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On Triple Bind Remedies in *Fair Shake* and Gender Bias Remedies in Psychological Science

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Introduction

Despite the federal regulations and judicial precedents that protect employees from gender discrimination, women continue to face challenges in the workforce. The winner-take-all (WTA) economy, in which institutional power and rewards are disproportionately reserved for those higher up the corporate ladder, has perpetuated these challenges. In *Fair Shake: Women and the Fight to Build a Just Economy* (hereafter referred to as *Fair Shake*), Naomi Cahn, June Carbone, and Nancy Levit propose a powerful tripartite framework called the "Triple Bind" to understand how the WTA economy has established an unspoken set of rules that disadvantage women in the workforce.[1] For decades now, social and organizational psychologists have studied the nature of gender stereotypes and prejudice and the ways in which these cognitive and motivational processes undermine and disadvantage women in workplaces and, more broadly, in the economy as depicted in *Fair Shake*.

In this Article, we suggest that the body of theory and research on gender stereotypes and prejudice complements our understanding of the social and organizational psychological dynamics associated with the "Triple Bind" framework. Gender stereotypes, for example, have two distinct properties: a descriptive belief about the *typical* characteristics of each gender and a prescriptive belief about the *expected* behaviors of each gender.[2] These stereotypes facilitate biased judgments at the individual and

[1]. NAOMI CAHN, JUNE CARBONE & NANCY LEVIT, FAIR SHAKE: WOMEN AND THE FIGHT TO BUILD A BETTER ECONOMY 14–16 (2024).

[2]. Madeline E. Heilman, Suzette Caleo & Francesca Manzi, *Women at Work: Pathways from Gender Stereotypes to Gender Bias and Discrimination*, 11 ANN. REV. ORG. PSYCH. & ORG. BEHAV. 165, 166–68 (2024).

interpersonal levels, and influence the perceptions and evaluations of women in work contexts such that stereotypically masculine traits are conflated with the attributes of successful workers.[3] In addition, as implied by the "Triple Bind" framework, women who exhibit stereotypically feminine traits such as warmth and collaboration are negatively evaluated for not meeting male gender-typed job requirements and are not granted the same options for career advancement as their male co-workers.[4] Thus, consistent with the first bind of the "Triple Bind" discussed in *Fair Shake*, these women are essentially punished for embodying descriptive stereotypes of women and for not adhering to the prescriptive expectations for masculine behavior required by the WTA economy.

Unfortunately, as the "Triple Bind" framework suggests, women who do not embody stereotypically feminine traits, but rather demonstrate counter-stereotypical behavior, still encounter challenges and obstacles to success in the workforce.[5] In contrast to research demonstrating that the presence of counter-stereotypical women would *reduce* gender stereotypes,[6] these women are subject to biased judgments for violating the normative expectations associated with female behavior. As such, these women and their work contributions are more likely to be harshly devalued for any transgressions than their male co-workers. Bringing to mind counter-stereotypical women who fit masculine defaults (such as women with stereotypically masculine characteristics and behaviors) can reinforce the importance of masculinity in majority-male fields by implying that these characteristics are necessary and

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3. *See* Sapna Cheryan & Hazel Markus, *Masculine Defaults: Identifying and Mitigating Hidden Cultural Biases*, 127 PSYCH. REV. 1022, 1025–26, 1029 (2020).

4. *See* CAHN ET AL., *supra* note 1, at 14–15.

5. *See id.* at 15.

6. *See, e.g.*, Eimear Finnegan, Jane Oakhill & Alan Garnham, *Counter-stereotypical Pictures as a Strategy for Overcoming Spontaneous Gender Stereotypes*, 6 FRONTIERS PSYCH., Aug. 2015, at 12–14 (finding that counter-stereotypical pictures were effective for overcoming gender stereotypes); Vidhi Chhaochharia, Mengqiao Du & Alexandra Niessen-Ruenzi, *Counter-stereotypical Female Role Models and Women's Occupational Choices*, 196 J. ECON. BEHAV. & ORG. 501, 507–516 (2022) (finding that counter-stereotypical female role models were associated with female labor supply and women's occupational choices); *cf.* Calvin K. Lai, Maddalena Marini, Steven A. Lehr, Carlo Cerruti, Jiyun-Elizabeth L. Shin, Jennifer A. Joy-Gaba, Arnold K. Ho, Bethany A. Teachman, Sean P. Wojcik, Spassena P. Koleva, Rebecca S. Frazier, Larisa Heiphetz, Eva E. Chen, Rhiannon N. Turner, Jonathan Haidt, Selin Kesebir, Carlee Beth Hawkins, Hillary S. Schaefer, Sandro Rubichi, Giuseppe Sartori, Christopher M. Dial, N. Sriram, Mahzarin R. Banaji & Brian A. Nosek, *Reducing Implicit Racial Preferences: I. A Comparative Investigation of 17 Interventions*, 143 J. EXPERIMENTAL PSYCH.: GEN. 1765, 1771–72 (2014) (describing counter-stereotypes on racial prejudice).

