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Store Leader Gender and Store Sales Performance:

When and Why do Women and Men Underperform?

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Abstract

Finding ways of breaking the gender-based glass ceiling is an important human resource issue in companies today. Employing a sample of over 200 retail stores, we explore multiple moderating and mediating factors to explain when and why women store leaders perform better, equal to, or worse than men. Results reveal that (a) women are assigned to lead stores that are positioned closer to competitive rivals than men, and (b) women receive unfair distributive pay outcomes in that they are generally paid less than their male counterparts. When accounting for these factors, performance (i.e., productivity) differences between stores with men and women leaders diminished. Further, organizational tenure and store-unit size (i.e., number of employees) were positively associated with sales performance among stores with women leaders. The findings unveil why some store-units led by women underperform, but also offer contingency factors that delineate when women-led and men-led stores excel in sales productivity. Implications for recruiting and retaining both women and men in leadership are considered.

Keywords: women leaders, gender differences, pay equity, role congruity theory

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Despite making some inroads into leadership roles over the past few decades (Echeverri-Carroll, Oden, Gibson, & Johnston, 2018), women are still underrepresented in leadership (Catalyst, 2020; Maume, 2004; Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1987). A Catalyst (2020) report shows that women represent 44.7% of employees in Standard & Poor's (S&P) 500 companies and 36.9% of first- and mid-level managers, but dwindle to 26.5% of senior-level managers, 11% of top earners, and only 5.8% of chief executive officers (CEOs). This phenomenon is true worldwide. At 3.5%, the number of women CEOs in Australia is lower than that of their American counterparts but surpasses the 3.3% of CEO positions held by women in large European companies (Nekhili, Chakroun, & Chtioui 2018). A separate study of Danish companies found that, contrary to the assumption that having a woman CEO will likely result in a larger female representation of female directors, companies with "a female chairperson on the board of directors tend to have significantly fewer other non-employee-elected female board members" (Smith & Parrotta, 2018 p. 446). Although we know a good deal about the causes of women's lower likelihood to occupy leadership positions, we know less about the experiences of women in leadership and their business outcomes relative to those of their male counterparts (Triana, Richard, & Yücel, 2017).

This study advances the literature by assessing the relationship between leader gender and store-unit business performance. According to Lindsey (2016), women have traditionally been the backbone of the retail industry, and "women drive 70-80% of consumer spending in the [United States] U.S. through their purchasing power and influence." Yet, although women's purchasing power drives the retail industry, there is a lack of women leadership in the retail

industry, where women hold only 5.6% of CEO positions within S&P 500 retail companies (Lindsey, 2016). Fundamental questions also remain as to when and why there are within-firm performance differences between store-units with a female leader and a male leader. In the present study, we focus on store-units within one large retail organization, which permits an examination of within-firm effects across store-units without extraneous factors related to industry or competitive (strategic) differences. The retail sector is also an ideal and important setting to examine, because according to a 2019 Trading Economics Report, year-over-year retail sales increased an average of 4.35% between 1993 and 2019. This industry is also in a state of change given COVID-19, digitization, and a need to focus on employee burnout (KPMG, 2021).

The present study relies on role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) as its theoretical framework. Role congruity theory proposes that gender beliefs create expectations about women's and men's competence. These expectations are often implicit (accessed automatically and subconsciously) and they are pervasive when influencing assumptions about the value that women and men will contribute as leaders. Role congruity theory proposes that leadership roles are more difficult for women compared to men because, despite the progress women have made during the past few decades (Catalyst, 2020), men typically hold higher-level leadership roles and are thought of more as de-facto leaders compared to women (e.g., all United States Presidents have been men to date; Eagly, Karau & Makhijani, 1995; Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell & Ristikari, 2011). This gendered leadership stereotype persists and is deeply embedded at an implicit/subconscious level (Nosek et al., 2007). In spite of a meta-analysis of perceptions of leader effectiveness showing that women and men leaders do not differ significantly in perceived leader effectiveness (Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, & Woehr, 2014), another meta-analysis of leaders revealed that the "think manager think male" paradigm still persists (Koenig et al., 2011).

People often implicitly associate leadership with masculine traits (Koenig et al., 2011; Nosek et al., 2007) and this creates bias against women in leadership (Ridgeway, 2009, 2011).

Leadership has traditionally been reserved for men, and agentic characteristics such as risk-taking and taking charge are usually associated with masculinity (Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio, 2004; Calas, Smircich & Bourne, 2009; Heilman, 2001; Ridgeway, 2011; Yang & Aldrich, 2014). Moreover, a meta-analysis of experimental research measuring gender bias in employment decision-making found that women are especially likely to face gender bias and discrimination in male-dominated occupations (Koch et al., 2015). Because men are more readily and implicitly associated with leadership (Benokraitis & Feagin, 1995; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Nosek et al., 2007), people trust them as leaders, often automatically, and have more confidence in their leadership abilities compared to their women counterparts (Berger, Conner & Fisek, 1982; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Yang & Triana, 2019). These biases produce less favorable impressions of women leaders, therefore making it more challenging for them to lead (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1992; Heilman, 2001). For example, when women behave in role-incongruent ways, they are deprecated (Bark, Escartín, Schuh, & van Dick, 2016). Moreover, research also shows that when women are selected for leadership positions, they are often chosen during periods of poor performance when the firm wishes to try something new; given the risky situation, the leader can be set up for failure (Cook & Glass, 2014; Ryan & Haslam, 2007). For women who run their own business, research demonstrates that they have fewer resources and less assistance running the business than their male counterparts, which also makes leadership challenging (Yang & Triana, 2019).

The present study examines when and why store-unit leader gender is associated with store-unit sales performance within one large retail company. Consistent with research showing

that women in leadership are often placed in more difficult situations than men (Cook & Glass, 2014; Ryan & Haslam, 2007), we propose that the distance to a business rival and leader compensation function as mechanisms that can explain why store-units with a female leader sometimes perform worse than store-units with a male leader. Moreover, we also examine two theoretically important conditions under which women's disadvantages can be mitigated, specifically, the store leader's organizational tenure and the size of the store-unit.

We theorize that the performance of store-units with a woman leader will be explained by the fact that their store-units are often located closer to that of rivals compared to store-units led by their male counterparts. Managing a store which is close to one's rival would be consistent with research that women in leadership are often chosen for difficult situations (Cook & Glass, 2014; Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Moreover, given a persistent glass ceiling and wage gap between men and women in the workforce, lower compensation can also explain why store-units with a female leader would perform worse than store-units with a male leader (Catalyst, 2020; Maume, 2004; Morrison et al., 1987). Role congruity theory proposes that gendered expectations about women's competence as leaders can make it challenging for women to excel in leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992; Heilman, 2001). Recent glass cliff research has identified the extent to which resources, such as pay, provided in support of leader success can mitigate glass cliff effects (Ryan et al., 2016). Meanwhile, the job demands-resources model identifies pay among the job-related resources that support engagement and work performance while reducing the costs (e.g., burnout) of work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli, 2017). Managing businesses close to rivals and being paid less than male counterparts can increase the chances that women leaders will perform worse than their male counterparts. Therefore, we begin by explaining these two critical mechanisms that disadvantage women leaders.

Next, we turn our attention to moderating factors, including the store leader's company tenure and store size, as contexts that can help women leaders overcome disadvantages related to role incongruity. Research shows that biases against women leaders can be mitigated by exposure to counter stereotypical information which demonstrates women's competence (Dasgupta & Asgari, 2004). For women with long organizational tenure who demonstrate knowledge of the organization and a record of contributions, bias may be mitigated and confidence in their leadership will be bolstered. Moreover, managing large stores can be a good fit for women's leadership styles, which tend to be more democratic and transformational compared to men's styles (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

The present study contributes to our knowledge of women in leadership in several ways. For years, research has established that a glass ceiling which prevents women from advancing to higher-level and more lucrative occupations persists (Catalyst, 2020; Maume, 2004; Morrison et al., 1987). Koch et al. (2015) explained that women are disproportionately segregated into low-paying and low-status jobs, and when women work in male-dominated fields, they are more likely to experience gender bias and discrimination. We apply role congruity theory within the context of women in traditionally male-dominated leadership roles to help unpack why the road for women leaders is more difficult than the road for men leaders. While research has established that social beliefs about gender disadvantage women in leadership roles, this study directly tests being put in difficult situations (e.g., proximity to rival businesses) and the wage gap (i.e., lower compensation) as mechanisms that set women-led store-units up for poor performance. In spite of this, our research also reveals two boundary conditions when women are able to overcome these disadvantages, namely, substantial organizational tenure with the store-unit and leading a larger store-unit (i.e., number of employees in the organization).

