different leadership styles and behave differently as leaders (Wang, Chiang, Tsai, Lin, & Cheng, 2013) but the genders are often perceived differently even when behaving in the same manner (Eagly A., 2005).

Researchers have found that upbringing is one important prerequisite in whether man and women become fit for leadership. When researching male and female CEO’s, authors found that there were interesting differences in the childhoods of the boys versus the girls. The group of male CEO’s had surprisingly similar childhoods and young adult experiences. Commonly they played group sport and were in a leading role doing so. The boys generally played amongst themselves in a more hazardous way than girls and looked up to their fathers regarding work and work ethic. By taking more risk and harvesting success these men got more confident and learned self-efficiency. These experiences built a good foundation and consequently helped them grow into the leaders they later became (Fizsimmons, Callan, & Paulsen, 2014).

However, according to the same study female CEO’s seemed to have quite different experiences growing up. Many of the women got their confidence from experiencing adversity as children and successfully dealing with those difficulties with the help of an adult. A great portion of the female CEO’s worked in their small family business where they gained work ethic from their fathers, similar to the boys. Moreover, they held more senior roles in those businesses earlier in their life relative to men.

The most prominent link that tied these women together were their female mentors. As young girls, they looked up to female family members, mothers, aunts or a family friend that they saw as the "independent women." Moving forward, when entering the job market they were lacking in leadership experiences, relative to men, and so they depended on female mentors in their professional lives. By acquiring mentors in higher positions, they gained more leadership experience, a broader network and guidance in climbing the corporate ladder. In doing so, they developed self-efficiency similar to what men got from team sports (Fizsimmons, Callan, & Paulsen, 2014).
Only a small number of the male participants mentioned a female mentor or a role model from childhood (Fizsimmons, Callan, & Paulsen, 2014).

Another research highlighted how females developed stereotypical male leadership traits while growing up and how these traits might have helped them break through the barrier and acquire positions that were otherwise out of their reach. Furthermore, the research continued on saying that the majority of female candidates got their CEO positions due to unusual circumstances at the company, where board members wanted to find someone to shake things up (Fizsimmons, Callan, & Paulsen, 2014). In an article, author Rosener claims, as well, that women more often than not got their first opportunity in a leading position because of some sort of disorder in the company. The author goes on stating that the companies that women lead are usually of a moderate size, are developing fast and thus in need of unconventional leadership methods (Rosener, 1990). A separate study noted that female leaders were preferred when a company was dealing with an in-house issue, while male leaders were preferred when the company had external problems (Van Vugt & Spisak, 2008).

A study by Johnson, Murphy, Zewdie and Reichard inspected the impact stereotypical gender roles had on a leader’s ratings. Strength was identified as an important male leader’s characteristic whereas sensitivity was more strongly identified with a female leader. When looking into the effectiveness of being either strong or sensitive, they found that male leaders only needed to show strength to be considered effective while female leaders needed to be both sensitive and strong to be effective leaders. Interestingly enough both genders could possess both feminine and masculine qualities and be considered effective leaders, however, the absence of either sensitivity for female or strength for male resulted in the genders being deemed ineffective as leaders no matter what other qualities these leaders possessed (Johnson, Murphy, Zewdie, & Reichard, 2008). These papers highlight that it’s not necessarily in favor of women to acquire the stereotypical male characteristics to become successful but rather bringing something new to the table.

This was further brought to light by Eagly’s article. She suggests that because of people’s preconceptions about the leadership role, the fact that stereotypical features of a leader are more strongly associated with the male stereotypical features, women are
less likely to be considered authentic in their leadership roles. Women are portrayed as acting in an ill-fitted manner rather than being themselves. (Eagly, 2005). Additionally, another research found that female leaders displaying either dominance or no emotions at all were perceived as inauthentic (Brescoll V. L., 2016).

Furthermore, a research by Buchanan, Warning and Tett shows that women are less likely to want a female boss than men. It states that when entering the job market men and women equally approve of a female boss. However, as women get older and gain experience their approval of a female boss decreases (Buchanan, Warning, & Tett, 2012).

