SAME MOUNTAIN, DIFFERENT CLIFF: EXAMINING THE EMERGENCE OF
APPOINTING MEMBERS OF MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES TO PRECARIOUS
MID-LEVEL LEADERSHIP ROLES

A Thesis in
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Abstract

The burgeoning research on the glass cliff phenomenon, characterized as the increased likelihood of minorities being appointed to precarious leadership positions, has focused primarily on top-level management. Yet, little research has examined the phenomenon emerging within leadership selection processes at the mid-level, potentially missing an opportunity to further our understanding of why underrepresentation of minority leaders persists throughout the upper echelons of management. Therefore, the goal of the current study was to expand the understanding of the glass cliff phenomenon through a set of hypotheses based on racial and gender stereotypes associated with managing crises and mid-level leadership roles. To gain a greater understanding of the leadership selection process involved in the glass cliff, a vignette study ($N = 1,494$) was conducted to examine differences in perceived leader suitability, derailment potential, and tenure potential. Overall, results elicited no support for the emergence of the glass cliff phenomenon at either the mid-level or executive level. Interestingly, analyses found that Black and Asian candidates were perceived as more suitable leaders and less likely to engage in derailing behaviors than White and Latinx candidates regardless of organizational performance or leadership level. Further, female candidates were predicted to engage in less derailment behaviors than males. Though the hypothesized models were unsupported, the present study found patterns of perceived leader suitability that align with current social movements (i.e., Black Lives Matter, Stop Asian Hate, Me Too), indicating that societal dynamics of race and gender indeed play a role in leadership selection processes.
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**Introduction**

Workplace diversity has become increasingly important over the past few decades. The percentage of White workers in the United States has consistently decreased since 1998, with further decreases expected within the coming decades (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Such an increase in workplace diversity has led to a greater demand for diversity and inclusion experts that can fulfill organizational diversity initiatives (Bolden-Barrett, 2018). Yet, despite the growing interest in leveraging workplace diversity, gender and racial/ethnic minorities continue to be underrepresented in managerial and professional roles. For instance, despite making up 51% of the population, women held only 40% of the managerial positions and 27.6% of chief executive positions in the US in 2019 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Further, Black and Latinx people make up 13.4% and 18.3% of the US population, respectively. Yet Black workers held 7.8% of managerial and only 4.1% of chief executive positions, while Latinx workers made up 10.7% of managerial and 6.2% of chief executive positions.

Of the few occupational minorities that ascend into executive leadership roles, many are appointed to positions that are accompanied with greater risk of failure (Cook & Glass, 2014; Elsaid & Ursel, 2018). A phenomenon known as the “glass cliff” suggests that women and racial/ethnic minorities have a greater likelihood of being appointed to precarious leadership positions compared to White males (Morgenroth et al., 2020; Ryan & Haslam, 2007). For example, examining CEO transitions among Fortune 500 companies, Cook and Glass (2013b) found that minorities were more likely to be promoted as CEO in organizations experiencing poor financial performance. Further, female and racial/ethnic minority candidates tend to be selected and perceived as more suitable for precarious leadership positions in experimental
studies (Morgenroth et al., 2020). Although evidence of the glass cliff exists, these effects may be understated. That is, if context is considered, more precarious placement may be likely. Specifically, the glass cliff may be more likely to emerge for mid-level management.

Such context is important as, when compared to similarly performing White males, gender and racial/ethnic minorities suffer greater promotional disparities at the mid-level than at the executive level (Yap & Konrad, 2010). Considering much of the glass cliff research has examined the role of stereotypes and prejudice in appointing minorities to precarious leadership positions, mid-level leadership is an important context to examine as certain communal traits that are stereotypically attributed to women and racial minorities are valued for both mid-level (Den Hartog et al., 1999; Eagly & Karau, 2002) and organizational crisis management (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Gündemir et al., 2019). Such desirable traits allow for a doubling effect in which female and racial/ethnic minorities may be perceived to be the best candidates and ultimately selected for precarious mid-level leadership positions in which success is harder to achieve. Therefore, not only is the glass cliff likely to emerge at the mid-level, but the likelihood may be even greater for middle management than for top management.

The emergence of the glass cliff at the mid-level can also have broader and harsher implications than at the executive level as opportunities for being appointed to a mid-level managerial position are more plentiful than for top management positions. Additionally, appointments to precarious leadership positions are reported to begin early in the career for many minority leaders (Glass & Cook, 2019). This is especially detrimental as women and racial/ethnic minorities tend to receive less organizational support (Cook & Glass, 2013b; McDonald et al., 2018) and face blame and social backlash for struggles that were already in place prior to their appointment (Cook & Glass, 2014), negatively impacting one’s career
trajectory. Not only may the glass cliff at middle levels of management stunt opportunities for minority leaders to reach the upper echelons of organizational hierarchies, but it may also limit the leadership opportunities for other aspiring minority leaders as White males tend to replace minority leaders after poor performance, a phenomenon termed the “savior effect” (Cook & Glass, 2013a, 2014). Therefore, the glass cliff can act as an invisible barrier for minority leaders striving to climb the corporate ladder as opposed to only being present once they reach top management, exemplifying the importance of examining the glass cliff at the mid-level.

In the current study, I seek to make four primary contributions. First, I aim to gain a deeper understanding for why minorities continue to be underrepresented in top management positions and the conditions in which the glass cliff phenomenon emerges. I propose that the effects of gender and racial/ethnic stereotypes increases the likelihood of minority leader appointments to precarious mid-level leadership positions, shifting the focus of the glass cliff literature from executive-level to mid-level management. Second, while much of the glass cliff literature has focused on gender differences in leadership appointment, the current study seeks to expand the gendered focus of the glass cliff literature (Morgenroth et al., 2020) by providing greater insight on the emergence of the glass cliff for racial/ethnic minorities. Third, by focusing on stereotypes desirable for precarious leadership positions, I also seek to extend the literature on role congruity theory by providing insight on perceived suitability for mid-level minority leaders through the context of organizational performance. To do so, I will examine the differences in perceived leader suitability, tenure potential, and derailment potential between minority and White male candidates for mid- and executive level leadership positions in a vignette study. Finally, by identifying the potential gender and racial/ethnic biases in suitability perceptions for precarious leadership positions, the current study can inform organizational practices that limits
bias in leadership selection and enhance the career progression and leadership experiences for minority leaders. In the next section, I present relevant literature on the emergence of the glass cliff, the experiences of occupational minority leaders that may contribute to the glass cliff emerging in a mid-level context, and the gender and racial/ethnic stereotypes desirable for managing precarious, mid-level leadership positions.

**Evidence of Glass Cliff**

The glass cliff literature suggests that women and racial/ethnic minorities tend to be appointed to leadership positions during times of crisis (Glass & Cook, 2019). Precarious leadership positions are characterized as having an increased risk of failure and criticism (Haslam & Ryan, 2008). Crises can be defined as an organization experiencing a scandal (e.g., data breach, ousting of CEO), declining profits and sales, organizational restructuring, or struggling industry or economy. For instance, Cook and Glass (2013b) found that a company’s decline on return on equity (ROE) led to more minorities being appointed as CEO than White males. When examining the Standard & Poor’s Corporation (S&P), Elsaid and Ursel (2018) found that female CEOs were appointed to positions that were both riskier and less profitable than those faced by male CEOs.