Studying women in leadership and disentangling when and why they perform on par with men in predominantly male roles is important not only for ethical reasons but also to enhance business performance. Waiting for role-based stereotypes to change is a less likely path forward for organizations than identifying factors and conditions that support success. Part of our contribution is to identify methods of putting cracks into the glass ceiling for women generally and for women working in male-dominated occupations specifically. We also examine pay and the desirability of job assignments (i.e., distance to a rival store) as job characteristics that can have implications for the glass cliff phenomena. Although studies have demonstrated that a glass cliff exists both theoretically and empirically (Cook & Glass, 2014; Ryan & Haslam, 2007), our study begins to unpack why this phenomenon occurs by presenting pay and distance to rivals as mediating mechanisms. Only when we understand when and why female leaders perform well can we begin to put cracks in the glass ceiling (Catalyst, 2020; Maume, 2004; Morrison et al., 1987). A review of 60 years of discrimination and diversity research in *Human Resource Management* explained that women have made nowhere near the level of progress into leadership roles that they had been predicted to make by futurists 50 years ago (Triana et al., 2021). Given women's limited progress over time, researchers have called for more studies on women in leadership to ascertain what helps women succeed as leaders, including in male-dominated roles (Triana et al., 2021). The present study begins to answer this call for research to advance theory and practice on the glass ceiling.

Theory and Hypotheses

Factors that Disadvantage Women in Leadership

Role congruity theory explains that women in leadership roles are regularly evaluated less favorably than men in leadership roles (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly & Karau,

2002; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992; Heilman, 2001) due to a lack of congruence, or the contradicting demands, between their feminine gender role (stereotypically communal qualities) and their leadership role (stereotypically agentic qualities). When people think of leadership, the gender/sex of the first person that comes to mind is usually masculine/male (Eagly et al., 1995), and this may happen either consciously or subconsciously (Nosek et al., 2007). Ironically, these challenges that disadvantage women and make it more difficult for them to succeed in traditionally male leadership roles can also make women attractive candidates to lead companies and business units that are struggling or in need of a fresh leadership approach.

Research explains why firm stakeholders may knowingly put women in difficult situations as well as why women leaders are willing to accept such difficult situations. On the one hand, gender stereotypes hold that men are more agentive (i.e., assertive, decisive, active, strong) than women (Heilman, 2001). Because men are traditionally thought of first for leadership roles (Heilman, 2001), choosing a woman leader is sometimes a desired signal for a company that wants to indicate it is making a change and trying a new approach. On the other hand, women may be willing to accept such difficult assignments because the alternative may be that they are never selected for leadership roles or that they delay their career advancement (Catalyst, 2020; Cook & Glass, 2014). A 1996 Catalyst survey found that executive women indicated “seeking out tough job assignments” was among the three most important keys to their career success (cf. Nelson & Burke, 2000). Indeed, part of the reason prestigious jobs in male-dominated occupations are so challenging for women is because the “think manager-think male” bias is deeply embedded (Koenig et al., 2011; Nosek et al., 2007). The rare exception shown to this gender-biased default is among people who associate women with agency, with Mölders et al. (2018) reporting that such individuals supported quotas for women in leadership.

The term “glass cliff” was coined in 2007 by Ryan and Haslam to describe what happens to women who take precarious leadership assignments. In a study of companies before and after the appointment of new board members, Ryan and Haslam (2007) found that companies appointing women to their board of directors were more likely than others to have experienced persistent bad performance in the preceding five months. Cook and Glass (2014) also reported a glass cliff effect whereby firms that were already performing badly were also more likely to hire a female CEO to replace a departing male CEO. Because the firm was performing poorly to begin with and operating in a tough context, the majority of new women CEOs working under such circumstances inevitably struggled and their firms performed poorly. They were subsequently replaced by male CEOs, a phenomenon which Cook and Glass (2014) called the “savior effect”, because a male leader is restored and things go back to normal.

With this research as our backdrop, we consider why women leaders are more likely to be selected to lead store-units that are positioned closer to a competitor. Individuals (leaders) at the same level in an organization, in this case, the level of store unit leadership, often have a general understanding of the placement and relative situation of other leaders. That was the case in the organization serving as the research site for this study, where store team leaders were familiar with the organization’s strategy and store placement and had relationships within the network of store team leaders. Anecdotally, host organization HR management at the time understood that store team leaders had frequent conversations about store placements and relative salary. Thus, women were likely to have a general understanding that their opportunities for store leadership were unlikely to be the relatively low hanging fruit represented by a stable store far from competition. We propose that women are more likely to be selected as leaders for stores near a direct competitor. These stores are in a situation where success is more difficult to sustain, and

therefore, performance challenges with a given store are likely to render top leadership open to trying a different approach. Appointing a woman to lead a store can represent a different approach and perhaps a fresh leadership perspective for the store unit. Although this can set women up for failure, as has been shown by the glass cliff phenomenon (Cook & Glass, 2014), women often accept these leadership positions because opportunities to lead in their careers may come along rarely, if ever again.

Importantly, although gender bias against women in male-dominated roles seems to be pervasive (Koch et al., 2015), a few studies have shown what has been called a qualified leader advantage (Rosette & Tost, 2010). In their meta-analysis, Koch et al. (2015, p. 218) found that “gender-role congruity bias was reduced when information clearly indicated high competence of those being evaluated”. Moreover, van Esch, Hopkins, O’Neil, and Bilimoria (2018) found that while moderately qualified women were deemed to be riskier for senior leadership roles than moderately qualified men, highly qualified women were seen as less risky for senior leadership roles than highly qualified men.

Leadership assignments for men are more likely to be those considered quality developmental opportunities well-suited to the person’s experience and style. For leaders in the current organization, stores with less competition provide an environment that is more conducive to early success. It is also possible that men are more likely to decline opportunities to lead stores representing a more difficult path to success. If it is relatively common to see male colleagues placed in stores that are more distal, rather than proximal, to competition, it makes sense for men to decline relatively unfavorable placement with the idea that a more favorable opportunity will likely emerge. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis 1. Store leader gender will be related to distance to a competitive rival.

Women store leaders will manage stores in closer proximity (in mileage) to a competitive rival than men store leaders.

Role congruity theory may also explain the wage gap that long persists between men and women. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), since the year 2004, women's earnings have consistently remained in the 80% to 83% range of what their male counterparts earn. According to Blau and Kahn (2017), major human capital variables including work experience explain a small percentage of the wage gap. Instead, Blau and Kahn (2017) explain that "research based on experimental evidence strongly suggests that discrimination cannot be discounted." Research also shows that even women CEOs who have made it to the very top of organizations face biases and underrepresentation (Luo, Huang, & Lin, 2018). In fact, Aguinis et al. (2018) found that the disadvantages women face compared to their male counterparts are more pronounced among star performers.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019), men earn more than women in almost every occupation. Castilla (2008) analyzed personnel data from a large services organization and found pay bias against women, demonstrating that women had lower salary growth after performance ratings were taken into account, all else being equal. In another study, sampling almost 9,000 employees at a large private employer over a seven-year period, Castilla (2012) found gender disparities in performance evaluation, salary, and career setting stages even after the organization had implemented merit-based work practices. Moreover, Magnusson (2016) presented a longitudinal study of physicians from Sweden and found that even when differences in the physicians' specializations were taken into account, men earned more than women, and the

wage gap was actually larger in 2007 than in 1975. Such findings have implications resulting in pay injustice between female and male leaders.

Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders provides a general framework for understanding women's often vulnerable status as leaders depending on the leadership positions they hold. Motivated by the explicit or implicit assumption that women perform worse because they are less competent leaders, women's lower status accounts for why they are valued less and provided lower salaries in leadership roles (Ridgeway, 2011). According to role congruity theory, the same compensation biases that disadvantage women in leadership positions would advantage men in those same positions because people are more likely to reward men over women if they implicitly perceive them to be better leaders (Nosek et al., 2007). We advance the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2. Store leader gender will be related to compensation. Women store leaders will receive significantly less compensation than men store leaders.

Next, we propose that when women who are paid less than their male counterparts to do the same job are also assigned to lead a business in close proximity to a rival, the stores these women manage will exhibit lower sales performance.