These researchers showcase the difficult path women in the workforce have to navigate. From the beginning of their career, they can be perceived as fake when behaving in a traditional leadership style, while also being held back by fellow women in the workplace. There are thus many different factors pushing women down, referencing a ‘glass ceiling’ when women have a hard time breaking into higher positions in a firm, but now researchers also write about a “glass escalator”, which will be discussed in more detail later, where men seem to be pushed up and onwards, past women colleges into higher positions (Eagly, 2005).
4 Followership

Moving forward it is important to note that before I dive into gender roles in followership it is crucial to understand the followership theories, follower’s attributes and what makes a good and effective follower.

As mentioned before many leadership theories have been very leader-centric. Research has focused mostly in the characteristics of effective leaders and behavioral traits (Riggio, 2014). Until recently a follower has been mostly seen as someone who is affected by and acts on a leader’s influence and commands (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). Leadership, however, is incomplete without followers and followership (Owie, 2017). Studying followership is a key ingredient to fully understand the relationship between leaders and their followers and how they co-produce leadership (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014).

Followers have taken many different roles in leadership theories over the years. The bulk of the research making up the history of leadership theory has focused on the leader while followers are mentioned as passive subordinates. Followers were seen as people who acted on orders of their leaders mindlessly and were without any independence. Fortunately, the role of followers has gotten more attention in recent literature and their role is portrayed with somewhat more characteristic. This train of thought was pioneered in part when the implicit leadership theories came to light. The implicit leadership theory did not view followers as passively but instead identified characteristics, traits and actions in which they were able to influence their leaders in some way. Further on leadership was seen as an outcome of a collaboration between the two groups, followers and leaders. Implicit followership theories further enhanced the importance of a follower, by giving managers and followers a chance to contribute to the evaluation and sorting of a follower’s traits. More recent research suggests that leaders and followers co-produce both leadership and followership. It is a social process where interaction between followers and leaders form the outcome of their relationship and how successful the group will be. The engagement of the two groups, understanding, influencing and trusting each other is ultimately what produces the company’s outcome (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014).
Strikingly enough, the concept of followers and followership has been around and recognized in leadership for years. The follower's role in leadership is widely accepted and encouraging voices have been shining a light on the overlooked theory for quite some time. Despite all that the leadership research continues to be immensely leader-centric (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014).

For followership theories to further develop and the understanding of the role of a follower to evolve, it is essential to have a clear definition of the concept being discussed. In their article; Followership theory: A review and research agenda, the authors have presented a broad theory of followership in the hopes of it being a stepping-stone for others to continue the research of followership theory. Their definition is: “Followership theory is the study of the nature and impact of followers and following in the leadership process”. Further emphasizing that followership includes the role and behavior of a follower, both in connection with the leader, as well as an outcome co-produced with a leader (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014).

It is important to note that a follower should not be thought of as synonymous with the concept of an employee. Instead it focuses on how a person acts, where all characteristics, behaviors and processes are viewed in relation to leadership. For example, how a person will react in a group task or how an employee will react to his superior when provided a task. These are all examples of how we judge a person in the role of a follower. Followership is the study of how followers see themselves and their actions in relation to leadership, not how they view leadership (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014).

As we begin to better understand followership and the behaviors of followers we will begin to understand leadership in more depth as well. It will allow us to understand that a leader, for example, is not necessarily the only flawed person in an ineffective leadership, she might simply be unable to co-construct leadership with her followers.

4.1 Effective follower

As a definition of followership has been brought forward, it is important to take a look at the attributes that make up an effective follower.

Robert Kelley’s model of followership outlines the different stages of follower’s efficiency. Kelley has put forward a two-dimensional scale where one dimension of the
scale measures independence (e.g. critical thinking) versus dependence in followers. While the other dimension measures activeness versus passiveness in a follower’s behavior (Kelley, 1988).

As can be seen in Figure 1, Kelley believes to have identified five types of followers. Kelley categorizes them depending on how effective people with these characteristics will be in the role of a follower (Kelley, 1988).

