Think Crisis, Think Female: A Study of Women Leaders Perched on Glass Cliffs
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Q1. Pick a CEO
General Electric’s falling stock price and dismal outlook have prompted the Board of Directors to choose a new CEO among two equally strong candidates: Pamela and Mark. Who do you think they will choose?

Q2. Consider these Leaders (L to R)

Lynn Elsenhans, CEO, Sunoco (2008-2012)
Carly Fiorina, CEO, HP (1999-2005)
Carol Bartz, CEO, Yahoo! (2009-2011)

What Do They Have in Common?
- Were underpaid compared to male CEOs in their industries
- Were Rhodes Scholars in the 1980s
- Were appointed to risky leadership positions
- All of the above

Propositions:
1. Perceived empathy will predict whether a male or female leader is chosen in times of crisis if the choice is between same-sex leaders
2. Women will be preferentially selected for leader positions during intra-organizational crises while men will be selected during inter-organizational crises
3. Research question: When the crisis is extreme (i.e., barely having any chance of success or survival), what leader will be selected?

How To Test these Propositions
We will investigate biological (applicant’s sex), psychological (applicant’s perceived empathy), and situational (crisis of an intra- or interorganizational nature) contributors to glass cliffs. Using a vignette methodology (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014), we will ask participants to read scenarios describing a declining firm in which the crisis is either internal or external. Participants will then select the most qualified candidate. Unbeknownst to the participants, candidates will possess the same leadership qualifications.

Glass Cliffs
Any situation in which women, more so than men, are either promoted to executive roles in companies with declining performances or chosen to assume leadership positions in hard-to-win situations (Haslam & Ryan, 2005)

Some causes for glass cliffs
1. Hostile or benevolent sexism
2. In-group favoritism (e.g., old boys’ network)
3. High-risk leadership positions are some of the few opportunities for women
4. Strategic response by a company signalling change

What is empathy?
“...the capacity to (a) be affected by and share the emotional state of another, (b) assess the reasons for other’s state, and (c) identify with the other, adopting his or her perspective.” (de Waal, 2008)

Not All Crises are the Same
While some crises arise between organizations (inter-organizational crises; e.g., hostile take-overs), others stem from within organizations (intra-organizational crises; e.g., internal strife)

Why is this Important?
1. Reasons women are appointed to glass cliff is still under question
2. Understanding implicit theories about women will help us overcome biases against other managerial minority groups
3. Knowing the reasons behind the glass cliff - and controlling for them - will help protect women leaders from burnout