Mechanisms Through Which Women Leaders' Disadvantages Operate

Disproportionately assigning women to lead more stores in more challenging conditions, such as managing a store-unit in close proximity to a rival, is a fairly straight-forward representation of a glass cliff situation. Leaders in these stores face a more difficult task as they are less likely to perform well due to the greater competition their stores face. Per the metaphor that "a rising tide lifts all boats" (Kennedy, 1963), it can be the case that having multiple businesses of the same kind located in close proximity may attract more customers to that area

generally, helping to support each of the stores present. However, it also means a business must be more competitive (i.e., operate a higher level of effectiveness/competitiveness) so it does not suffer by comparison to its nearby rival(s), which customers can readily choose.

Disproportionally placing women in precarious conditions such as relatively competitive markets can be akin to setting them up to fail and thus should explain variance in store performance associated with leader gender.

Research into the glass cliff has begun to consider the role of resources in the phenomenon. Ryan et al.'s (2016, p. 452) review of glass cliff research identified the availability of support as a potentially important factor in perceptions of the glass cliff, asserting "all crisis situations are not equally precarious." For example, experimental studies by Rink, Ryan, and Stoker (2013) found that the availability of support, such as being able to count on the social support of relevant organizational stakeholders, led to more favorable evaluations of the likely success of women charged with leading underperforming businesses. Thus, the extent to which resources are provided in support of leader success can render situations less precarious. We extend glass cliff research by considering more closely the potential role of leader pay as an influential resource in the experience of the glass cliff for women.

The job demands-resources model identifies job-related resources as aspects of the job that support engagement, achieving work goals, and reducing the psychological or "psychosocial" costs (e.g., burnout) of that work (Schaufeli, 2017). Bakker and Demerouti's (2007, p. 312) review of related research identified employee pay among organizational resources that are "valued in their own right or because they are means to the achievement or protection of other valued resources." Building on research into employee engagement via the job demands-resources model (e.g., Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Schaufield, 2014), we submit

that leaders who receive lower compensation than other similarly qualified peers doing the same job are more likely to withhold effort as a means of righting the wrong (restoring equity) when they feel they are under-compensated. Leaders who believe they are paid less than others may also reason that lower performance expectations should be applied to them because the organization is getting what it is paying for (Adams, 1963, 1965; Deutsch, 1975). As one practitioner (Radstad, 2020) put it:

“A female worker that feels less valued because of the pay gap will likely underperform, since there is little incentive for her to go the extra mile. And the resentment wouldn’t be isolated since companies that have institutionalized unfair practices or fail to stop them will likely see the impact across the entire workforce”.

We do not go so far as to suggest that high or fair wages necessarily lead to effective job performance or leadership. Rather, we put forth that perceived pay inequity cannot provide affirmation (perceived value, support) and engagement that has been associated with perceived fairness. Further, pay inequity can exacerbate the physiological and psychological costs identified as relevant in the job demands-resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Thus, lower pay for women leaders relative to their male counterparts can represent being denied resources that support success in their role. Relatedly, Welbourne, Brooke and Brooke’s (2019) recent review of role theory and job engagement pointed out the folly of expecting more from employees without increasing pay or other valued resources – it is associated with burnout and perceptions of injustice. Welbourne and colleagues concluded “Ultimately one outcome is clear from this review of the literature: When organizations have highly engaged employees who are provided adequate resources, they complete more work in the core job” (p. 186).

Taken together, we propose that if a woman leader is assigned to a store near a rival or is paid less than a man for doing the same job, she will reduce her work outputs (Adams, 1963, 1965; Colquitt, 2001), which would account for lower business performance. Specifically, role congruity theory explains why women are put in difficult work settings and paid less to begin with, while the job demands-resources model and distributive justice theory explain why these factors will create inequity and result in lower store-unit sales performance. Putting these frameworks together would predict the following mediating logic.

Hypothesis 3: Distance to a rival and compensation will each partially mediate the relationship between store leader gender and store performance. Specifically, women store leaders will show lower performance than men store leaders partially because (3a) women leaders manage stores in closer proximity (in mileage) to a competitive rival than men, and (3b) women are paid significantly less compensation than their male counterpart store leaders.

Next, we turn our attention to women's organizational tenure and the size of the store-unit led as conceptually meaningful moderators which may mitigate women's leadership disadvantages.

Moderators that Mitigate Women Leaders' Disadvantages

Per role congruity theory, Heilman (1983) describes that when there is a lack of fit, or congruence, between a person in a particular job and what others expect to see in that job, the person faces discrimination. However, when people become aware that a person's qualifications are a good match for the skills required in a particular job, then an assessment of being a good fit for the job is made, which raises people's opinions of that person and leads to expectations of job success. Multiple empirical studies provide evidence that even when an employee is incongruent with his/her role, when their qualifications are clear, bias against them diminishes (Heilman et

al., 2004; Heilman & Haynes, 2005; Koch et al., 2015; van Esch et al., 2018).

We propose that organizational tenure combined with being in a leadership position is one way for women to demonstrate clear qualifications and thus subvert the negative effects of perceived role incongruity. Although tenure does not guarantee one is an excellent performer, we argue that tenure is a stronger indicator of competence for leaders who are women, compared to men. For instance, because of double standards of competence (Foschi, 2000), the leadership path for women is more rigorous than men's, meaning fewer get through. This means that women who do reach leadership roles are often more qualified than their male counterparts who have faced fewer obstacles to arrive at the same position (Aguinis et al., 2018; Brieger, Francoeur, Welzel, & Ben-Amar, 2019). Indeed, research has shown that when women leaders excel they can obtain a leadership advantage, meaning they are rated higher than their male counterparts, if the women's credentials are impeccable (Rosette & Tost, 2010; cf. Dasgupta & Asgari, 2004). Triana et al. (2017) found that subordinates were most committed to organizations under the supervision of women leaders when those women had excellent credentials compared to those of their subordinates. The moment the women leaders' credentials seemed weak or were in doubt, subordinate identification with their group diminished as well as commitment to the organization. This implies that women's support from their own subordinates may be on shaky ground unless the women leaders have a solid foundation of knowledge and experience from which to draw. If women have long organizational tenure, that provides a credential which speaks to their knowledge of the organization and the value they have added to the organization, and gives them credibility because they earned a legitimate leadership position over time. This reasoning is consistent with human capital theory arguments which would predict that managers with longer tenure have more experience, skills, and human capital to draw upon, and women

leaders may need to draw from this experience if they face glass cliff dynamics in a male-dominated occupation.¹

In contrast, role congruity theory would predict that the leadership path for men is more lenient (less meritocratic) due to role congruence advantages and assumptions of fit (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly et al., 1992). More lenient standards will be applied to male leaders because they are role-congruent and accepted as the norm while female leaders are more likely to be scrutinized for a similar level of performance (Foschi, 2000; Lyness & Heilman, 2006). In fact, “the higher the status, the more convincing the demonstration of incompetence will have to be” in order for individuals holding such status to be evaluated as incompetent (Foschi, 2000, p. 25). Thus, we expect more men who are average in terms of talent or competence to reach leadership positions compared to their women counterparts who have had an uphill battle to reach leadership by comparison (Catalyst, 2020; Heilman, 2001). When organizational tenure is short for leaders, male leaders will likely benefit from the fact that their gender is congruent with leadership stereotypes (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly et al., 1992). As a result, men may get better compliance and effort from followers early on because they are given the benefit of the doubt. However, this early bump in performance via role congruity effects may only support relatively mediocre talent in the short term. The relationship between tenure and performance should be more evident among women store leaders compared to men store leaders. The following hypothesis is, therefore, posited.

Hypothesis 4: Accounting for distance to rival and compensation, women leaders with longer store unit tenure will show higher performance than women leaders with shorter store unit tenure. No tenure effect is expected among men store team leaders.

¹ We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this argument.

Finally, we propose that store size can also operate as a moderator to mitigate the disadvantages women face in leadership. Specifically, we predict that managing larger stores with more employees may play to women's strengths because research shows that women are more democratic and transformational leaders, on average, than men (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Competence as a democratic or transformational leader would seem to be of greater importance in larger stores (i.e., more employees) where there is a wide range of complex human capital to reconcile and leverage. In larger organizations, where many employee stakeholders are involved, the leader has a greater challenge to engage, inspire, and motivate a larger number of people (Avolio, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1995; McShane & Von Glinow, 2000). In such an environment, women's participative and democratic leadership style may allow a larger number of people to feel more engaged and included in the organization. Feeling included in a group setting has been demonstrated to lead to higher levels of participation and improved performance in groups (Pearce & Randel, 2004; Triana, Kirkman, & Wagstaff, 2012). Therefore, women's leadership styles may result in an advantage in larger stores with more employees where it is more difficult to engage each employee (Karau & Williams, 1993). Supporting this assertion, a meta-analysis conducted by Paustian-Underdahl et al. (2014) showed that women received higher ratings than men leaders on measures of leadership effectiveness rated by peers, supervisors, and subordinates.