Some studies, however, have reported results inconsistent with the glass cliff phenomenon. For instance, within the S&P 1500, women were favored in terms of being appointed to CEO positions in which prior stock performance was steadily rising (Adams et al., 2009). Further, Cook and Glass (2014) found that among Fortune 500 companies, racial minorities were more likely than White executives to be promoted to firms that showed strong performance over a period of years. Such findings have been termed the “bold moves” hypothesis, which stipulates that larger institutional goals and expected shareholder reactions
may diminish biased selections and drive minority leadership appointment decisions in well performing organizations (Cook & Glass, 2014). Therefore, in an organization that is performing strongly, those selecting for a new leader may wish to signal that the organization is taking on a new direction by appointing a minority CEO (Cook & Glass, 2014; Lee & James, 2007). Conflicting findings between the glass cliff and bold moves hypotheses are reflective in Morgenroth and colleagues’ (2020) meta-analysis on archival glass cliff studies, which found that neither explanation emerged in the managerial domain.

In terms of experimental studies, occupational minority leaders have been perceived to be more suitable and receive higher selection ratings for precarious leadership situations (Morgenroth et al., 2020). It should be noted that racial/ethnic minority groups deemed masculine (i.e., Blacks; Galinsky et al., 2013) were just as likely to experience the glass cliff as women, suggesting that stereotypes associated with communal and agentic traits may not be the underlying driver of the glass cliff. Morgenroth et al (2020), instead, suggest that signaling change may be the reason for perceiving minorities as suitable candidates for precarious leadership positions. Yet, the abovementioned archival data found that the glass cliff emerged in predominantly female domains (i.e. educational, non-profit) but not in masculine domains (i.e. managerial, sports). Such a finding is contrary to the signaling change hypothesis as one would expect women to represent more of a change in masculine domains.

Given such contradictory findings, more research is needed to understand the underlying processes that influence the leadership decision making process that elicits the glass cliff to emerge. In this paper, I offer that examining the glass cliff in mid-level contexts can provide such clarity. For instance, in addressing if the glass cliff is a result of change signaling, decision makers selecting for mid-level leaders may not be concerned with managing stakeholder
impressions and avoiding public scrutiny in making their leadership selection decision, leading
one to expect the glass cliff not to emerge in the mid-level context. On the other hand,
stereotypes associated with mid-level leadership, when combined with gender and racial
stereotypes, may bolster the likelihood of the glass cliff emerging in middle management,
leading to stronger effects at the mid-level than at the executive level. Therefore, examining the
glass cliff in a mid-level context allows us to advance our understanding of how and why the
glass cliff emerges.

Precarious Leadership Roles Early in Career

Not only will examining the glass cliff in the mid-level help develop our understanding of
the mechanisms underlying the potentially biased leadership selection processes, but it may
provide a practical benefit in helping low and mid-level minority leaders as well. Despite
chances of one’s career trajectory being hindered, many occupational minorities seek and accept
precarious leadership roles early in their career. Some minorities are willing to accept risky
leadership positions in fear that they may not receive any other, or better, leadership
opportunities in the future (Collins, 1997; Ryan & Haslam, 2007). For instance, Darouei and
Pluut (2018) found that women with low self-efficacy are just as likely to accept both promising
and precarious leadership positions because, despite being able to identify the difference in
potential failure, they perceive a risky job as a promotional opportunity. This can produce
negative implications as self-efficacy is positively linked to in-role performance (Ingusci et al.,
2019; Judge & Bono, 2001). Therefore, accepting a precarious leadership position with low self-
efficacy can be detrimental to one’s chances of success and leadership advancement
opportunities.
Although minorities may be more likely to accept precarious leadership positions, some leaders may actively seek such risky roles. For many executive level minority leaders, being assigned to difficult leadership roles was part of a deliberate, long-term career strategy in overcoming being either hyper-scrutinized or presumed “invisible” in the workplace and achieving upward mobility (Glass & Cook, 2019). Though minorities are more likely to take on risky leadership roles starting early in their career as a method for career advancement, it is important to note that the reasons for taking such roles indicate a disparity in opportunities to climb the corporate ladder and exemplifies the importance of enhancing the leadership opportunities and experiences of occupational minorities in mid-level leadership positions. Taken together, these findings suggest that the glass cliff phenomenon is very likely to emerge among mid-level management and exemplifies the importance of its examination in a mid-level context to reduce said disparities.

**Mid-Level Leadership and Gender and Racial/Ethnic Stereotypes**

Because minorities are more likely to seek and accept precarious leadership positions, it is important to understand why those that select for leaders perceive minorities as more suitable candidates and offer such positions disproportionately to minority leaders. Much of the glass cliff literature has relied on role congruity theory, which posits that female leaders are generally subject to being perceived as less favorable leadership candidates than men due to the incongruity between the stereotypical female gender role and leadership role (Eagly & Karau, 2002). However, Eagly and Karau (2002) also proposed that female leaders would face lesser issues of congruency in a mid-level leadership context as traits desirable for mid-level management are also associated with female stereotypes. In support of this, one meta-analysis showed that women are indeed perceived to be more effective leaders than men at the mid-level
Research suggests that such preference for female leaders at the mid-level may be due to the effectiveness of communal traits among mid-level leadership as such positions tend to require greater relational skills and close interactions with subordinates (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Utilizing implicit leadership theories, Den Hartog and colleagues (1999) found that communal traits such as being attentive to subordinates, fostering cooperative effort, and team building are perceived to be more pivotal for a lower level, rather than top-level, manager. On the other hand, agentic traits such as being action oriented, courageous, and decisive tend to be associated with both male and successful top-level management (Den Hartog et al., 1999; Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Interestingly, no study has examined the preference for female leadership in a mid-level context while also considering prior performance of the team, department, or store that a leader is appointed to lead. When an organization is performing poorly, women are considered to be more suitable candidates than men (Haslam & Ryan, 2008). In fact, the phrase *think crisis- think female* (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010) indicates that stereotypically female characteristics, such as being emotionally aware of others and having a greater ability to handle risk (Ryan et al., 2011), are considered highly valuable in times of organizational crisis. When a leader is expected to take responsibility for poor organizational performance, manage workers through a crisis, or simply endure the crisis, people tend to believe women are best suited for such situations (Ryan et al., 2011). Therefore, one can expect female candidates to be seen as more suitable for precarious top-level leadership positions. Yet, when combined with traits deemed useful for mid-level leadership, there is reason to believe that an additive relationship between poor prior organizational performance and desirable mid-level leader traits may exist, making female candidates appear even more suitable for precarious mid-level leadership than for precarious top-
level leadership. Considering such gender stereotypes, and in line with the glass cliff phenomenon, I predict:

\[ H_{1a}: \text{In more stable leadership situations, female candidates will be perceived as less suitable than male candidates at the executive level.} \]

\[ H_{1b}: \text{In more stable leadership situations, female candidates will be perceived as more suitable than male candidates at the mid-level.} \]

\[ H_{2}: \text{In more precarious leadership situations, female candidates will be perceived as more suitable leaders than male candidates, and this effect will be more pronounced at the mid-level than the executive level.} \]