desirable for success.[7] Related research on the efficacy of diversity initiatives in organizations also has found that unintended effects, such as "backfire" effects, can result in increased discrimination against targeted groups.[8] In other words, consistent with the second bind of the "Triple Bind," counter-stereotypical women are essentially punished for contradicting prescriptive stereotypes of women, even if they embody the masculine attributes required by the WTA economy. And, as suggested by the third bind of the "Triple Bind," when women learn about the unspoken rules stacked against them and feel stymied by the numerous roadblocks that undermine their professional advancement, they opt out and remove themselves from the game.[9] The combination of these three binds establishes a corporate culture in which women struggle to attain equality with their male co-workers and, assuming that they have not already been pushed out, refuse to engage with such culture.

Most important to the focus of our Article, *Fair Shake* also proposes a three-step *remedy* to counteract the "Triple Bind" and minimize gender disparity in the workforce (see Figure 1). First, the overarching injustices of the WTA economy should be revealed to evoke a sense of public outrage.[10] Second, an explicit connection should be made with the WTA practices that not only enable gender discrimination but are also counterproductive to society.[11] Third, women should have the opportunity and the platform to voice their own experiences without being penalized by the WTA economy.[12]

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7. *See* Jennifer L. Berdahl, Marianne Cooper, Peter Glick, Robert W. Livingston & Joan C. Williams, *Work as a Masculinity Contest*, 74 J. Soc. Issues 422, 428 (2018) (discussing how counter-stereotypical women may affect the masculine contest culture in organizations); *e.g.,* Sapna Cheryan, John Oliver Siy, Marissa Vichayapai, Benjamin J. Drury & Saenam Kim, *Do Female and Male Role Models Who Embody STEM Stereotypes Hinder Women's Anticipated Success in STEM?*, 2 Soc. Psych. & Pers. Sci. 656, 661 (2011) (finding that non-stereotypical female role models in STEM did not improve women's belief in their potential success); Sapna Cheryan, Benjamin J. Drury & Marissa Vichayapai, *Enduring Influence of Stereotypical Computer Science Role Models on Women's Academic Achievement*, 37 Psych. Women Q. 72, 76–77 (2012) (finding that non-stereotypical female role models in computer science did not increase women's interest in the field).

8. *See* Lisa M. Leslie, Y. Lillian Kim & Emily R. Ye, *Diversity Initiatives: Intended and Unintended Effects*, 61 Current Op. Psych. 101942, Feb. 2025, at 3–4; Joseph A. Vitriol & Gordon B. Moskowitz, *Bias in Individuals and their Organizations: When does Increasing Awareness of Bias Translate into Egalitarian Motivations and Support for Anti-Bias Policies?* 55–58 (Feb. 12, 2025) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with authors).

9. Cahn et al., *supra* note 1, at 15.

10. *Id.* at 231.

11. *Id.* at 232–33.

12. *Id.* at 233.

In this brief Article, we suggest that the efficacy of this three-step solution in eliminating the "Triple Bind" and preserving gender equity hinges on a significant cultural change taking place: abolishing (or, at the very least, loosening the grip on women in) the WTA economy. Achieving change at this social structural level is certainly a significant and worthy goal, but there are many challenges to taming the excesses of the WTA economy. Notably, systemic reform in the private and public sectors will take a long time to accomplish, especially in the current political climate. A more modest approach with a slower growth curve to attaining such systemic reform, we suggest, is anchored in the science-based interventions that target gender (and other forms of) bias at the individual and interpersonal levels of analysis. These interventions, as we overview in the next sections, are informed by decades of theory and research in social and organizational psychology on gender bias. Most important, this body of work on remedies for gender bias has evolved from an almost exclusive focus of remedies at the individual level to remedies that take into consideration *both* the individual level of analysis ("hearts and minds") *and* the organizational level ("policies and practices") *and* their interaction.[13]