Smaller stores do not require as much democratic or transformational leadership skill because they are structurally easier to manage, and it is more feasible to engage a smaller number of employees and make them feel appreciated even if the leader has a more autocratic and masculine style (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). In relatively small stores, product offerings are commensurately narrow and employees are fewer, thus an autocratic leader is better

able to monitor all relevant operational and performance issues and coordinate effectively with an autocratic style. However, women's more transformational and participative leadership is especially useful when there are more operational issues to contend with (e.g., larger variety of product offerings) and many employees that need to be engaged.

In other words, women's more transformational leadership style should scale better to larger stores with more employees who may not have as close a personal relationship with the store manager. If the manager is transformational, he/she can still inspire and motivate employees and benefit from employee input and proactive effort (Bass & Avolio, 1995). Moreover, to the extent that men have more autocratic leadership styles than women (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001), they may be seen as cold and impersonal in larger store settings where the employees have less opportunity to form a personal relationship with them. This type of leadership style would be less inspiring and motivating for employees (Bass & Avolio, 1995). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis 5: Accounting for distance to rival and compensation, (a) women leaders will show higher performance in larger, relative to smaller, stores, and (b) men leaders will show higher performance in smaller, relative to larger, stores.

The complete theoretical model is depicted in Figure 1.

 Insert Figure 1 about here

Method

Organizational and Industry Context

The setting of the present study is a large retail firm with more than 5,000 non-exempt employees across 205 retail store units. The initial number of stores in our sample was 223. However, due to missing data across stores, we ultimately received data for 207 stores led by 148 men and 59 women leaders. Of these stores, 205 provided a complete set of data for all variables of interest in our model when we use listwise deletion to run our statistical analyses. The host organization for the present study employed a “big box” model which was typical of many in the industry at the time of data collection. The retail stores distributed general merchandise and thus sold both brand-name and private-label apparel, electronics, food products, health and beauty products, housewares, jewelry, and lawn/garden supplies. The firm had retail store-units distributed across 19 states located in the Midwest and West regions. An important part of the parent retail firm strategy was to operate in markets too small (average population is 4,300) to support the largest big-box competitor (Walmart) and position only a single store in communities to assure that there was not any within-region competition among their own store-units. Thus, there was only one store-unit located in a specific town.

Although the organization enjoyed important competitive advantages including locations in favorable markets (i.e., remote, small), the strategic model was trending toward the end of its lifecycle from a retail standpoint. Bigger boxes (e.g., Target) were gaining traction in expanding their reach, and economy retailers such as Dollar Store, Family Dollar, and Dollar General were proliferating. The organization recognized in-store pharmacies as strong customer retention mechanisms and important differentiators in competition with economy retailers, finding success retaining customers who utilized their pharmacies. However, pharmacies such as Walgreens

were also quickly encroaching on the organization's markets and, outside the realm of providing prescription services, had (have) a similar model as our host organization. Leadership in the organization explained that walking into a pharmacy such as Walgreens was very much akin to the experience of walking into a host store location, absent "home goods" such as clothing. Thus, strategic and sustainable differentiation was rapidly growing more challenging. Online retailers were also applying competitive pressure. At the time of the present data, the organization was attempting to carry items that people want to see first before buying and thus were less likely for online purchase. However, the stores were beginning to find that people would come to look at a television or other device and then go home to order it online. The organization was behind on the digital marketing and transactions side of things. Taking these factors together, the retailing competitive environment for the host organization was fierce and effective store leadership imperative.

Each store leader was provided a sales plan based on their volume category, and they were evaluated on whether they met targets. Store leaders knew where they were ranked relative to other store leaders based on metrics such as sales, inventory levels, and shrink (i.e., theft) which are all objective measures. Independent of corporate strategy and resources (e.g., product mix, pricing, advertising), store presentation and employee performance were understood by leadership in our host organization to be key competitive (success) factors and squarely in the domain of (driven by) store leadership.

The retail store-units averaged 24 employees ranging from a minimum of 9 employees to a maximum of 53 employees. 29% of store leaders were women. Store employees were 70-77% women across store units, and the organization professed an internal recruitment (promote from within) approach. The retail store-unit data for the independent variable (store leader gender) and

dependent variable (sales productivity index) along with several control, moderator, and mediating variables were acquired directly from the firm's human resources and operations records. Human resource records included worker demographic information by store unit, such as date of hire (tenure), age, gender, and pay. Year to date quarterly sales productivity data were collected (as of March) to correspond with the store leader's demographic data. Town population was collected from the U.S. Census Bureau website (i.e., factfinder.census.gov).

Dependent Variable

The relevant *performance* measure, *sales productivity*, is a key performance metric for firms in the service industry as well as for firms with notable human capital costs (Mehra, 1996; Richard, 2000). *Sales productivity* reflects the first quarter and was calculated as the logarithm of total sales in thousands (year to date March) per employee (Huselid, 1995; Huselid, Jackson, & Schuler, 1997).

Independent Variable

Store leader gender was coded 0 if store leader was a man and 1 if store leader was a woman.

Other Variables

Several mediators and moderators were represented in our model. Miles to nearest competitor (i.e., *distance to rival*) as well as store leader pay (monthly), both continuous variables, were mediators in our framework. *Store leader tenure* (number of months) and *store-unit size* (number of employees) were moderators included in our measurement. Several control variables were included due to their known or likely association with sales productivity (Bono & McNamara, 2011; Richard, Stewart, McKay, & Sackett, 2017). *Store leader age* was a continuous measure used as a control to ensure that we were capturing store leader tenure as

opposed to age given their common correlation. Also, the community control was total *town population* for the town in which the retail store-unit is located, a factor that could impact sales levels (Mazze, 1972). We also sought to capture spending potential from the actual households in the community. The household data were reported in ten categories from (1) number of households making less than \$10,000, (2) \$10,000 to 14,999, (3) \$15,000 to 24,999, (4) \$25,000 to 34,999, (5) \$35,000 to 49,999, (6) \$50,000 to 74,999, (7) \$75,000 to 99,999, (8) \$100,000 to 149,000, (9) \$150,000 to 199,999, and (10) \$200,000 or more. Average household income was \$58,174.23 during this period (dqydj.com). We added categories 6 through 10 together and divided by total number of households to compute a variable “Percentage of Households with Income over \$50,000” and used this as a control in our models (calling it Household Income) to account for spending potential. Finally, we controlled for the store leader’s marital status with a dummy variable (0 = not married; 1 = married) which accounts for dual-career households and the possibility that there is additional income from a spouse.

Analytical Approach

Hierarchical regression analyses were utilized to test the mediation hypotheses in Table 2. The control variables were entered in step one to examine effects on each mediator (Model 1 and Model 3). The independent variable, store leader gender, was entered in step two to see if main effects exist on the mediators, distance to rival (Model 2) and store leader pay (Model 4), which is the first criteria to establish if mediation occurs (Baron, & Kenny, 1986). Finally, Model 5 shows productivity effects of store leader gender accounting for both mediating factors, a second criteria necessary to establish if mediation occurs (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Bootstrapped confidence intervals were used along with the index of the indirect effects of store leader gender on sales productivity through both mediators to determine if mediation effects

exist (Hayes, 2013, 2015). We also use hierarchical regression models to test for the interaction effects such that control variables were entered in step one to examine effects on the dependent measure (Model 1), the independent variable, was entered in step two (Model 2), moderators were entered in step three (Model 3), and the two interaction terms comprising a centered independent variable and moderator were entered in step four (Model 4) to test the moderation hypotheses (Cohen, 2008).

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations among all study measures are shown in Table 1a for the entire sample, Table 1b for female store leaders, and Table 1c for male store leaders. Tables 2 and 3 provide regression results.

 Insert Tables 1a, 1b, and 1c about here

We observe several interesting differences in the correlations when comparing Table 1b and Table 1c. Specifically, since our manuscript pertains to store leader gender, we examined the correlations for the subset of female store leaders ($N = 59$) and the subset of male store leaders ($N = 148$). We first wanted to see if our mediators (distance to rivals, store leader pay) were related to sales productivity in both subsets. Given the small sample size for female store leaders, we were not surprised that the correlation ($p = .065$) was not quite statistically significant at $p < .05$ compared to the larger male subsample ($p < .01$). Store leader pay had a strong correlation to store productivity in both subsamples. We also observed that both store leader tenure and store size were more highly correlated with sales productivity in the female subsample compared to the male subsample, which is consistent with our proposed hypotheses. Below we provide more fine-grained and robust hypothesis testing results.