Research on the racial implications of the glass cliff is sparse. Yet, when examining leader prototypicality and racial stereotypes, there is reason to believe that the glass cliff may emerge for racial/ethnic minorities at the mid-level. Thus far, previous research has shown that racial/ethnic minorities are indeed affected by the glass cliff (Morgenroth et al., 2020). Because racial/ethnic minority groups that are associated with masculinity (i.e., Blacks) experience the glass cliff at similar rates as women, Morgenroth and colleagues (2020) claim that stereotypes play a marginal role in producing glass cliff effects. I, instead, argue that rather than focusing on stereotypes broadly, specific communal stereotypes that are shared among gender and racial minority groups may be activated in determining the suitability of a candidate for a precarious leadership position, thereby leading to potentially biased leadership selection processes. Such a premise can be tested through examining the emergence of the glass cliff at both mid- and executive levels of management.

When examining desirable executive level leadership traits, being White is associated with being a prototypical business leader (Rosette et al., 2008). At the mid-level, both White and
Asian leaders are associated with being prototypical successful managers, while Black and Hispanic leaders tend to have less congruence with such prototypical leadership (Chung-Herrera & Lankau, 2005). When examining specific leadership stereotypes, Black professionals tend to be viewed as less qualified, capable, and competent than White professionals (Cook & Glass, 2013b), Latinx people have been stereotyped as lacking intelligence, ambition, and achievement orientation (Chung-Herrera & Lankau, 2005; Landau, 1995) and Asian professionals are generally perceived to lack dominance, assertiveness, and extraversion (Gündemir et al., 2019).

In terms of leading an organization through crisis, though, such racial/ethnic minority groups are perceived to have traits desirable to help organizations navigate through their struggle. Black men are typically seen as warm and relational (Biernat et al., 2009; Cook & Glass, 2014) while Asians are seen as self-sacrificing, non-confrontational, and compliant (Chung-Herrera & Lankau, 2005; Gündemir et al., 2019). Though research regarding Latinx managers and stereotypes is lacking, findings by Chung-Herrera and Lankau (2005) suggest that there is reason to believe Latinx managers may also be perceived to have traits deemed valuable at the mid-level, including being more socially skilled and relationship oriented. Further, both Asian and Latinx managers are perceived to be more service oriented, while Black and Latinx managers are perceived to be modest. In strengthening the potential effect of stereotypes on perceived leader suitability, White leaders tend to be perceived as being less hospitable, less polite, less warm, and having a higher need for power, potentially reducing the perceived suitability of White candidates for precarious and mid-level leadership roles (Chung-Herrera & Lankau, 2005). With these racial stereotypes in mind, I predict:

\[ H_{3a}: \text{In more stable leadership situations, racial/ethnic minority candidates will be perceived as less suitable than White candidates at the executive level.} \]
In more stable leadership situations, Asian candidates will be seen as more suitable than White candidates at the mid-level.

In more stable leadership situations, Black and Latinx candidates will be perceived as less suitable than White candidates at the mid-level.

In more precarious leadership situations, Black, Latinx, and Asian candidates will be perceived as more suitable than White candidates, and this effect will be more pronounced at the mid-level than the executive level.

There has also been very little research examining the integration of intersectionality and the glass cliff literature. Intersectionality has been defined as “overlapping social categories, such as race and gender, that are relevant to a specified individual or group’s identity and create a unique experience that is separate and apart from its originating categories” (Rosette et al., 2018, p.3). Despite all the possible paths toward investigating intersectionality (e.g., sexuality, social class), the current study examined the dynamic relationship between gender and race. Intersectionality between gender and race is important considering that stereotypes of racial/ethnic groups tend to overlap more with stereotypes of the men within the racial group, and that general stereotypes of women tend to overlap more with those of White women, suggesting that women of color are ascribed unique stereotypes (Ghavami & Peplau, 2021). Therefore, the current study also examined the interaction of race and gender on the proposed leadership outcomes on an exploratory basis.

Black women are expected to be strong and dominant, but also are perceived to be incompetent. Such perceptions are linked to the matriarch subtype of the “strong Black woman” stereotype, which describes Black women as the strong, self-reliant head of the household (Rosette et al., 2018). Black women face a unique situation because they are generally ascribed
traits that are both communal and agentic. Considering stereotypes presuming incompetence, Black women may experience diminished perceptions of suitability for executive level leadership positions. Further, Black women are generally perceived as more agentic in nature rather than warm, concerned for others, or cooperative (Rosette et al., 2016), potentially impacting their perceived suitability for mid-level leadership positions as well. Therefore, it is expected that black women may face differential effects of the glass cliff compared to Black men and White women.

Asian women, on the other hand, are generally perceived as highly competent, yet submissive, passive, and lacking communality (Rosette et al., 2016). Like Asian men, Asian women are expected to be agentic in the form of competency, but not dominance, suggesting that they may be just as self-sacrificing, non-confrontational, and compliant (Chung-Herrera & Lankau, 2005; Gündemir et al., 2019). Therefore, Asian American women may be perceived as competent to lead, but only in struggling organizations and leadership roles that do not call for assertive or aggressive expectations (e.g., mid-level positions) due to their perceived lack of dominance, assertiveness, and extraversion (Gündemir et al., 2019). Compared to women, though, Asian women may be perceived as more uniquely qualified for leadership positions in general (Rosette et al., 2016). Therefore, I would expect similar patterns between Asian men and Asian women, but differential patterns between Asian women and White women.

There has been a striking lack of research on Latinx women (Rosette et al., 2018). Rosette and colleagues (2016; 2018) suggest that such a shortage of research may stem from Latinx populations being perceived as racially and phenotypically ambiguous. Regardless, the current study is interested in examining the interaction between gender and Latin heritage. Of the research that has examined stereotypes pertaining to Latinx women, they found that Latinx
women are perceived to be uneducated and incompetent, which overlaps more with Black women, but not White and Asian women (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013). Further, Latinx women are perceived to be submissive, yet emotional (Lopez, 2013), eliciting a unique dynamic not shared by any other race or gender combination. Considering the unique experiences of women of color, I propose the research question:

*RQ1: How do race and gender interact to influence leader selection outcomes for women of color, and do such influences differ at the mid-level compared to the executive level?*

**Tenure and Career Derailment Potential**

While one major negative aspect of the glass cliff is a prejudiced leadership selection process, there are many potential consequences for minority leaders after being appointed in a glass cliff scenario. For example, Cook and Glass (2014) suggested that minorities tend to be held responsible for failure that was already set in course prior to their appointment. The likelihood of failure is further exacerbated as minority leaders and their minority subordinates tend to receive less organizational support in the form of mentorship, task-related help, and recommendations for board seats (Cook & Glass, 2013b; McDonald et al., 2018). Such social backlash and lack of support can contribute to greater perceptions of career derailment and considerably shorter tenures among minority leaders compared to White men.