This trend toward a multi-level analysis of organizational discrimination, fueled by peer-reviewed systematic reviews and quantitative meta-analyses, in our view, represents the field's response to concerns that the past prioritization of individual-level remedies most likely meant *not* focusing on the systemic-level approach to remedying gender bias. An exclusive empirical focus on the efficacy of remedies at the individual level threatens an inattentiveness toward the organizational-level remedies to address the kinds of policies (as articulated in *Fair Shake*) that seek to bring about systemic change to the WTA economy.

I.   Individual-Level Remedies to Reduce Workplace Bias

Over the past several decades, the psychological research literature has predominantly explored interventions to remedy gender bias at the individual level. These interventions primarily focused on reducing biased beliefs and attitudes of individuals within hypothetical organizational contexts. However, such interventions often relied on experimental designs with limited generalizability to actual organizational contexts. The disconnect

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13. Nicole M. Stephens, Lauren A. Rivera & Sarah S.M. Townsend, *The Cycle of Workplace Bias and How to Interrupt It*, 40 Rsch. Org. Behav. 100137, 1–3 (2020).

between the abundant research on individual-level interventions and the focus of *Fair Shake* on systemic remedies is quite apparent.

Understandably, a significant portion of psychological science has focused on understanding the intra-individual mechanisms and processes that connect biased attitudes with discriminatory behaviors. For example, researchers have developed and experimentally tested influential theoretical frameworks of gender stereotyping and bias, such as the one developed by Madeline Heilman and her colleagues.[14] As seen in Figure 2, the mental activation of descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes leads to biased evaluations and judgments of women in work contexts, which in turn are hypothesized to be associated with gender discrimination.

As Elizabeth Levy Paluck and colleagues suggest, however, these interventions, predominantly tested in laboratory (vs. field) settings, are often characterized as "light touch" interventions that involve minimal time, money, and energy.[15] Though such interventions unjustifiably claim to produce both enduring attitudinal and behavioral changes, most of the studies, in fact, exclusively demonstrate attitudinal change. Others have replicated the findings that "light touch" or passive interventions are largely ineffective in changing behavior.[16] Moreover, the overwhelming majority of studies do not examine the persistence of the effects over time,[17] or whether and to what extent these effects translate to the organizational level.

II. Organizational-Level Remedies to Reduce Workplace Bias

In contrast to focusing on individual-level remedies within work contexts, organizational-level interventions address the codified, procedural, and systemic cues that enable biased attitudes and behaviors in the workforce. A recent systematic review by Theresa Treffers and colleagues, for example, offered four different categories of organizational-level interventions, each with varying

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14. Heilman et al., *supra* note 2, at 169–83

15. Elizabeth Levy Paluck, Roni Porat, Chelsey S. Clark & Donald P. Green, *Prejudice Reduction: Progress and Challenges*, 72 ANN. REV. PSYCH. 533, 549–50 (2021).

16. *See, e.g.*, Elaine Costa, *Examining the Effectiveness of Interventions to Reduce Discriminatory Behavior at Work: An Attitude Dimension Consistency Perspective*, 109 J. APPLIED PSYCH. 1669, 1681–83 (2024).

17. Katerina Bezrukova, Chester S. Spell, Jamie L. Perry & Karen A. Jehn, *A Meta-Analytical Integration of Over 40 Years of Research on Diversity Training Evaluation*, 142 PSYCH. BULL. 1227, 1242–43 (2016).

degrees of effectiveness by the organizational outcome and by the group affected by discrimination.[18] As summarized in Figure 3, *structural interventions* alter their communications and procedures to establish an environment of inclusivity. Treffers and colleagues reported that these interventions were found to be most effective at minimizing biases in hiring, pay, and promotional decisions, particularly among marginalized groups related to disability status, ethnicity, and sexual minorities (gender was not included in their review).[19] Also seen in Figure 3, *similarity-building interventions* were found to minimize the perceived differences between the majority and the marginalized groups, either by not disclosing one's minority status (if possible) or by ensuring equity amongst groups.[20] Overall, all four types of organizational interventions were effective but different types of interventions were effective for different minority groups.