Hypothesis 1 suggests that being a female store leader negatively relates to distance to rival. Model 2 in Table 2 shows that store leader gender explained significant additional variance in distance to rival ($\Delta R^2 = .025$, $p = .023$) and the main effects were significant ($b = -5.904$, $p = .023$), lending support for Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that women store leaders will receive less compensation than men store leaders. Model 4 in Table 2 reveals that store leader gender explained significant additional variance in store leader pay compared to Model 3 ($\Delta R^2 = .194$, $p < .001$), and the main effect was significant ($b = -356.522$, $p < .001$), lending support for Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 proposes that distance to rival (H3a) and store leader pay (H3b) will mediate the relationship between store leader gender and sales performance (i.e., sales productivity). Since Model 5 of Table 2 shows an effect of store leader gender on sales productivity and Model 6 shows an effect of the mediators accounting for store leader gender, we tested for mediation of both theorized mediators employing 10,000 bootstrap intervals based on the Hayes Process Macro 4 (2012). The standardized indirect effect of the mediator, distance to rivals, was $-.071$ with standard error (SE) $= .036$, and the 95% bootstrap confidence interval does not include zero and falls between $-.152$ (lower level of the confidence interval (LLCI)) and $-.009$ (upper level of the confidence interval (ULCI)). We also found support for store leader pay as a mediator (Effect $= -.417$; SE $= .087$; LLCI $= -.602$ and ULCI $= -.264$). Thus, H3a and H3b are supported, in accordance with our mediation predictions.

Table 3 shows the results related to the moderation hypotheses. First, all relevant control variables (store leader age, town population, percentage of households with income over \$50,000, store leader marital status) were entered in step one (Model 1). In Model 2 we added the independent variable, store leader gender. The moderating variables (store leader tenure and

store-unit size) were entered in step three (Model 3) and the interactions between store leader gender and the associated moderator testing the hypotheses were entered in step four (Model 4). Model 5 (store leader gender \times store leader tenure) and Model 6 (store leader gender \times store-unit size) show separate interaction effects. Hypothesis 4 predicted an interaction between store leader gender and store leader tenure on sales productivity. In Table 3, Model 5 including the store leader gender \times store leader tenure interaction explained significant additional variance in sales productivity over Model 3 ($\Delta R^2 = .013, p < .001$) and the interaction term was also significant in Model 5 ($b = .001, p < .05$). We plotted the interaction effect following Aiken and West (1991) at one standard deviation above and below the mean of the moderator variable. See Figure 2 for a plot of the interaction, which indicates partial support for Hypothesis 4. The positive tenure effect among women leaders is found. However, a negative tenure effect is shown among men such that less tenure is associated with higher levels of performance than more tenure, counter to our predicted null effect among men.

 Insert Tables 2 and 3 about here

 Insert Figure 2 about here

Hypothesis 5 predicted an interaction effect between store leader gender and store-unit size driving sales productivity. As suggested by Hypothesis 5, store leader gender significantly interacted with store size to predict sales productivity ($b = .015, p < .01$) in Model 6 of Table 3 and explained significant additional variance in sales productivity over Model 3 ($\Delta R^2 = .023, p < .001$), lending initial support for Hypothesis 5. Furthermore, the fully specified model, Model 4,

shows that both interactions together explain a 3.8% increase in R^2 compared to Model 3 (changed from .346 to .384). Specifically, smaller stores led by men did indeed outperform larger stores led by men. However, larger stores led by women did not perform significantly better than smaller stores led by women. Therefore, this provides partial support for our hypothesis. See Figure 3 for a plot of the interaction.

 Insert Figure 3 about here

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

This study provided an opportunity to examine dynamics related to women's leader ascendance and success in the context of men and women holding store leader positions in a single organizational context. The results present compelling evidence that women continue to experience discriminatory dynamics in leadership. Specifically, consistent with a glass cliff diagnosis (Cook & Glass, 2014), we see organizational leader selection processes favoring men with regard to placement into better positioned stores that are further away from a major competitor. Stores led by women were closer to a major competitor, suggesting the leadership opportunities made available to women were less conducive to success. In addition, consistent with prior findings, the distribution of resources in the form of compensation favored men. Women were generally paid less to take on these more onerous leadership situations. However, even under these conditions, women-led stores demonstrated favorable performance when those store leaders had longer store-unit tenure. These findings support the glass cliff effect (Cook & Glass, 2014) and double standards of competence theory (Foschi, 1996, 2000), because women are being held to a higher standard by being paid less and assigned to manage stores where it will

be more difficult to succeed. Moreover, the findings extend role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) which predicts that women will be disadvantaged in leadership roles because men are stereotypically associated with leadership while women are stereotypically associated with followership and supporting roles.

The present study contributes to our knowledge about ways of putting cracks in the glass ceiling. This is a very important human resources and ethical issue which has persisted over many decades (Morrison et al., 1987). Koch et al.'s (2015) meta-analysis described that women are disproportionately segregated into low-paying jobs and that women in male-dominated fields are more likely to experience gender bias. The present study applied role congruity theory to a male-dominated leadership context where women were 29% of store leaders. We identified that women were disadvantaged by leading stores closer to rivals and receiving lower pay than their male counterparts. However, we also found that controlling for these factors eliminated performance differences between men- and women-led stores. Therefore, if women are put on a level playing field to men by having comparable stores and equal pay, their stores' performances are just as high as those of their male counterparts. Moreover, substantial organizational tenure with the store was also positively associated with sales performance for women leaders. Therefore, we identify ways to chip the glass ceiling and contribute to the study of gender equality, because only by understanding when and why female leaders perform just as well (and possibly better) than their male counterparts can we begin to crack the glass ceiling (Catalyst, 2020; Maume, 2004).

The combination of role congruity theory and double standards of competence theory is uniquely well-suited to explain how women can be disadvantaged by being selected for leadership opportunities that placed them in difficult leadership situations compared to men. In

the Paustian-Underdahl et al. (2014) meta-analysis, when only more objective measures of other-rated leadership effectiveness were considered (i.e., from supervisors, peers, subordinates, and trained observers) women were evaluated as substantially better leaders than men. Our findings suggest that women leaders are in multiple binds because they are (a) less likely to be considered for a leadership opportunity, (b) more likely to be selected for difficult assignments that require non-conventional leadership, and (c) receive fewer resources in support (such as pay) than their male counterparts. Role congruity theory can be extended to account for these multiple binds in which women leaders paradoxically find themselves.

We extended glass cliff research with the application of the job demands-resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) to frame compensation as a valued resource that can support leader performance when facing challenging assignments. Our results shed light on the fact that assignment into difficult or challenging situations itself does not necessarily equate to setting a developing leader up to fail. Challenging assignments can be developmental for leaders when they are provided adequate resources in support of their learning, performance, and well-being. Under-resourcing some leaders by, for example, increasing their job demands with a challenging assignment, yet paying them disproportionately less than other leaders in similar conditions, renders a situation in which they are less likely to be able to maintain engagement and ward off negative effects of high job demands such as burnout (e.g., Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Schaufield, 2014). Only when we fully comprehend the context in which women leaders work and the reasons which limit their leadership selection, tenure, and success can we understand why senior leaders in the U.S. have traditionally been and still remain predominantly male (Catalyst, 2020).

Practical Implications

The results point to implications that are organization- and leader- focused. A human resource management implication of our results is that in some organizational and professional contexts, the glass cliff exists. Based on organizational practices, such as unfavorable assignments and lower pay, women are more likely to underperform in their leader roles and opportunities relative to similarly talented men. When women succeed, they have had to leap over a higher hurdle due to double standards for men and women leaders (Foschi, 1996, 2000). This process reinforces and perpetuates the under-representation of women in leadership positions (Catalyst, 2020). Direct detrimental consequences ensue for the career trajectories of women and for the maximization of human capital in organizations. Organizations suffer the loss of leader talent, as highly talented women are discouraged, derailed, and burdened with sub-optimal resources and performance while their male counterparts with equal and lesser talent are encouraged, provided supportive resources, and given positions of leadership, continuing their positive trajectory up the organizational hierarchy (Castilla, 2008; McKinsey & Company, 2020).