Leadership derailment occurs when leaders fail to fulfill their potential and, as a result, are terminated or experience a plateau in their career (Lombardo et al., 1988). While leadership derailment describes the action of failing in one’s current position, leadership derailment potential, which are perceptions of “warning signs” of derailment, speaks to potentially prejudiced hiring practices (Bono et al., 2017). Derailment potential is important to consider as increased perceptions of career derailment can lead to a withdrawal of mentorship and
sponsorship support, ultimately making career advancement even more difficult (Bono et al., 2017). Much of the literature on derailment potential has examined such potential after specific erroneous actions made by leaders. Though specific leadership behaviors are not included in the current study, the potential findings may shed light on the expectations of performance toward each candidate based on their gender and race/ethnicity and the stereotypes associated with them.

Therefore, consistent with the glass cliff hypotheses, I predict:

- **H$_{5a}$**: In more stable leadership situations, female candidates will be perceived as more likely to derail than male candidates at the executive level, but not at the mid-level.

- **H$_{5b}$**: In more stable leadership situations, Asian candidates will be perceived as more likely to derail than White candidates at the executive level, but not at the mid-level.

- **H$_{5c}$**: In more stable leadership situations, Black and Latinx candidates will be perceived as more likely to derail than White candidates at both executive and mid-levels.

- **H$_{6a}$**: In more precarious leadership situations, female candidates will be perceived as less likely to derail than male candidates, and this effect will be more pronounced at the mid-level than the executive level.

- **H$_{6b}$**: In more precarious leadership situations, racial/ethnic minority candidates will be perceived as less likely to derail than White candidates, and this effect will be more pronounced at the mid-level than the executive level.

Similar to findings regarding the emergence of the glass cliff, research on tenure effects as it relates to the glass cliff have also produced mixed results. One study found that female CEOs faced shorter tenures compared to males within Fortune 500 companies (Glass & Cook, 2016). Yet, similar to findings regarding the bold moves hypothesis, Elsaid and Ursel (2018) reported that female CEOs in the S&P 1000 were 40% less likely to lose their leadership role.
than males at any point in their tenure. Elsaid and Ursel (2018) suggested that such tenure effects may be an effort to avoid negative public and market sentiment. Compared to the CEO position, mid-level management is virtually invisible to the general public and, thereby, unsusceptible to public and market scrutiny. Though the current study will not be able to measure actual tenure allocated to each candidate, examining tenure potential may provide further evidence as to whether gender and racial/ethnic minorities are perceived as being capable of managing precarious leadership positions. Therefore, in line with the glass cliff hypotheses, I predict:

$H_7a$: In more stable leadership situations, female candidates will receive lower tenure potential ratings than male candidates at the executive-level, but not at the mid-level.

$H_7b$: In more stable leadership situations, Asian candidates will receive lower tenure potential ratings than White candidates at the executive-level, but not at the mid-level.

$H_7c$: In more stable leadership situations, Black and Latinx candidates will receive lower tenure ratings than White candidates at both executive and mid-levels.

$H_8a$: In more precarious leadership situations, female candidates will receive higher tenure potential ratings than male candidates and this effect will be more pronounced at the mid-level than the executive-level.

$H_8b$: In more precarious leadership situations, racial/ethnic minority candidates will receive higher tenure potential ratings than White candidates and this effect will be more pronounced at the mid-level than the executive.
**Method**

**Sample**

1,705 participants were recruited through Prolific.co and completed the study via Qualtrics.com. To increase external validity and build a stronger bridge between science and practice, the sample included participants that had hiring and/or managerial experience. All participants were United States residents. Participants were filtered out on a point system. Participants received a point for every attention check and manipulation check item that they answered correctly. Further, participants also received a point if the time they took to complete the study was between five minutes and two standard deviations from the mean ($M = 10.86, SD = 7.15; N = 143$). This means that participants were able to get a maximum of eight points. Participants that received six points or lower were filtered out of the study, whereas participants that received seven or eight points were retained. For example, a participant that incorrectly responded to one attention check item but correctly answered the other attention and manipulation check items correctly and completed the study in a timely manner was retained, whereas a participant that incorrectly responded to one attention check and one manipulation check item was filtered out. Therefore, data from 1,494 participants was utilized, well above the 1,235 participants required for an expected small effect size of .10 according to a power analysis conducted via G*Power. Fifty-four percent of the participants were men, 44.3% were women, and 1.5% were either non-binary, transgender, or preferred not to say. Participants were 76.8% Caucasian, 7.4% Black, 7.4% Asian, and 4.4% were of Latin descent. In terms of education, 7.8% of participants held an associate’s degree, 41.6% held a bachelor’s degree, 22.9% held a master’s degree, 5.6% held a doctoral degree, and 22.7% held a high school diploma or had some college experience.
Procedure and Design

Utilizing best practices suggested by Aguinis and Bradley (2014), the study used a between-subjects experimental vignette methodology with a 4 (candidate race: Asian, Black, Latinx, White) x 2 (candidate gender: male or female) x 2 (leadership level: mid-level or executive level) x 2 (organizational performance: precarious or safe) design, for a total of 32 study conditions.

To begin the study, participants provided their informed consent and were instructed that the purpose of the study was to examine what traits were more desirable for a certain leadership position depicted in a hypothetical scenario. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the thirty-two questionnaires corresponding to study conditions. Each participant was instructed to imagine they were a consultant assisting either a regional (mid-level) or national (executive level) grocery store chain select for either a vacant Risk Manager (mid-level) or Chief Financial Officer (CFO; executive level) leadership position. To reduce potential biasing effects based on industry and occupation, the grocery store industry as well as occupations of risk manager and CFO were chosen because they contain some of the most diverse representation across gender and racial groups according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019a, 2019b).

Participants read a brief job description of a vacant leadership position (see Figure 1 for example). To add fidelity to the study, the job descriptions differed slightly to reflect the difference in breadth and oversight the job requires. For instance, while the mid-level position required candidates to “analyze areas of potential risk to the assets or success for a specific region,” the executive level position required the same demand, but for the entire national organization rather than just one region. To increase realism and enhance external validity, differences in interpersonal responsibilities were emphasized in the mid-level job description as
mid-level leadership tends to require greater interpersonal skills (Eagly & Karau, 2002). For instance, in the mid-level description, the Risk Manager was expected to “train, direct, and oversee between 10-50 employees,” whereas the executive level CFO was expected to “appoint department managers as well as delegate responsibilities.” After reading the job descriptions, participants were exposed to a brief article describing the recent performance of the fictitious organization along with a chart showing the 5-year profit/loss trend (see Figure 2 for example).

