**Application Paper**

Alyssa Lopez

Department of Industrial-Organizational Psychology, Seattle Pacific University

ORG 7420: Social Psychology

Dr. Jorge Lumbreras

July 15, 2022

**Application Paper**

There are many theories within social psychology that are interesting and relevant today. My interests, however, mostly lie within the experiences of different genders in the workplace. Specifically, I am interested in women in leadership roles and the unique obstacles that they face as they navigate gender bias and discrimination. It is well-known and established by the literature that gender discrimination in the workplace is still rampant (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011). While there have been substantial strides to mitigate gender inequality, sexism continues to put women at a disadvantage in the workplace. As Cecchi-Dimeglio (2017) writes, even women’s performance reviews are negatively tainted by sexist notions in comparison to their male counterparts. These effects are exaggerated for women in leadership. Men have dominated the corporate world since its beginning, so much so that what is considered professional or appropriate at work is based off of white, cis-gendered, heterosexual males. Women are now present in the corporate workplace, but the impact of the stereotypical, discriminatory beliefs of those around them directly effects how much women themselves can succeed and thrive.

In addition to gender equity, executive coaching has become integral in the discussion around leadership development. Executive coaching improves skill development, stress reduction, and coachee behaviors and attitudes (Sonesh et al., 2015). Studies that have explored executive coaching specifically for women, such as that of Bonneywell (2017), have found that the development of women leaders is a unique area that coaching can certainly contribute to. For example, Bonneywell (2017) states that the women in their study struggled with low self-esteem, but after going through coaching, felt more empowered and confident in their identity as a woman *and* a leader. Coaching positively impacted the way they showed up in the workplace. Executive coaching of females in leadership is a space where women can recognize and work through the difficulties they face, difficulties stemming from gender discrimination as well as their own limiting beliefs.

Combining these two areas, I am interested in the impact that executive coaching could have on the relationship between gender discrimination and women leadership outcomes in the workplace. Research has explored the benefits of leadership coaching for women, but there seems to be a gap in the literature revolving around how coaching can help to abate gender biases in an organization. What kind of effect does executive coaching have on women leadership outcomes such as the number of women in leadership positions, the perception of these female leaders, and the treatment of them when gender discrimination is still so prevalent? Can coaching help to level the playing field? Executive coaching could be a tool that equips women to shed the unhelpful identities and beliefs that they’ve been socialized into. It could even be a tool that provides men a safe space to work through their internalized biases against their female leaders and coworkers. In other words, I am curious if executive coaching moderates the relationship between workplace gender biases and women leadership outcomes.

The objective of this research would be to gain insight into how coaching men and women could help to lessen the degree of gender discrimination against women leaders in the world of work. As long as gender biases live on in organizations, women will be kept from succeeding and thriving in their leadership roles. It is important to note that women of color are particularly susceptible to greater discrimination in the workplace. Thus, it is pivotal to look at women across the board in this research. Women of all races, ethnicities, (dis)abilities, and sexual orientations deserve to develop into the leaders they have the potential to be.

**References**

Bobbitt-Zeher, D. (2011). Gender discrimination at work: Connecting gender stereotypes,

institutional policies, and gender composition of workplace. *Gender & Society*, *25*(6), 764-786.

Bonneywell, S. (2017). How a coaching intervention supports the development of female leaders

in a global organisation. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring*, *15*.

Cecchi-Dimeglio, P. (2017). How gender bias corrupts performance reviews, and what to do

about it. *Harvard Business Review Digital Articles*, 2-5.

Sonesh, S. C., Coultas, C. W., Lacerenza, C. N., Marlow, S. L., Benishek, L. E., & Salas, E.

(2015). The power of coaching: A meta-analytic investigation. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, *8*(2), 73-95.