Our findings indicate that women with strong credentials in the form of a successful track record (i.e., long tenure) can overcome initial low expectations associated with gender role incongruence (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Due to discrimination against women leaders associated with gender role stereotyping (leadership as masculine/agentive), we suggest that longer tenure for women store leaders is a reliable indicator of merit (a positive track record). Longer exposure to a woman leader can eventually convince followers of the leader's competence (Dasgupta & Asgari, 2004). However, this process takes time and is in some ways left to chance as research also demonstrates that primacy effects can be enduring and contribute to expectancy

confirmation processes, such as selective perception, per role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau 2002). Contact theory research has found that negative impressions of different others established early in a relationship can persist and lead to worsening interpersonal/group relations over time (e.g., Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005; Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002). In a study of diverse team functioning among a sample of graduate student teams, Polzer, Milton, and Swann (2002) found that group member appraisals of one another during their first 10 minutes of interaction influenced group outcomes more than two months later. To improve the prospects for women promoted to leadership positions, organizations may make a specific effort to inform followers about the qualifications and talent of these leaders to establish favorable expectations among subordinates.

Tenure as store team leader showed a very different effect among men in this organization, contrary to our hypothesis. Consistent with role congruity, having limited (short) tenure was not a detriment for leaders who were men as they showed a pronounced performance advantage in the short term and then decline over the longer term. Our data do not allow us to directly test hypotheses related to men's apparent underperformance. However, the theory and dynamics put forth in this study suggest that we may be observing the effect of mediocre talent among men in leadership positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002). In fact, double standards of competence would predict that mediocre male leaders would be given the benefit of the doubt initially and their true capability may be seen over time (Foschi, 2000). The pattern of tenure results among men may indicate some correction in performance over time. If less talented men ascend to leadership positions as we argue, and if repeated exposure to a leader reveals a leader's true level of competence, we might expect a decline in performance or a relatively flat tenure

curve over time. Because of the think manager think male bias (Koenig et al., 2011), it is possible that men are promoted to leadership roles whether or not they are really ready for them.

Alternatively, our results are also consistent with the idea that men who show favorable performance early in their tenure as store leaders subsequently leave the organization (turnover) in order to advance their careers in another organization. As a result, the talent pool among longer tenured store leaders may be diminished. To the extent this is occurring in the present organization, it behooves senior leadership to consider the implications of allocating favorable leader assignments to talented men who then exit the firm while (a) less talented men are retained, and (b) equally talented women receive less favorable leader assignments (e.g., closer to a rival), increasing their likelihood of failure. This dynamic may be more detrimental to the organization than it initially appears, as leadership in our host organization attested to the fact that men leaders often took unsustainable approaches to enhance store performance metrics, such as understaffing. To the extent this was the case, not only may we be seeing talented men leaders exit the organization, but they are leaving behind stores that may be in worse circumstances with regard to staffing and employee morale, relative to when they arrived. Though our results control for marital status, which can impact women's mobility relative to men when it comes to dual-career balance, we recognize related dynamics can factor into the observed pattern of high performing men, but not women, leaving the organization earlier in their tenure. Recognition of this possibility warrants investigation by the organization as it could figure into reconsideration of the approach to compensation and promotion of store team leaders, including the re-allocation of resources such as pay and leader assignments.

Our application of the job demands-resources model identified pay as a potential mitigating factor in the severity of glass cliff dynamics. Offering equitable pay may provide

resources and support that neutralize other elements of an assignment that may be onerous by boosting engagement and motivation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Ryan et al., 2016). Our research into the potential for pay to operate as an important resource that can diminish or neutralize glass cliff phenomena raises the possibility that bringing women's pay into parity more generally may generate significant returns for organizations across industries in the form of enhanced engagement and thus effort toward one's work roles. For an organization such as our host for this study, the benefits of a raise in pay (to parity) for women who took on leadership positions, particularly in challenging stores, may have generated significant returns (store performance, leader emergence and development) by providing valued resources in support.

An important limitation is that our data do not account for how bonuses affected managerial actions². In the present study, we only had access to fixed salary data. However, store team leaders were eligible to receive an annual bonus determined by store performance relative to a financial scorecard, a calculation including revenue increase and expense control. Bonuses could be significant, up to 25% in pay in the largest stores. Supporting our theorizing based on leadership research that has found women tend toward collaborative/transformational leader approaches, relative to men, who have been found to be more autocratic leaders, organizational leadership in our host organization anecdotally witnessed gender differences with regard to approaches toward achieving the bonus. According to leadership, men tended to understaff their stores and work employees harder to minimize the staffing expense, a large expense item that made the financials look better and protected their bonus. In contrast, women were more likely to spend the entirety of their staffing dollars to support smoother and more agreeable store operations and climate, though the expense could diminish their bonus. Organizational

² We thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing this to our attention.

leadership relayed multiple occasions when they disciplined men store team leaders because they were unloading trucks themselves or taking on other tasks inappropriate for on-duty managers in order to save staffing dollars. Differences in leader styles across women and men leaders led to different behaviors and outcomes in this organization, some of them positive for women who otherwise appeared to be in difficult situations (i.e., close to a rival, lower pay).

This raises an additional mitigating factor for women leaders in our study, specifically, being placed in a situation conducive to one's leadership style. This might be considered a resource or form of support (Ryan et al., 2016) as a situation may not fit one leader's style (represent a cliff) while fitting another leader's style well (the cliff may not be as severe). Our study also has implications for male leaders. Specifically, in the present study, larger stores with more employees and a broader set of worker competencies added complexity to the environment. This complexity represents both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge lies in effective communication and finding common ground for motivating a large pool of employees. It appears that male leaders in this organization did not fare as well in such an environment. Men leaders seemed to less effectively leverage the complexity inherent in this situation, perhaps due to less exhibition of empathy and a directive or transactional leader approach (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001) that impedes contributions and commitment from a broader cross-section of employees (Triana et al., 2017).

Organizations committed to the development of women leaders may take more deliberate steps to level the leader development opportunities made available to men and women. In settings like retail, the research context for this study, organizations can rotate aspiring leaders (men and women) through the same or similar leader development opportunities, such as the same stores, or stores with the same number of employees and proximity to a major competitor.

This allows for a more valid and equitable evaluation of leader talent for both women and men. It is not in the interests of organizations to generate a high number of leaders managing mediocre stores, as is suggested by our results. The results also demonstrate that fully understanding performance variance among leaders in such a program also requires that participants are provided equivalent or equitable resources such as pay.

In organizational contexts such as those in the present study, aspiring women leaders may benefit from explicit recognition that they are accepting more challenging leader placements. Such explicit recognition can aid in properly calibrating their own performance expectations as well as in negotiations with management regarding the time spent in that position, resources such as compensation, and formal performance expectations. Taking on more onerous or challenging roles can increase the need for more effective management of stress and work-life balance (Nelson & Burke, 2000). Recognition of the scale and scope of the professional challenge may facilitate active steps to obtain technical/professional support and socio-emotional support as needed, enhancing the likelihood of a successful and positive leader experience.

In addition to the glass cliff dynamics tested in our hypotheses, our host organization faced a number of challenges that are familiar to other organizations in a variety of industries, such as disproportionate rates of promotion for men, relative to women, while espousing a promote from within leadership recruitment policy. At the time of data collection, the organization did not have a dedicated position focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion, such as a director of diversity or chief diversity officer. A well designed and empowered role of this type may be a promising route forward. Without intervention or change, we might expect to see a number of negative dynamics emerge in the organization's culture, including women in leadership choosing not to support other women. Findings from Ali et al., (2020) show that in

unfavorable situations, such as male dominated industries where gender role stereotypes are normative, senior women refrained from helping support other women's careers within their organizations, possibly to avoid highlighting their own gender identity.

We note that having a diversity officer does not guarantee progress for women; it just means that more attention will be paid to gender equity. According to research by Tatli et al. (2015), because diversity officers are often lower-level employees who report to a member of the executive suite, extra-organizational resources such as programs sponsored by the government, industry professional associations, non-profits, and major social movements can provide resources that promote gender equality. Therefore, managers in the retail industry, human resource managers, diversity officers, and others who wish to champion gender equality in organizations may benefit from using extra-organizational resources that legitimize their cause (Tatli et al., 2015). For example, organizations such as the Women in Retail Leadership Circle (WIRLC) provide mentoring, networking, and other professional development opportunities for members to help break the glass ceiling in the retail industry.