First Kelley identifies Sheep. These followers are categorized as passive and dependent on others. They are irresponsible and need to be constantly told what to do (Kelley, 1988).

The Yes-People are blind followers. They are committed to the leader and the company without questioning its direction or stand. Leaders with questionable ethical or moral values often seek after these types of followers, as these leaders won’t have to worry about being objected (Kelley, 1988).

Figure 1: Kelley’s model for followers (Kelley, 1988).
Alienated Followers, are critical thinkers but often in a negative way. Criticizing leadership without publicizing their opinions and tend to be responsible for bringing the workplace morale down (Kelley, 1988).

The Survivors are right in the middle of the four. Survivors are risk-averse people who prefer to shadow popular opinions and directions rather than forming an opinion of their own (Kelley, 1988).

Lastly, we have the Effective Followers, which Kelly, like the category suggests, are the most successful followers, being both independent and active workers. Kelley has established a few qualities he believes are shared by effective followers. According to the model effective followers are good at managing their own time and recourses. They generally see themselves as equals to both supervisors as well as other co-workers and so can easily do their job without close supervision. They are not afraid to disagree with their supervisors or voice a difference in an opinion. These followers are committed to the company and with their enthusiasm and positive outlook foster a good morale within the company. When employees believe in the project they are working on and are excited about their work, tasks are more likely to stay on track and the groups becomes more efficient at what they do. Effective followers are in the habit of continually educating themselves and mastering necessary skills for their job and have no problem in listing their own best and worst features. They are positive, well organized and critical employees both of their own work as well as others. Lastly, effective followers have courage. They are comfortable confessing to their own mistakes as well as sharing rightful responsibility for a job well done and can be trusted to keep the necessary people informed on how projects are going. With all that being said, to unethical leaders these types of followers can cause problems and so be highly unpopular (Kelley, 1988).

Other researchers have found similar results as Kelley. A recent research had a group of leaders, supervisors and subordinates rate effective attributes of followers. The outcome of this study identified that “supporting others” and “contribution to the group” as important traits of a follower. They also found the most important trait of a follower to be “Reliability as a group member” and the least significant trait to be “Learning and embracing change” (Antelo, Prilipko, & Sheridan-Pereira, 2010).
Interestingly, the attributes Kelley categorists as traits possessed by effective followers are in many ways similar to the ones Antelo, Prilipko and Sheridan-Pereita identified. That is, with the exception of “Learning and embracing change”, which Kelley identified as an important attribute. This further highlights the need for further research into this field.

4.2 Gender in followership
Still to this day, women are vastly underrepresented in the leadership position (Fizsimmons, Callan, & Paulsen, 2014). Some research has suggested that it is because women are ill-fitted into the managerial stereotype, which is closely linked with trait’s normally affiliated with males (Eagly A., 2005). It would therefore be interesting to see how the genders are represented in the role of a follower. Unfortunately, this is not a field that has been vastly researched (Braun, Stegmann, Hernandez Bark, Junker, & van Dick, 2017).

The first known study about gender bias in implicit followership theories looked into the preconceptions people have about certain groups, in this case followers. Results showed that women in a follower’s position had a significantly higher rating than men in relationship-orientation as well as task-orientation. These results are interesting as both traits are regularly categorized as being ideal traits for followers. Male followers however, were rated higher in counter-ideal relationship-orientation, characterized as being ill-fitted for teamwork and impolite. This is a particularly interesting result as task-orientation, when put out of context with followership, is often more associated with men or impartial to genders. Furthermore, women followers were described as being better at cooperating and working with others in a group setting (Braun, Stegmann, Hernandez Bark, Junker, & van Dick, 2017).

This bias suggests that women are not only affected by the “glass ceiling” that keep them from leadership positions but as well the “sticky floor” that glues them to the follower’s role, as it is believed to suit them better (Braun, Stegmann, Hernandez Bark, Junker, & van Dick, 2017). Finally, it has also been shown that men are unfairly pushed to higher positions when working in a field traditionally crowded by women. The cause being that the men are perceived to be doing a job that is underneath them and so they seem to be overqualified and quickly move on to what is thought to be a more appropriate
position for them. Men who take this route to higher positions have been said to take a trip on the “glass escalator” towards a promotion (Williams, 1992).