Instructions: Please read the following job description for the vacant *Risk Manager* position:

- Analyze areas of potential risk to the assets or success for a specific region of the U.S.
- Review a region’s financial reports to identify places to cut costs and to improve financial performance, policies, and programs
- Recommend ways to control or reduce financial risk throughout a specific region of the U.S.
- Train, direct, and oversee between 10-50 employees in support of their growth and execution of day-to-day job responsibilities
- Report to Regional Vice President
- Pay is commensurate with industry salaries for mid-level managers

Figure 1. An example of the job description provided to participants. This example is for the mid-level condition.
Participants then examined a description and a photograph of one candidate for the vacated leadership position (see Figure 3 for example). Each candidate had business degrees from an ivy league MBA program and previous leadership experience at a retail drugstore. In terms of work-related credentials, candidates in the mid-level condition held a role as a financial analyst, whereas candidates in the executive level condition held a risk management specialist position. These positions were selected because they both fit among the career trajectory of Risk Manager and CFO, respectively (Chief Finance Officer: Overview, 2020). The candidates’ former job responsibilities differed by leadership level in accordance to the job overviews provided by zippia.com so the candidates were equally qualified for their respective vacant position (Chief Finance Officer: Overview, 2020; Risk Manager: Overview, 2020).
[Ms. Truong] earned [her] MBA from Columbia University. For the past 6 years, [Ms. Truong] has held a role as a [financial analyst] for a mid-sized national retail drugstore. [Her] responsibilities included [recommending and timing investments for the company based on analysis of corporate financial information, forecasting business and industry conditions, and presenting reports on general economic trends].

Figure 3: An example of the candidate profile. This is an example of an Asian, female, mid-level condition. Words in brackets are replaced to reflect condition race, gender, and leadership level condition.

All candidates were referred to by their surnames. Surnames were selected based on a database that provided popular surnames in the United States by race (Name Census: United States Demographic Data, 2021). After considering names that were similar in terms of letter and syllable count, the candidate names were as follows: Mr./Ms. Truong (Asian), Thompson (Black), Torres (Latinx), and Thomas (White).

Pilot testing using 190 undergraduate students enrolled in a psychology course in a large northeastern university was utilized to select photographs for the candidates to make sure the photos were as similar as possible and to minimize effects of perceived age and attractiveness. Analyses from the pilot study led to changes for the Latinx male and female candidates as 63% of participants were unable to correctly identify the race/ethnicity of the Latinx candidates. Further, the White male and Black female candidates were replaced due to participants perceiving them as older than the rest of the candidates. Due to time constraints, a second pilot
study was not conducted to confirm that the new photos increased the saliency of Latin heritage for the Latinx candidates or minimized any effects of attractiveness or age.

After being exposed to all the vignette manipulations, participants were asked to complete a series of questions regarding characteristics of the organization and perceptions about the candidate, including an open-ended question asking on what factors the participants based their decision and what they believed the purpose of the study was. Once participants completed the questionnaire pertaining to their perceptions of the candidate and leadership position, they completed a brief demographic survey, were debriefed, and were directed to a Prolific.co portal to complete the compensation process.

**Measures**

**Leader Prototypicality.** To measure the extent to which participants would recommend a candidate for the vacant leadership position and believe a given candidate is a prototypical leader, the General Leadership Impression scale (adapted from Cronshaw & Lord, 1987) was utilized. Participants indicated their agreement with four statements on a 5-point Likert type scale (1 = disagree strongly; 5 = agree strongly). Example items include “The candidate fits my image of what a leader should be,” and “I would recommend the candidate for the position” (α = .86).

**Derailment Potential.** To measure perceptions of derailment potential, participants indicated their agreement on five statements adapted from Braddy et al. (2014) on a 5-point Likert type scale (1 = disagree strongly; 5 = agree strongly). Sample items include “I believe this candidate will be emotionally volatile and unpredictable,” and “resist learning from mistakes.” Additionally, participants were also asked to indicate their agreement on a statement regarding the candidate’s potential to fail to live up to expectations on a 5-point Likert type scale (α = .87).
**Tenure Potential.** To measure perceptions of tenure potential, participants indicated how long they believed the candidate will remain in the leadership position on a 5-point Likert type scale (1 = <1-2 years; 5 = 8-10+ years). Further, participants indicated their agreement with statements regarding outcomes post appointment on a 5-point Likert type scale (1 = disagree strongly; 5 = agree strongly). Example items include “This candidate will be fired?” and “This candidate will retire.”

**Leader Competence.** To measure perceptions of leader competence as a supplement to perceived leader suitability, a modified version of the Perceived Leader Competence Scale (adapted from Yukl, 2007) was used on an exploratory basis. Participants indicated their agreement with 16 statements on a 5-point Likert type scale (1 = disagree strongly; 5 = agree strongly). This measure consisted of two of the three original subscales. Eight statements depicted task related competency, while the other eight statements depicted relational competency. Sample items include “Direct and coordinate work activities” (task; α = .88), and “Providing support and encouragement to someone with a difficult task” (relational; α = .92).

**Likeability.** The Likeability scale (adapted from Wayne & Ferris, 1990) was used to assess perceived likeability for the candidates on an exploratory basis. Participants indicated their agreement with four statements on a 5-point Likert type scale (1 = disagree strongly; 5 = agree strongly). Sample items include “Working with this person would be a pleasure” and “I think this person would make a good friend” (α = .92).

**Change Signaling.** To address the assertion by Morgenroth et al. (2020) regarding the underlying factor of the glass cliff and to measure perceptions of the organization’s intent to signal change, participants were asked to indicate their agreement on two statements adapted from Kulich et al. (2015) using a 5-point Likert style scale. Items include “Appointing this
candidate will show that the company wants to change the type of management,” and “Appointing this candidate will symbolize a visible change for consumers, partners, and competitors (α = .87).

**Visibility.** To further address the assertion by Morgenroth et al. (2020) and to measure perceptions of occupational visibility, participants indicated their agreement on three statements on a 5-point Likert type scale used to examine the perception of potential publicity around the occupation (1 = disagree strongly; 5 = agree strongly). Example items include “The candidate’s performance and actions will be publicly scrutinized,” and “The news of this hire will be publicized” (α = .72).
Results

Manipulation checks

Four ANOVAs were conducted to address the manipulation checks used to assess participants’ perceptions of the precariousness, or safeness, of the leadership position and recall of the hypothetical organization’s performance, vacant leadership position, and candidates’ gender and race. Participants in the precarious condition rated taking on the leadership position as significantly riskier ($M = 1.49, SD = .72$) than those in the growth condition ($M = 4.10, SD = 1.0$), $F(1, 1,492) = 2,540.11, p < .001$. Ninety-eight percent of participants in the mid-level condition were able to recall the vacant risk manager position they were selecting for, whereas 97.2% of those in the executive condition were able to recall the vacant CFO position they were selecting for. Ninety-nine percent of participants in the male condition were able to identify their candidate as male, whereas 98.5% of those in the female condition were able to identify their candidate as female. In terms of race, 99.5%, 97.4%, and 94.2% of participants in the White, Asian, and Black conditions were able to correctly identify their candidate’s race, respectively. Seventy-five percent of participants in the Latinx condition correctly reported their candidate’s race, which was significantly lower than all other conditions, $F(3, 1701) = 95.65, p < .001$. The fact that participants struggled to identify Latinx candidates more than the other races is consistent with Rosette and colleagues’ (2018) assertion that Latinx people as a subgroup experience phenotypic ambiguity.