When considering women's leadership, some scholars have also suggested various approaches that women and organizations may take to facilitate success for women. For example, Athanapoulou et al. (2018) recommend a gynandrous (*gyne* = female, *andro* = male) leadership style, meaning that women may blend both feminine and masculine traits, with the feminine traits being the most prevalent, so that their styles are seen as socially acceptable but also decisive. Bilimoria et al. (2008) analyzed 19 National Science Foundation ADVANCE universities and concluded that there are both pipeline initiatives and climate initiatives that can facilitate the inclusion of women in traditionally masculine workplaces. Pipeline initiatives include: increasing the flow of women into predominantly male careers starting as early as

introductory programs in high school, improving recruitment and promotion of women (including training, networking, and mentoring), and advancing senior women into leadership development and leadership positions. Inclusion initiatives prosed are: improving awareness and practices of male colleagues, improving departmental climate, and increasing organizational awareness of the climate through events such as presentations, conferences, other training, and publicizing family-friendly policies (Bilimoria et al., 2008). It is also notable that Ali et al. (2015) examined a large sample of 198 Australian publicly listed organizations and found that non-management gender diversity is associated with higher productivity in organizations with many work-family programs. Also, management gender diversity was associated with lower financial performance in firms with few work-family programs (Ali et al., 2015). Therefore, it appears that a flexible climate which allows women to balance work-life demands facilitates women staying in the workforce and advancing.

Limitations and Future Research

While the organization serving as our sample engaged in what appear to be prevailing practices that discourage women from successfully ascending the leadership ladder, it is not known whether the organization had knowledge of these dynamics. While individual performance ratings for each store leader were not available to us, it would be ideal if future research had access to such information. That would allow us to see how regional leaders assess individual store leaders and whether they appear to consider the difficulty level of the various store leadership assignments in their ratings. Also, perceptual data from the store leaders themselves regarding the decision-making (selection, compensation) process would inform the results and suggest possible steps toward mitigating the prevailing dynamic. Perceptual data capturing store leaders' job satisfaction and/or organizational commitment might also further

untangle the relationship between store leader gender, store leader pay, and sales productivity. Specifically, one might expect some serial mediation where perceptual measures might mediate between store leader gender and our mediators (i.e., distance to rival, store leader pay) or between our mediators (i.e., distance to rival, store leader pay) and sales productivity. Similarly, the extent to which women in this organization understood that they were accepting more onerous leader opportunities or that they were systematically underpaid relative to men is unknown. Thus, whether this knowledge informed their decision-making and helped calibrate their expectations cannot be accounted for in the results. Perceptual data would be beneficial here as well allowing for the integration of store leaders' work and organization expectations.

However, even if a pay difference was not salient for any given store leader in our sample, it is reasonable to expect that when a leader was tasked with leading a challenging store (e.g., nearby competition, large staff), the leader considered how equitable the job was by considering inputs (i.e., effort and stress) relative to outputs (i.e., pay; Adams, 1963). Personal communication with our company contact revealed that information about proximity to a rival and store size relative to the organization's other retail stores was readily available to the leaders in the study sample to facilitate such comparisons. Moreover, people in the organization often compared salary band information.

Additional research is also needed to test the variables identified in the present study (i.e., proximity to competitor, store size, leader tenure) in different organizational and industry contexts. Understanding the variables that emerge across contexts as obstacles versus positive moderators of women's leadership experiences (e.g., education, type of development experience) will be instructive for practitioners and scholars to leverage support mechanisms and mitigate obstacles. The extent to which characteristics such as tenure and leader behaviors (e.g., being

participative, transformative) help women across contexts would support effective career development.

Another limitation of our study is that store data were collected in one cross-sectional study rather than longitudinally, which can be susceptible to common method bias. We note that our measures were all obtained from human resources and operations records and are objective in nature (e.g., store leader gender, store leader tenure, store leader compensation, number of employees at the time, store quarterly sales as of March) which reduces common method bias concerns (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Moreover, research shows that conceptually there is no reason to expect that common method variance would result in spurious interaction effects (Evans, 1985; Schmitt, 1994). While correlations can be inflated due to common method bias, this should not produce spurious interaction effects. Nevertheless, future research may conduct similar studies across multiple periods of time to see if results would be consistent with those presented in this study (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

Moving forward, we urge scholars to also consider gender in conjunction with race using an intersectional approach. Although our sample consisted of 98% Whites, we believe that women who are in the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) category might have unique experiences to that of White women (above and beyond that of White men) with important implications for understanding performance differences (Rosette, Koval, Ma, & Livingston, 2016; Rosette, Ponce de Leon, Koval, & Harrison, 2018). Scholarship may also consider how gender issues (driven by the Me Too Movement) and racial issues (highlighted by the Black Lives Matter and Stop Asian Hate Movements) may impact the interactions and practical concerns raised in the present study.

Extending this consideration of intersectionality, existing reviews of research into the

disadvantages experienced by lesbian employees (e.g., the “lavender ceiling”) indicate that the intersection between sexuality and gender is complex and difficult to predict, but often manifests in patterns of discrimination with significant career ramifications for lesbian employees (see Ozturk & Rumens, 2015; Ozturk & Tatli, 2018). Lesbian leaders can be stereotyped in ways that straight women may not. While some of these stereotypes can be highly constraining, we must also consider that not being heterosexual could offer advantages due to assumptions about non-heterosexual women. For example, the first female Prime Minister of Iceland, Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir, was also the first openly lesbian woman to be head of state (Bruckmüller & Branscombe's, 2010; Moody, 2009)³. Because traditional gender norms do not necessarily apply to lesbian women, this might give them certain advantages in leadership if other people stereotype them less (or at least differently) than heterosexual women in leadership roles. Given the trend toward organizations being more proactive in having employees present their gender pronouns, an examination of how these assumptions operate in male-dominated roles, such as leadership, points to potentially rich complexities and nuances in the operation of glass cliffs. We recommend that future research seek to understanding the roles of sexual orientation and gender identity as a clear way to extend our findings related to gender and leadership effects.

Conclusion

Taken together, the results present another case of good-news/bad-news with respect to research on gender and human capital resources. Empirical indicators of systematic discrimination in the path of women leaders are shown, as well as evidence of conditions that support women’s success in leadership positions. Solutions to the barriers enacted by biased assignment and compensation practices appear relatively straightforward (i.e., implement

³ We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for making these excellent suggestions.

internally equitable processes), while the challenge of negative expectations associated with women leaders due to incongruent gender (e.g., communal) and leader (e.g., agentic) role expectations appear more complex. Solutions to both rely upon an ability and a willingness to (a) recognize the nature of implicit and explicit biases that stifle women's ascent to leadership positions but remove obstacles for comparable men, and (b) adjust the mindset that enacts resistant behavior associated with those negative perceptions such that we more consistently calibrate decisions based on merit. The finding that some women take on challenging and unfavorable assignments (i.e., closer to major competitor, a large staff) at relatively low pay and yet still succeed provides some sense of optimism. These results imply that providing equal opportunity for both men and women to advance to store leadership positions can be good for business. We hope that optimism will grow as companies do more to increase women leader's equitable job assignments and compensation so that both men and women leaders can excel.

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Table 1a

Descriptive statistics, means, and standard correlations

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Store leader age	40.72	8.666	-								
2. Town population	4303.49	2306.097	.031	-							
3. Household income	.27	.07	-.063	.099	-						
4. Store leader marital ^a	.33	.47	-.260**	-.054	.104	-					
5. Store leader gender ^b	.29	.453	-.017	-.120	-.007	.138*	-				
6. Store leader tenure	117.55	90.074	.365**	.100	.094	-.131	-.137*	-			
7. Store-unit size	23.73	8.272	.021	.202**	.257**	-.116	-.218**	.231**	-		
8. Distance to rival	23.63	19.444	.067	-.049	-.075	-.023	-.165*	.196**	.195**	-	
9. Store leader pay ^c	1576.61	360.471	.283**	.201**	.156*	-.146*	-.476**	.595**	.644**	.301**	-
10. Sales productivity	3.03	.373	.124	.258**	.100	-.142*	-.253**	.346**	.306**	.329**	.522**

Note: $N = 205$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Correlations were run using listwise deletion.

^a Store leader marital coded 0 if not married and 1 if married ^b Store leader gender coded 0 if male and 1 if female. ^c Store leader pay is monthly.