Unlike the Treffers and colleagues' review that did not directly address gender bias, other researchers have specifically proposed strategies to reduce gender bias at the organizational level. Cheryan and Markus, for example, focus on identifying and modifying "masculine defaults" in organizational cultures.[21] These defaults reflect values that advantage men in organizations. Cheryan and Markus review a broad swath of research establishing the existence of masculine defaults and advocate for organizations to conduct company-specific needs assessments to consider whether and how to reduce or remove masculine defaults. As seen in Figure 4, the needs assessment that Cheryan and Markus propose involves three phases: identify masculine defaults on multiple levels of the culture, determine whether masculine defaults are essential, and evaluate the pros and cons of removing masculine defaults.[22]

Finally, as seen in Figure 5, other social and organizational researchers have proposed an array of strategies to reduce gender bias at the organizational level. Some research has focused on de-emphasizing WTA features and replacing them with more collaborative practices.[23] Others examine the role of organizational

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18. Theresa Treffers, Ann-Carolin Ritter, Nadja Born & Isabell Welpe, *A Systematic Review of Experimental Evidence on Interventions Against Bias and Discrimination in Organizations*, 34 HUM. RES. MGMT. REV. 101029, 4–8 (2024).

19. *Id.* at 10–11.

20. *Id.* at 11.

21. Cheryan & Markus, *supra* note 3, at 1024–25.

22. *Id.* at 1034–36.

23. *See, e.g.*, Sophie L. Kuchynka, Jennifer K. Bosson, Joseph A. Vandello & Curtis Puryear, *Zero-Sum Thinking and the Masculinity Contest: Perceived Intergroup Competition and Workplace Gender Bias*, 74 J. SOC. ISSUES 529, 545–47

leadership and the extent to which leaders play a crucial role in attenuating gender bias and recognizing characteristics beyond masculine defaults.[24] And other research suggests the efficacy of structured, merit-based, and data-driven practices to reduce gender bias in organizations.[25]

III. Multi-Level Remedies to Reduce Workplace Bias

Multi-level approaches to remedying gender bias in the workplace are exemplified by what Nicole M. Stephens and colleagues refer to as "bias cycle theory"—interventions designed to cut across individual (bias embedded in hearts and minds) and organizational levels (bias embedded in policies and practices).[26] As Cheryan and Markus suggested—and consistent with the "Triple Bind" framework developed in *Fair Shake*—gender bias never occurs at only one level of analysis.[27] As seen in Figure 6, workplace bias operates as a cycle requiring multi-level interventions that disrupt bias across individual, interpersonal, and organizational levels. Individual-level interventions aimed at "hearts and minds" (how individual organizational members think, feel, and behave) affect and are affected by how organizational members interact with each other (the interpersonal level of analysis) and how organizational-level policies and practices are used within an organization.[28] Stephens and colleagues review individual-level bias reduction efforts and sociology/management research on reducing bias at the organizational level. They suggest that some individual-level gender bias interventions are promising (e.g., using social norm information from the organizational culture to reduce

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(2018); Robin J. Ely & Michael Kimmel, *Thoughts on the Workplace as a Masculinity Contest*, 74 J. SOC. ISSUES 628, 632 (2018).

24. *See, e.g.*, Margaret M. Hopkins, Deborah Anne O'Neil, Diana Bilimoria & Alison Broadfoot, *Buried Treasure: Contradictions in the Perception and Reality of Women's Leadership*, 12 FRONTIERS PSYCH. 684705, 9–10 (2021); Ely & Kimmel, *supra* note 23, at 631–32; Crystal T. Clark & Jennifer L. Payne, *Gender Diversity in the Psychiatric Workforce: It's Still a (White) Man's World in Psychiatry*, 42 PSYCHIATRIC CLINIC N. AM. 271, 275–76.

25. *See, e.g.*, Leanne S. Son Hing, Nouran Sakr, Jessica B. Sorenson, Cailin S. Stamarski, Kiah Caniera & Caren Colaco, *Gender Inequalities in the Workplace: A Holistic Review of Organizational Processes and Practices*, 33 HUM. RES. MGMT. REV. 100968, 3–11 (2023).

26. Stephens et al., *supra* note 13, at 1–3.

27. Cheryan & Markus, *supra* note 3, at 1029–32; *see also* Vienne W. Lau, Veronica L. Scott, Meg A. Warren & Michelle C. Bligh, *Moving from Problems to Solutions: A Review of Gender Equality Interventions at Work Using an Ecological Systems Approach*, 44 J. ORG. BEHAV. 399, 401 (2023).

