

# The Progress of Women as Leaders

**SUBMITTED BY:** Knowledge@Wharton Summer Educator

**SUBJECT(S):** Management

**GRADE LEVEL(S):** 11, 12

## ≡ OVERVIEW:

This lesson will encourage students to think about and explore the progress of women as leaders in a variety of spaces (e.g., business, government, law, education). Using gender as a category of diversity, students will also examine how culture (more specifically corporate culture) impacts women's opportunities for advancement.

## ≡ NBEA STANDARD(S):

- Management, IV. Personal Management Skills

## ≡ RELATED ARTICLES:

- [“The Conversation: Investing with a Gender Lens”](#)
- [“Scoring Equity at the Women’s World Cup”](#)
- [“Laying the Framework for a Successful Startup”](#)
- [“Is Bossy the Other “B” Word?”](#)
- [“Exploring the Business of Money with a Few ‘Girls Who Invest’”](#)
- [“Educator Toolkit: The Chief Executive Officer”](#)
- [“Digital Natives Are Poised to Solve World Problems – and Close the STEM Gender Gap”](#)
- [“Career Insight: Lean In’s Rachel Thomas on New Challenges for Women at Work”](#)
- [“Career Insight: Advice from New York Stock Exchange President Stacey Cunningham”](#)

- “Business in 3: Cell Phone Forensics, Smart Homes and Wage Bias”

**Common Core Standard(s):**

- CCR Standard for Reading Informational Text: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support the analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- CCR Standard for Reading Informational Text: Determine a central idea of a text and provide an objective summary of the text.
- CCR Standard for Reading Informational Text: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text.
- CCR Standard for Writing: Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**Objectives/Purposes:**

- Students will be able to define the meaning of corporate culture and its influence on individuals’ success in the workplace.
- Students will be able to describe gender bias, and think about ways to strategically combat it through the notion of role congruity.
- Students will be able to define the difference between gender and sex.
- Students will understand gender as an important construct of diversity and how to consciously combat the cultural nuances.
- Students will become knowledgeable about women’s status in the world of work.

**Knowledge@Wharton Article:** [“The ‘Masculine’ and ‘Feminine’ Sides of Leadership and Culture: Perception vs. Reality”](#)

**Other Resources/Materials:**

- Internet Access
- Projector

**Vocabulary Spotlight:**

- **Corporate Culture:** The ways of thinking, being, saying and doing that businesses and organizations value. These expectations are communicated explicitly through mechanisms such as mission statements and company handbooks, and implicitly through the ways in which rewards and negative consequences occur.
- **Gender:** Refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women (World Health Organization definition).
- **Sex:** Refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women (World Health Organization definition).
- **Role Congruity:** The expectation that a person will act a certain way based on his or her gender (from Knowledge@Wharton article).
- **Gender Bias:** Is the prejudice in action or treatment against a person on the basis of their sex (<http://www.legal-explanations.com/definitions/gender-bias.htm>).
- **Glass Ceiling:** An unseen, yet impenetrable barrier, that keeps women and minorities from rising to executive level management positions, regardless of their qualifications or achievements. (U.S. Department of Labor. (1995). Good for Business: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital: A Fact Finding Report of the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission.)

### Activities:

- 1) Begin by asking students to work in pairs to name as many leaders as they can think of within four minutes. Leaders may be dead or alive, in business, government, law or any other field. (Teachers, you can offer a small prize to encourage the students' attention on this task, but you should not reveal what you are looking for in the list — diversity representation. The point of the exercise is to see how many women and minorities make the list, as white males are overwhelmingly represented in corporate leadership as well as other areas. The mention of diverse leaders is indicative of progress).
- 2) Ask the students to share their lists. The teacher or a student can write the names on the board or on an overhead slide. (My students loved helping me in this way and it allowed me to focus on the discussion in the room.) (4 mins)
- 3) Have students collectively analyze the list they developed. What do they notice about the group of leaders selected by the class (e.g., more men than women, religious leaders, few historical women leaders, etc.)? (4 mins)

a. Depending on the type of list the students come up with, the discussion that follows will vary. The teacher will likely need to develop questions about the list's composition in the moment. Some questions that resulted from my experience pertained to the era which students drew from (i.e., contemporary vs. historical leaders), areas of representation (law, church, monarchies, business), racial and ethnic diversity representation.