Hypothesis Testing. Table 1 provides a correlation matrix for all the variables that were used to analyze the influence of gender, race/ethnicity, organizational performance, and leadership level on leadership selection outcomes. To test the hypotheses,
Table 1: Correlations between predictor variables and criterion variables

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<td>-.292**</td>
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<td>.194**</td>
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<td>.007</td>
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multiple 3-way ANOVAs were conducted with organizational performance, leadership level, and either candidate gender or race/ethnicity as independent variables and either perceptions of leader suitability, derailment potential, or tenure potential as the dependent variables. All independent variables were coded as follows: organizational performance (precarious = 0, successful = 1); leadership level (mid-level = 0 and executive level = 1) candidate gender (male = 0 and female = 1); candidate race/ethnicity (White = 0, Asian = 1, Black= 2, Latinx= 3).

Contrary to hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 2, which examined the difference in perceived suitability between female and male candidates, analyses showed no main effects for any of the independent variables (see Table 2). Female (M = 3.96) and male (M = 3.90) candidates were generally perceived as equally suitable for both precarious (M = 3.91) and stable (M = 3.96) leadership positions regardless of whether the participant was selecting for a mid-level (M = 3.93) or executive level (M = 3.93) position. Further, no significant three-way interaction between gender, leadership level, and organizational performance on perceived suitability was found, F(1, 1486) = .03, p = .86. Therefore, hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 2 were not supported.

### Table 2: ANOVA table predicting leader suitability from Gender, Leader Position, and Organizational performance.

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<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td>1.33</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td>.001</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.959</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
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<td>1.32</td>
<td>.250</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1.34</td>
<td>2.21</td>
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<td>.001</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1.74</td>
<td>.188</td>
<td>.001</td>
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In terms of hypotheses 3a, 3b, 3c, and 4, which examined the differences in perceived suitability ratings between Black, Latinx, Asian, and White candidates, though a main effect of race was found (see Table 3), the direction of the main effect was unexpected $F(3, 1,478) = 10.47, p < .001$. White ($M = 3.82$) and Latinx candidates ($M = 3.82$) were perceived as significantly less suitable than Asian ($M = 4.00, p = .005; p = .008$) and Black ($M = 4.07, p < .001; p < .001$) candidates regardless of organizational performance or leadership level (see Figure 4). In terms of the hypothesized model, there was no three way interaction, $F(3, 1,478) = 1.28, p = .28$, meaning that hypotheses 3 and 4 were not supported.

Table 3: ANOVA table predicting leader suitability from Race, Leader Position, and Organizational Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE</th>
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<tr>
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<td>.94</td>
<td>1.58</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.09</td>
<td>.151</td>
<td>.929</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>.279</td>
<td>.003</td>
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<td>Error Between</td>
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<td>1,476</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>1,493</td>
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For hypotheses 5a and 6a, which examined the differences in predicted leader derailment among male and female candidates, though there was a main effect of gender (see Table 4), the direction of the relationship was unexpected, $F(1, 1,486) = 22.55, p < .001$. Male candidates ($M = 2.12$) were predicted to derail at greater rates than female candidates ($M = 1.93$) (see Figure 5). In terms of the hypothesized model, no significant three-way interaction was found, $F(1, 1,486) = .37, p = .55$, indicating that hypotheses 5a and 6a were not supported.
Table 4: ANOVA table predicting Derailment Potential from Gender, Leader Position, and Organizational Performance

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<td>.20</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.545</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.54</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Error Between                | 797.75 | 1,486 | .54 |
Total                         | 811.62 | 1,493 |    |

Figure 5: Bar chart examining main effect of gender on derailment potential ratings. Error bars indicate 95% Confidence Intervals.
In terms of hypotheses 5b, 5c, and 6b, which examined the differences in derailment potential between White and racial/ethnic minority candidates, though there was a main effect of race on derailment (see Table 5), the direction of the relationships was unexpected $F(3, 1,478) = 20.06, p < .001$. White candidates ($M = 2.25$) were predicted to derail at significantly greater rates than Asian ($M = 1.90; p < .001$), Black ($M = 1.90; p < .001$), and Latinx candidates ($M = 2.04; p < .001$), regardless of leadership level or prior organizational performance. Further, though it was predicted that Black and Latinx candidates will be perceived similarly, Black candidates were predicted to derail at significantly lower rates than Latinx candidates ($p = .04$) (see Figure 6). Regarding the hypothesized models, there was no significant three-way interaction, $F(3, 1,478) = 1.57, p = .20$. Therefore, hypotheses 5b, 5c, and 6b were not supported.

Table 5: ANOVA table predicting Derailment Potential from Race, Leader Position, and Organizational performance.

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<td>.02</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.989</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org Performance*Race</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>.183</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position<em>Org Performance</em>Race</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>.195</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error Between</td>
<td>775.412</td>
<td>1,478</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>811.618</td>
<td>1,493</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For hypotheses 7a and 8a, which examined the differences in predicted tenure length between female and male candidates, analyses found no main effect of gender or leadership level (see Table 6). Yet, there was a main effect of organizational performance such that candidates in the stable condition ($M = 3.13$) were expected to experience significantly longer tenure than candidates in the precarious condition ($M = 2.78$), $F(1, 1,485) = 48.76, p < .001$ (see Figure 7). Contrary to hypotheses 7a and 8a, though, results showed no significant three-way interaction, $F(1, 1,485) = 2.06, p = .15$. 

Figure 6: Bar chart examining main effect of race on derailment potential ratings. Error bars indicate 95% Confidence Intervals.
Table 6: ANOVA table predicting Tenure Length Potential from Gender, Leader Position, and Organizational performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>PRE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>48.70</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.96</td>
<td>7.42</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.917</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Position</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.145</td>
<td>.704</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org Performance</td>
<td>45.74</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>45.74</td>
<td>48.76</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender*Position</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.375</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender*Org</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.734</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org*Position</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.601</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender<em>Position</em>Org Performance</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>.152</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error Between</td>
<td>1393.02</td>
<td>1,485</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1441.71</td>
<td>1,492</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7: Bar chart examining main effect of organizational performance on tenure length potential ratings. Error bars indicate 95% Confidence Intervals.
Finally, for hypotheses 7b, 7c, and 8b, which examined the differences in predicted tenure length between White and racial/ethnic minority candidates, multiple main effects were found (see Table 7). A main effect for organizational performance showed that candidates in the stable condition ($M = 3.13$) were expected to experience significantly longer tenure than candidates in the precarious condition ($M = 2.77$), $F(1, 1,477) = 50.52, p < .001$. Interestingly, though there was a main effect of race, there were no significant differences among the different races, $F(3, 1,477) = 2.75, p = .04$. Though no significant two-way interactions were reported, a significant three-way interaction was found such that for precarious mid-level positions, Asian candidates ($M = 2.96$) were predicted to have a significantly longer tenure than White candidates ($M = 2.58$), $F(3, 1,477) = 2.78, p = .04$, thereby providing very marginal support for hypothesis 8b (see Figure 8).