28. Stephens et al., *supra* note 13, at 1–3.

gender bias), but overall there is a dearth of studies testing such interventions in actual workplace settings. They also suggest that organizational-level interventions supported by published empirical data represent promising options for organizations to reduce gender bias at the organizational level (e.g., increasing transparency, increasing accountability, making job-related evaluations more systematic and structured). Relatedly, based on a quantitative meta-analysis of seventy studies that tested interventions to reduce discriminatory behavior at work, Elaine Costa found that so-called "light-touch" interventions were ineffective at reducing workplace discriminatory behaviors.[29] But, as seen in Figure 7, and consistent with the analysis offered by Stephens and colleagues, Costa reports stronger effect sizes for interventions that target work behaviors directly (rather targeting individual beliefs and attitudes) by the organization holding individuals accountable for biased behavior or changing social norms in organizations that reinforce biased behaviors.[30]

Conclusion

In this Article, we focus on *Fair Shake's* three-step remedy approach to counteracting the ways in which the "Triple Bind" disadvantages women in the WTA economy. We suggest a more modest, empirically-based approach to understanding and attaining systemic reform than that proposed in *Fair Shake*. While we most certainly endorse the kinds of changes to the WTA economy discussed in *Fair Shake* (e.g., capping the accumulation of power at the top, reforming management practices, investing in individuals, children, and communities, and strengthening the rule of law), our fundamental premise is that systemic reforms and individual-level interventions are profoundly intertwined.

In Parts I through III we provided a brief review of science-based interventions that target gender (and other forms of) bias at the individual, interpersonal, and organizational levels of analysis. We suggest that this body of theory and research from social and organizational psychology complements an understanding of the psychological and organizational dynamics associated with the "Triple Bind" framework. As discussed in Part III, for example, it makes good scientific sense for bias interventions to shift from a focus on changing interpersonal attitudes to changing intergroup behaviors (e.g., via social norm interventions) to impact gender (and

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29. Costa, *supra* note 16, at 1681–83.
30. *Id.* at 1681–883.

other forms of) bias in organizational contexts.[31] What we learn from individual, interpersonal, organizational-level, and multi-level interventions, in our view, should guide efforts to deploy multi-level interventions to achieve the kind of systemic reforms advocated in *Fair Shake*.

Figure 1. Steps to Escape the Triple Bind[32]

1. Make visible the injustices of the winner-take-all economy

- Enlist a sense of outrage at the abuses of the winner-take-all economy
- Publicity can be a powerful tool – the law usually lags behind social progress
- Mobilizing public outrage can lead to both short-term gains and long-term changes

2. Show the links between sex discrimination and winner-take-all practices that are counterproductive to society

- Alignment with unethical practices in companies and discrimination against women
- Corporations involved in corporate wrongdoing are also workplaces that are hostile to women
- Workplaces need to have a single set of standards that identify the most egregious abuses and hold everyone to the same degree of accountability

3. Empower women's voices

- Women are feeling emboldened to come forward because they have a sense that people will actually now believe them
- Companies are no longer willing to protect harassers
- However, such visibility can come with its own risks (e.g., Katz facing death threats)
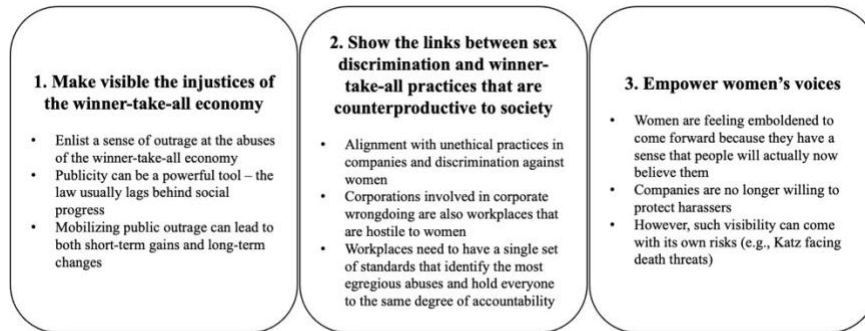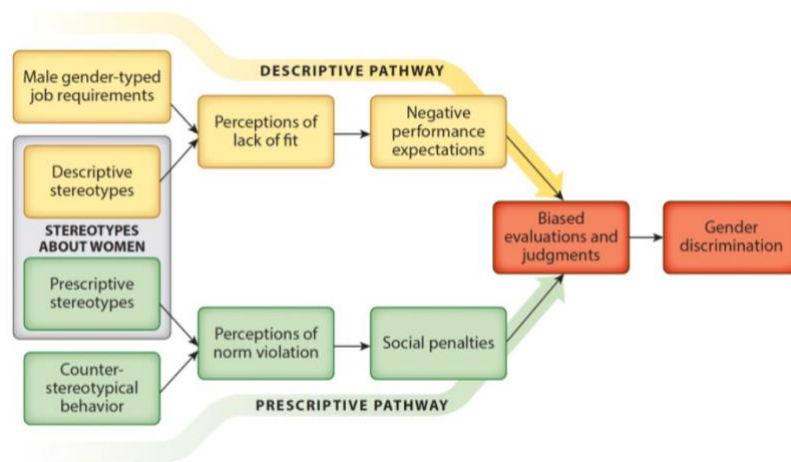
Figure 2. Pathways From Stereotypes About Women to Gender Bias and Discrimination[33]