4) After discussing the list generated, lead the discussion toward the role of women in leadership with the following question: How many of you have heard of gender bias or the glass ceiling? Invite students to share what they know about these terms already. If no one volunteers, provide definitions (found in the "Vocabulary Spotlight" section). Ask students if they believe these issues still affect women's leadership opportunities today — which is the focus of today's lesson. Why/Why not? Do they expect these issues to persist in their generation? Inform students that they will be examining the issues of women's leadership for the remainder of the class. (5 mins)

5) Have students read the Knowledge@Wharton article: "The 'Masculine' and 'Feminine' Sides of Leadership and Culture: Perception vs. Reality." Break up the article and have a brief discussion on the material presented in each of the major headings. (20 mins)

a. Introduction: (8 mins)

- i. Do you agree or disagree with how males and females have been characterized in the article?
- ii. Ask students if there is a difference between the terms sex and gender and have them try to describe it.
- iii. The author talks about gender as a "socially constructed" element. Spend a few minutes talking about how culture influences our perceptions of masculinity and femininity. Things to ponder: How did the colors pink and blue become so fixed in our culture as signifying girls and boys? Who made up this rule or did it come from nature? Ask the students to share the messages they have heard about being a "real" woman or a "real" man. Do any of these seem fake or arbitrary? What or whose purpose does it serve for us to assume these roles and identities? What would happen if we refused to buy into these characterizations or traits?

b. Role Congruity: (5 mins)

- i. What does the author mean by role congruity?
- ii. How does this issue affect a woman's career?

c. The Power of Culture: Mary Kay (7 mins)

- i. The article talks about corporate culture and the importance of being able to read and respond to the values embedded in an organization. Introduce the definition of corporate culture found in the vocabulary spotlight section. Have students think about their neighborhoods, places of worship, or other personal contexts in which there are specific ways of being, thinking and doing that determine one's survival, getting ahead, or enjoyment of life in those spaces. Have a few students share out these experiences as a way to demonstrate the concept of corporate culture. –OR–
- ii. Have the students describe an instance in their lives where they felt like an outsider. What limitations did they experience as a result of not being like everyone else? How did they adapt to the environment (or not)? What was the outcome?

**Tying It All Together:** Using the insights that they gained from reading and discussing gender as a cultural construct, have students write a short reflective essay about a way in which their gender currently works for or against them. Encourage students to focus on a specific issue of their own or perhaps an issue that affects someone close to them. (10-12 mins)

In the next class, students can share what they wrote in their reflective pieces with the class and discuss ways to improve these issues for their own generation.

**What Worked and What I Would Do Differently:** I used a seminar discussion approach in facilitating this lesson. Younger students were sometimes a little more reluctant to engage in discussions, but they loosened up as I kept assuring them that their opinions were valuable and usually on target. Furthermore, everyone was still getting to know one another, so I am sure that contributed to their reluctance to speak. The older students (seniors) tended to jump right into these discussions with little hesitation. I also found that students really grasped the concept of corporate culture well when drawing from their personal experiences of not fitting in. The students really enjoyed the competitive aspect of coming up with the names of as many leaders as possible, too. I provided snacks to everyone for their efforts on the following day; however, the winning team got to choose first what they wanted. This lesson also created an opportunity to expand students' understanding of the hiring and promotion process beyond the issue of hardcore "qualifications" such as grades and test scores — an issue that came up during a different and somewhat polarizing diversity session, to include subjective matters of culture.