Table 7: ANOVA table predicting Tenure Length Potential from Race, Leader Position, and Organizational performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>PRE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>68.30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Position</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.731</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org Performance</td>
<td>46.97</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>46.97</td>
<td>50.52</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>7.68</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position*Org performance</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.556</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position*Race</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.460</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org Performance*Race</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>.158</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position<em>Org Performance</em>Race</td>
<td>7.75</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error Between</td>
<td>13,73.41</td>
<td>1,477</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,441.71</td>
<td>1,492</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exploratory Analyses. While multiple main effects of race were found, it is important to consider how race and gender may intersect to influence leadership selection processes. To address my research question regarding the differences in predicted leader outcomes among women of color, multiple four-way ANOVAs were conducted with organizational performance, leadership level, and candidate race and gender as independent variables, with a particular focus on interactions involving race and gender. In terms of leader suitability, there was no significant four-way interaction, $F(3, 1,462) = .43, p = .73$, nor was there a two-way interaction between race and gender on perceived suitability, $F(3, 1,462) = 1.73, p = .16$. Similarly, in terms of tenure length, there was no two-way interaction between gender and race, $F(3, 1,461) = .65, p = .58$, nor was there a 4-way interaction, $F(3, 1,461) = .76, p = .52$, suggesting that the intersection between gender and race did not influence perceptions regarding a candidate’s leadership suitability or tenure potential.

Figure 8: Bar chart examining the three-way interaction between race, leadership level, and organizational performance on tenure length potential. Error bars indicate 95% Confidence Intervals.
In terms of derailment potential, while no four-way interaction was found, $F(3, 1,462) = .22, p = .88$, there was a significant two-way interaction between gender and race, $F(3, 1,462) = 4.04, p < .01$ (see Figure 9). When examining differences within race, White female candidates ($M = 2.07$) had significantly lower derailment potential scores than white male candidates ($M = 2.44; p < .001$). The derailment potential score for the Latinx female candidate ($M = 1.91$) was also significantly lower than the Latinx male candidate ($M = 2.16; p = .001$). Such results suggest that White and Latinx women were predicted to be less likely to engage in behaviors that will undermine their success as a leader compared to men of the same race. When examining differences within gender, the white female candidate was predicted to derail at significantly greater rates than Black ($M = 1.87; p = .04$) and Asian ($M = 1.87; p = .03$) female candidates, similar to the derailment findings among male candidates. Unlike male candidates, in which the Latinx male was perceived to engage in less derailment behaviors than the white male candidate, but more so than black and Asian male candidates, expectations for the Latinx female candidate did not differ from any of the female candidates.
Other important leadership selection variables were included in the analyses. Considering the assertion that the emergence of the glass cliff may be due to an organization’s signaling change and publicity surrounding the leadership position (Morgenroth et al., 2020), two four-way ANOVAs were conducted with the same independent variables as the exploratory analyses on intersectionality and with change signaling and visibility as the dependent variables. In terms of visibility, executive level ($M = 3.93$) leadership positions were perceived as being significantly more accessible to public scrutiny than mid-level leadership positions ($M = 3.55$), $F(1, 1,462) = 37.92$, $p < .001$, and precarious leadership scenarios ($M = 3.87$) were perceived as more visible than stable leadership scenarios ($M = 3.61$), $F(1, 1,462) = 78.15$, $p < .001$. There were no differences in perceived visibility based on race or gender.

In terms of the candidate being perceived as a symbolization of change, female candidates ($M = 3.66$) were perceived to be a greater indicator of change than male candidates.
Further, a two-way interaction between gender and organizational performance was found, such that female candidates in the stable condition ($M = 3.46$) were perceived as greater indicators of change than male candidates ($M = 3.11$), but not for precarious leadership positions, $F(1, 1,462) = 11.88, p = .001$ (see Figure 10). There was also a two-way interaction between gender and leadership level, such that female candidates for executive level positions ($M = 3.78$) were perceived to be a greater indicator of organizational change than executive level male candidates ($M = 3.45$), but no difference was found at the mid-level, $F(1, 1,462) = 10.92, p = .02$ (see Figure 11). Finally, white candidates ($M = 3.36$) were perceived as significantly worse indicators of organizational change than Asian ($M = 3.66; p < .001$), Black ($M = 3.69; p < .001$), and Latinx candidates ($M = 3.57; p = .02$), $F(3, 1,462) = 9.85, p < .001$. Considering that change signaling depends on both race and gender, a simple ANCOVA analysis would not be sophisticated enough to examine the true effects of change signaling on perceived leader suitability. Due to time constraints, the required complex analyses were not conducted. Therefore, future research should examine the influence of candidate age and attractiveness on leadership selection outcomes.
Figure 10: Bar chart examining the two-way interaction between gender and organizational performance on change signaling scores. Error bars indicate 95% Confidence Intervals.
Perceived leader task and relational competencies were also examined in the current study. Main effects of race and gender were found for perceived leader competence such that female candidates ($M = 4.16$) were perceived as more task-competent than male candidates ($M = 4.07$), $F(1, 1,462) = 8.62, p = .003$, and Black candidates ($M = 4.19$) were perceived as more task-competent than White ($M = 4.05; p = .003$) and Latinx ($M = 4.07; p = .006$) candidates, $F(3, 1,462) = 4.8, p = .003$. Similar effects were found for relational competence, such that female candidates ($M = 3.90$) were perceived as having more relational skills than male candidates ($M = 3.72$), $F(1, 1,462) = 24.18, p < .001$, and Black candidates ($M = 3.94$) were perceived as having more relational skills than White ($M = 3.68; p < .001$) and Latinx ($M = 3.81; p = .03$) candidates, $F(3, 1,462) = 8.78, p < .001$.

Perceived likeability was also examined on an exploratory basis. Main effects of race and gender were found such that female candidates ($M = 3.73$) were perceived as more likable than male candidates ($M = 3.55$), $F(1, 1,462) = 22.22, p < .001$. Further, Black candidates ($M = 3.83$) were perceived as significantly more likeable than White ($M = 3.42$), Asian ($M = 3.69$), and Latinx candidates ($M = 3.62$), whereas white candidates were perceived as less likeable than Asian and Latinx candidates, $F(3, 1,462) = 21.12, p < .001$.