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31. *See* Markus Brauer, *Stuck on Intergroup Attitudes: The Need to Shift Gears to Change Intergroup Behaviors*, 19 PERSPS. PSYCH. SCI. 280, 288–90 (2024).

32. *See* CAHN ET AL., *supra* note 1.

33. *See* Heilman et al., *supra* note 2.

Figure 3. Intervention Effectiveness Against (Other Than Gender) Bias and Discrimination in Organizations[34]

Structural Interventions

- Systematically structure communication documents, procedures, or interactions
- Effective for ethnic, disabled, and sexual minorities
- Mixed effects for age-related minorities

Similarity-Building Interventions

- Change information, behavior, or laws to create similarities between minority and majority groups
- Generally effective for disabled and age-related minorities
- Mixed effects for ethnic and sexual minorities

Informational Interventions

- Offer additional information about minorities, raise awareness about biases and stereotypes, or extend knowledge about institution's or majority's norms and values
- Effective for age-related minorities
- Generally effective for ethnic, disabled, and sexual minorities

Exposure Interventions

- Create experiences involving minority groups and their realities
- Generally effective for age-related, ethnic, and sexual minorities
- Mixed effects for disabled minorities

Figure 4. Steps for Reducing Masculine Defaults[35]

1. Identify masculine defaults on multiple levels of the culture

- At the ideas level, values that advantage men in organizations can pervade multiple cultural levels
- Code company materials (e.g., company mission statements, speeches by executives) for references to masculinity
- Once a culture has been identified as a masculine default, identify its manifestative at different levels of organizational cultures

2. Determine whether masculine defaults are essential

- Leaders could ask themselves whether they could change the masculine default and still have viable organizations
- Organizations could do a "dry run" without the practice
- Leaders could ask why the practice exists, what it predicts, and whether there is another way to do it that would not disadvantage women
- Determining what is essential should focus on business viability rather than how much people will like it or how difficult it would be to address

3. Removing masculine defaults and cultural balancing

- Nonessential masculine defaults can be dismantled and replaced with cultural features that do not disproportionately disadvantage women
- If masculine defaults cannot be dismantled, cultural balancing could occur by elevating feminine defaults
- Cultural balancing within an organization needs to be attentive to influences outside the organization and the broader field

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34. *See* Treffers et al., *supra* note 18.
35. *See* Cheryan & Markus, *supra* note 3.

Figure 5. Themes of Other Social Psychological Strategies to Reduce Organizational Gender Biases

Eliminate the contest by promoting a common goal

- Promote powerful "win-win" messages that highlight the ways men's and women's gains are intertwined (Kuchynka et al., 2018)
- Avoid practices/wordings that appear to benefit women at men's expense (Kuchynka et al., 2018)
- Leaders should reflect on how the norms and practices from the organization's culture undermine their vision (Ely & Kimmel, 2018)