Another study found little to no difference between man and women when they were asked to rate important attributes of followers. Both groups rated “Reliability as a group member” the highest attribute. Women rated “Supporting others” as the second highest trait while men rated “Conceptual understanding” as their second highest trait. “Learning and embracing change” was the lowest rated feature and additionally men rated “Interpersonal relations” equally as low (Antelo, Prilipko, & Sheridan-Pereira, 2010).

These studies suggest that, similarly to leadership positions, there might be some difference in the way the genders are perceived in the position of a follower. Women are thought to fit the follower’s attributes more strongly and this, in turn, breeds the bias that it is better suited for women to occupy the role of a follower. In the meanwhile, it is often deemed to be below a man to occupy such a position, especially if held within a female-dominated workplace. Followers themselves however seem to have a similar idea of what it takes to be an effective follower.
5 Summary

As previously mentioned, leadership has been vastly researched (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). Trying to figure out why women are still such a minority when it comes to top positions has been a constant headache (Fizsimmons, Callan, & Paulsen, 2014). Now that followership theory has gotten some increased attention it is interesting to see if the joint theories can shine a brighter light on where the genders stand in these positions and why. The aim of this thesis was to examine the roles of a leader and a follower and look into how men and women have been perceived to fit those roles.

The findings revealed that men and women are not perceived equally when it comes the leadership position. The genders have significantly different childhoods and experiences growing up, partly due to how they are perceived as a boy or a girl. They are therefore differently prepared for the role. Stereotypes help explain why female leaders do face higher expectations than men and why gender equality is not as prominent in today’s hierarchies. Recent research does suggest that the stereotypical gender traits are slowly evolving.

Interestingly enough, the qualities that make up an effective follower are roughly the same traits that make up an effective leader. Such as being a good communicator, able to work with others and being independent. Despite the similarities in the roles research suggest that women are considered to fit the role of a follower better than men. While women might be held down in the follower’s position, men seem to be pushed away from it.

Continued research about followership is desperately needed. I would purpose that continued research should center on the leader-follower relationship and highlight the difference between followers and employees.

As more and more companies focus on the culture that they are building within their workplace and the welfare and happiness of their employs it is important to increase the knowledge and understanding of everybody’s jobs and duties. With a clearer understanding of what is expected of a follower, better assumptions can be made within a company which will in turn be able to select their employs more effectively.
Additionally, staff members will get a better understanding of their duties and people will be more satisfied at their jobs. Moreover, with an increased understanding of followership it can be assumed that the leadership role will continue to develop.

Furthermore, until gender equality in the workplace has been reached it is important to continue to answer the question why these differences remain. I would suggest further studies focus on counter-stereotypes and the importance of different types of role models. The male dominant culture that unfortunately is still too common today within companies is not in line with the corporate social responsibility companies should aim to fulfill (Braun, Stegmann, Hernandez Bark, Junker, & van Dick, 2017).

The unfortunate small size of this project limits the conclusion, which I am able to make. The limited amount of research that has been documented about followership theories and gender roles further limits the conclusions that can be drawn at this stage. The definition of a follower and the list of an effective follower’s characteristics are relatively new and most likely will continue to develop, just as leadership theories have over the last few years. Fortunately, the interest in the field seems to be growing so we can hopefully see more papers being published in the coming years. This will further shed light on the importance of followership and the role the genders occupy.
Bibliography


Fizsimmons, T., Callan, V., & Paulsen, N. (2014). Gender disparity in C-suite: Do male and female CEOs differ in how they reach the top? *The Leadership Quarterly, 25,* 245-266. doi: 10.1016/j.leaqua.2013.08.005


Mendez, M., & Busenbark, J. (2015). Shared leadership and gender: all members are equal ... but some more than others. *Leadership & Organization, 36*(1), 17-34. doi:10.1108/LODJ-11-2012-0147