Table 1b

Descriptive statistics, means, and standard correlations for Female Store Leaders Only

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Store leader age	40.490	8.297	-								
2. Town population	3875.66	1966.574	-.016	-							
3. Household income	.266	.072	-.063	.318*	-						
4. Store leader marital ^a	.370	.488	-.216	-.073	.262*	-					
5. Store leader tenure	98.03	87.266	.303*	.122	.156	-.139	-				
6. Store-unit size	20.980	8.490	-.168	.406**	.578**	.060	.139	-			
7. Distance to rival	18.593	13.107	-.114	-.105	.010	.129	-.052	.214	-		
8. Store leader pay ^b	1305.293	320.023	.011	.422**	.398**	.091	.474**	.717**	.160	-	
9. Sales productivity	3.256	.428	-.063	.361**	.348**	-.053	.408**	.479**	.242	.628**	-

Note: $N = 59$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Correlations were run using pairwise deletion to retain all data possible for the female subsample.

^a Store leader marital coded 0 if not married and 1 if married. ^b Store leader pay is monthly.

Table 1c

Descriptive statistics, means, and standard correlations for Male Store Leaders Only

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Store leader age	40.81	8.835	-								
2. Town population	4490.09	2416.864	.044	-							
3. Household income	.267	.071	-.063	.036	-						
4. Store leader marital ^a	.24	.426	-.281**	-.022	-.001	-					
5. Store leader tenure	125.33	90.284	.389**	.075	.070	-.105	-				
6. Store-unit size	24.99	7.997	.091	.083	.130	-.147	.236**	-			
7. Distance to rival	24.674	17.689	.114	-.105	-.185*	-.142	.244**	.124	-		
8. Store leader pay ^b	1684.773	316.795	.426**	.084	.084	-.176*	.661**	.592**	.289**	-	
9. Sales productivity	3.462	.325	.218**	.185*	-.038	-.205*	.288**	.113	.317**	.396**	-

Note: $N = 148$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Correlations were run using pairwise deletion to retain all data possible for the male subsample.

^a Store leader marital coded 0 if not married and 1 if married. ^b Store leader pay is monthly.

Table 2
Regression results

Variable	<i>DV: Distance to rival</i>		<i>DV: Store leader pay</i>		<i>DV: Sales Productivity</i>	<i>DV: Sales Productivity</i>
	Models					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Constant	31.137*** (7.686)	32.760*** (7.64)	828.238*** (155.391)	926.256*** (137.565)	3.088*** (.158)	2.550*** (.158)
Store leader age	.069 (.138)	.078 (.137)	10.827*** (2.797)	11.384*** (2.466)	.003 (.003)	-.002 (.003)
Town population	-.001 (.001)	-.001 (.001)	.027** (.010)	.019* (.009)	.000*** (.000)	.000*** (.000)
Household income	-28.655 (16.354)	-28.705 (16.185)	803.289* (330.650)	800** (291.450)	.420 (.338)	.204 (.310)
Store leader marital ^a	-3.082* (2.683)	-2.217 (2.682)	-69.725* (54.242)	-17.495 (48.295)	-.107 (.056)	-.090 (.050)
Store leader gender ^b		-5.904* (2.584)		-356.522*** (46.695)	-.158** (.054)	.020 (.054)
Distance to rival						.004** (.001)
Store leader pay ^c						.000*** (.000)
<i>R-squared</i>	.034	.059	.129	.323	.141	.335
<i>Residual SE</i>	16.565	268.753	334.907	87144.352	.117	.092
<i>F statistic</i>	1.769	2.489*	8.565***	20.560***	6.563***	14.214***

Note: $N = 205$; Values in parentheses are standard errors. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

^a Store leader marital coded 0 if not married and 1 if married. ^b Store leader gender coded 0 if male and 1 if female. ^c Store leader pay is monthly.

Table 3

Regression results

DV: Sales Productivity						
Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Constant	2.566*** (.152)	2.550*** (.158)	2.575*** (.172)	2.600*** (.171)	2.566*** (.170)	2.595*** (.156)
Store leader age	-.002 (.003)	-.002 (.003)	-.003 (.003)	-.002 (.003)	-.002 (.003)	-.002 (.003)
Town population	.000** (.000)	.000** (.000)	.000** (.000)	.000** (.000)	.000*** (.000)	.000*** (.000)
Household Income	.214 (.308)	.204 (.310)	.296 (.315)	.133 (.313)	.176 (.306)	.145 (.314)
Store leader marital ^a	-.088 (.049)	-.090 (.050)	-.099* (.050)	-.098* (.049)	-.083 (.049)	-.106* (.049)
Distance to rival	.004** (.001)	.004** (.001)	.004** (.001)	.005** (.001)	.005** (.001)	.004** (.001)
Store leader pay ^c	.000*** (.000)	.000*** (.000)	.001*** (.000)	.000*** (.000)	.000*** (.000)	.001*** (.000)
Store leader gender ^b		.020 (.054)	.032 (.056)	.063 (.056)	.034 (.055)	.054 (.054)
Store leader tenure			.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)	
Store-unit size			-.006 (.004)	-.005 (.004)		-.006 (.003)
Store leader gender × Store leader tenure				.001* (.001)	.001* (.001)	
Store leader gender × Store-unit size				.014* (.006)		.015** (.006)
R-squared	.334	.334	.346	.384	.328	.368
Residual SE	.303	.303	.302	.294	.299	.296
F statistic	16.632***	14.214***	11.507***	10.980***	12.096***	12.696***

Note: $N = 205$; Values in parentheses are standard errors. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

^a Store leader marital coded 0 if not married and 1 if married. ^b Store leader gender coded 0 if male and 1 if female. ^c Store leader pay is monthly.

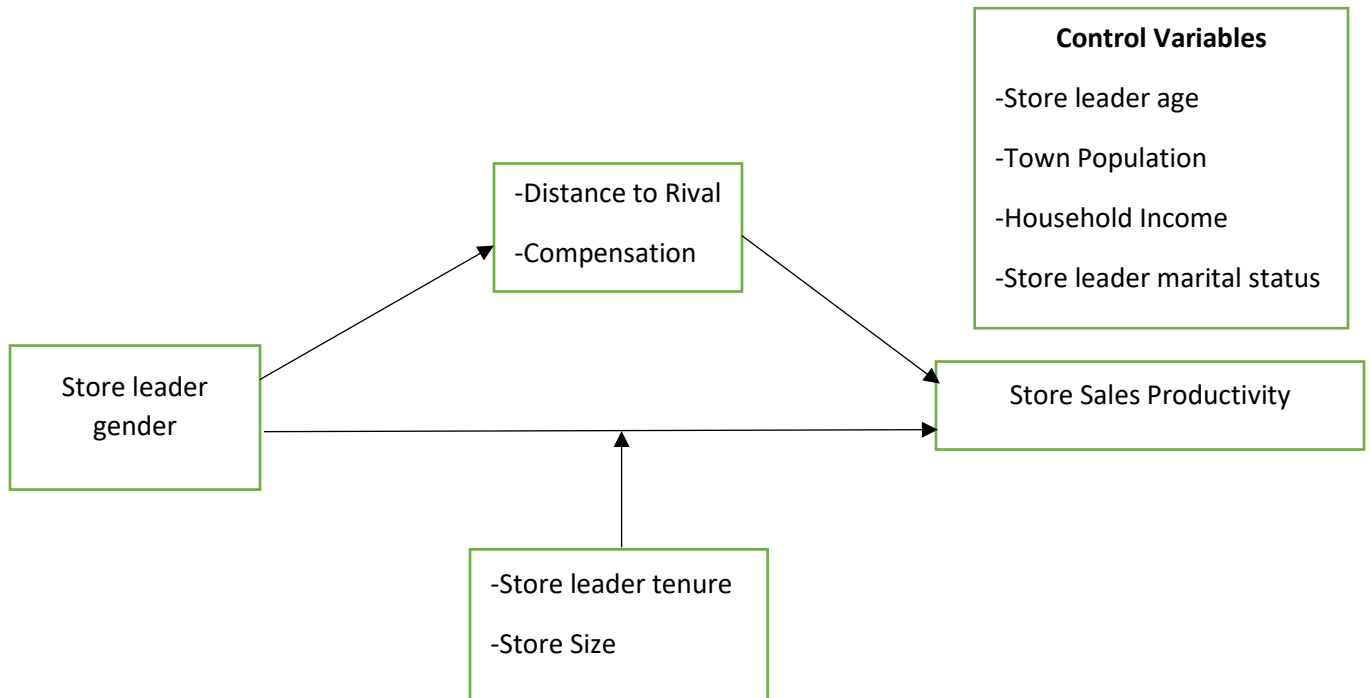


Figure 1. Theoretical model.



Figure 2. Moderating role of store-unit leader tenure on store-leader gender to productivity relationship.



Figure 3. Moderating role of store-unit size on store-leader gender to productivity relationship.