Introspection of leaders and organizations

- Organizations should examine practices, procedures, and policies regularly to determine whether they reinforce gender stereotypes (Hopkins et al., 2021)
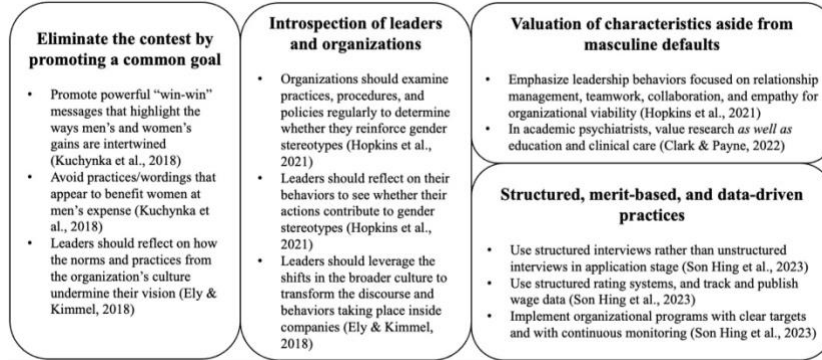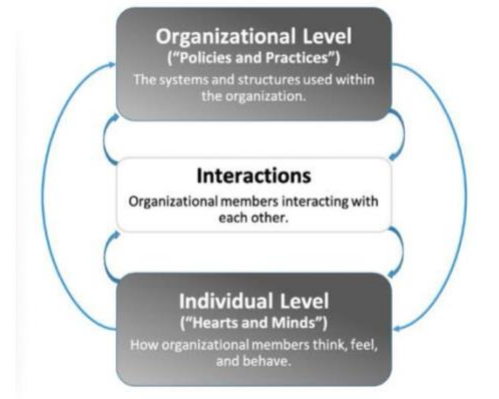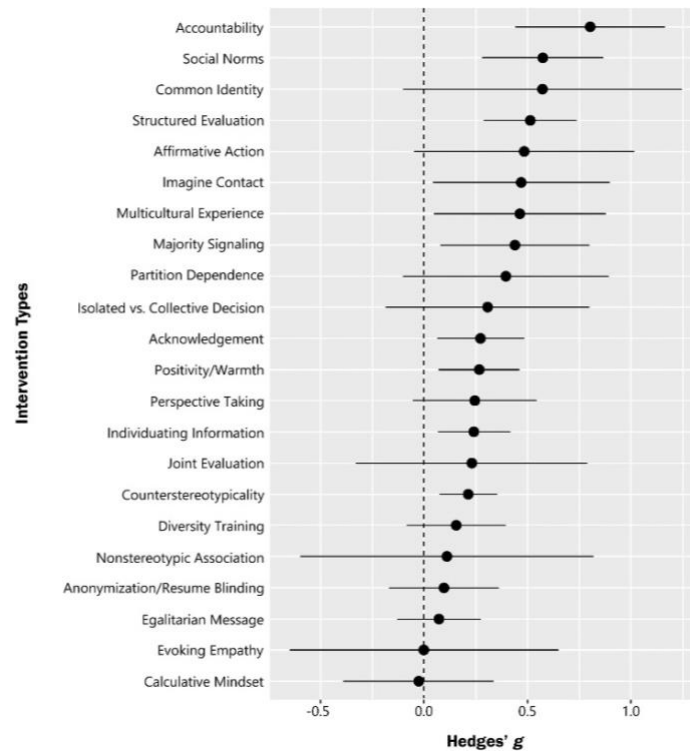- Leaders should reflect on their behaviors to see whether their actions contribute to gender stereotypes (Hopkins et al., 2021)
- Leaders should leverage the shifts in the broader culture to transform the discourse and behaviors taking place inside companies (Ely & Kimmel, 2018)

Valuation of characteristics aside from masculine defaults

- Emphasize leadership behaviors focused on relationship management, teamwork, collaboration, and empathy for organizational viability (Hopkins et al., 2021)
- In academic psychiatrists, value research *as well as* education and clinical care (Clark & Payne, 2022)

Structured, merit-based, and data-driven practices

- Use structured interviews rather than unstructured interviews in application stage (Son Hing et al., 2023)
- Use structured rating systems, and track and publish wage data (Son Hing et al., 2023)
- Implement organizational programs with clear targets and with continuous monitoring (Son Hing et al., 2023)

Figure 6. Cycle of Workplace Bias[36]

Organizational Level
("Policies and Practices")
The systems and structures used within the organization.

Interactions
Organizational members interacting with each other.

Individual Level
("Hearts and Minds")
How organizational members think, feel, and behave.

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36. *See* Stephens et al., *supra* note 13.

Figure 7. Effectiveness of Bias Reduction Interventions[37]