Another set of exploratory analyses examined the extent to which participants predicted their respective candidate would be to retire, move to another organization, or be fired or promoted as an extension of tenure potential ratings. For the likelihood of candidates being fired, main effects of gender and race were found, such that female candidates ($M = 1.82$) were perceived as significantly less likely to be fired than male candidates ($M = 1.92$), $F(1, 1,460) = 4.29, p = .04$, and Asian candidates ($M = 1.78$) were perceived as significantly less likely to be
fired than White male candidates ($M = 1.96$), $F(3, 1,460) = 4.17, p = .01$. Further, a three-way interaction was found between race, gender, and organizational performance such that in precarious leadership positions, black female candidates ($M = 1.73$) were perceived as significantly less likely to be fired than black male candidates ($M = 2.10; p = .005$) and white female candidates ($M = 2.13; p = .01$), $F(3, 1,460) = 3.27, p = .02$ (see Figure 12).

For predictions regarding leadership success through promotion, main effects of gender and race were found. Female candidates ($M = 3.57$) were perceived as more likely to be promoted than male candidates ($M = 3.41$), $F(1, 1,460) = 11.58, p < .001$. Further, Black ($M = 3.63$) and Asian candidates ($M = 3.61$) were perceived as significantly more likely to be promoted than White ($M = 3.36, p = .001; p = .006$) and Latinx candidates ($M = 3.37, p = .001; p = .001$), $F(3, 1,460) = 9.36, p < .001$.  

![Figure 12: Bar chart examining the three-way interaction between gender, race, and organizational performance on expectations of a candidate being fired. Error bars indicate 95% Confidence Intervals.](image-url)
In terms of predictions for candidates retiring, a two-way interaction was found between race and gender, $F(3, 1,460) = 16.53, p < .001$ (see Figure 13). Within race, the white male candidate ($M = 2.60$) was perceived as more likely to retire than the white female candidate ($M = 2.03; p < .001$), the Latinx male candidate ($M = 3.05$) was perceived being more likely to retire than the Latinx female candidate ($M = 2.31; p < .001$), and the black female candidate ($M = 2.47$) was perceived as more likely to retire than the black male candidate ($M = 2.14; p = .005$). Within gender, the Latinx male candidate was perceived as being more likely to retire than Asian ($M = 2.46; p < .001$), Black ($p < .001$) and White ($p < .001$) male candidates, whereas the Black male candidate was perceived as being less likely to retire than Asian ($p = .04$) and White ($p < .001$) male candidates. Among the female candidates, the White female candidate was perceived as being less likely to retire than Asian ($M = 2.37; p = .02$) and Black ($p < .001$) female candidates.

![Figure 13: Bar chart examining the two-way interaction between gender and race on expectations of a candidate retiring. Error bars indicate 95% Confidence Intervals.](image)
Another set of variables of interest were candidate age and attractiveness. Though an attempt was made to control for perceived age and attractiveness by running a pilot study, differences and effects of candidate age and attractiveness were much greater than anticipated. Bivariate correlations showed that candidate attractiveness was significantly linked to leader suitability \( (r = .27) \), derailment potential \( (r = -.23) \), and tenure length \( (r = .13) \). Candidate age, on the other hand, was only linked to derailment potential \( (r = .06) \). Further, after running ANOVAs with race and gender as independent variables, results showed that candidate age, \( F(3, 1,483) = 79.22, p < .001 \), and candidate attractiveness, \( F(3, 1,472) = 14.77, p < .001 \), depend on both race and gender, suggesting that simple ANCOVA analyses would not be sophisticated enough to examine the true effects of candidate age or attractiveness on any of the hypothesized models. Therefore, future research should examine the influence of candidate age and attractiveness on leadership selection outcomes.
Discussion

While much of the glass cliff literature focused primarily on C-suite and other forms of top-level leadership (Ryan et al., 2016), there may be ample opportunities being missed in understanding potential hiring- and promotion-based biases and the detrimental consequences associated with such biases for mid-level minority leaders. Therefore, the current study examined the emergence of the glass cliff in mid-level leadership. In accordance with Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and glass cliff literature (Ryan & Haslam, 2007), it was predicted that traits associated with prototypical mid-level managers and with leaders managing a crisis would combine to produce a doubling effect in which occupational minority leaders may appear to be the best suited candidates for precarious mid-level leadership positions, which may subsequently impact their chances for successful performance. Overall, findings in the current study failed to support the doubling effect hypothesis. Further, no evidence of the glass cliff emerged at either executive or mid-level leadership scenarios. Instead, the general findings suggest that Black and Asian candidates are predicted to experience greater leadership outcomes regardless of prior organizational performance or leadership level.

In terms of gender, no difference in perceived suitability or tenure potential were found between male and female candidates in either leadership level or organizational performance conditions. There was a difference in perceived derailment potential in which male candidates were perceived to engage in more detrimental behaviors than female candidates, regardless of organizational performance or leadership level. Such findings are inconsistent with previous research on the glass cliff (Ryan & Haslam, 2007) and role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), both of which posit that women are seen as more suitable and competent for mid-level
and precarious leadership scenarios. Such results imply that the reliance on gender stereotypes may not be as prevalent in leadership selection processes.

In terms of differences based on race/ethnicity, Black and Asian candidates were generally perceived as more suitable than White and Latinx candidates. Further, white candidates were perceived as more likely to derail than Black and Asian candidates, whereas Latinx candidates were perceived to be more likely to derail than Black candidates. The only finding that provided some support for the proposed hypotheses was for tenure potential, in which Asian candidates were predicted to enjoy a longer tenure than White candidates in precarious, mid-level leadership positions. Though the proposed hypotheses overall were not supported, these findings suggest that differential perceptions toward candidates based on race indeed exist and need to be further understood.

While my hypotheses pooled Black and Latinx experiences together, the fact that Latinx and White candidates were perceived more similarly throughout the study is not surprising as Latinx people tend to share phenotypic similarity with White people (Rosette et al., 2018). What was unexpected, though, was that Black and Asian candidates were consistently perceived in a greater light than White and Latinx candidates. Though unexpected, the findings make sense when considering the timing of the data collection. During the COVID-19 pandemic, great attention has been geared toward the “Black Lives Matter” movement in the wake of the death of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and the “Stop Asian Hate” movement in the wake of hate crimes geared toward Asian communities. Though it has not received as much attention, the “Me-Too” movement may have also played a role in the gender differences found in the current study. Considering these movements, I hesitate to claim that organizational performance and leadership level do not have any influence on leadership selection processes. Rather, these
findings suggest that stereotypes associated with working in the mid-level and for working in precarious leadership scenarios were potentially outweighed by the increased focus on justice toward women, Blacks, and Asians throughout American society. Because the current study did not collect participants’ perceptions regarding the social movements, future research should examine the impact that such social movements have on leadership selection processes.

The present research is also one of only a few studies (e.g., Glass & Cook, 2019) that have examined the interaction between race and gender in the context of leadership selection. Results suggest that women of color were not perceived differentially among themselves or the men of the same race in terms of perceived leader suitability or tenure potential. Yet, in terms of derailment potential, White and Latinx female candidates were perceived as significantly less likely to derail than their male counterparts. Further, White female candidates were perceived as more likely to derail than Black and Asian female candidates. Considering that there were no within-race differences among Black and Asian candidates, and that female candidates were perceived as less likely to derail than their male counterparts in the races that are not experiencing a major societal movement, there is further evidence that social movements may have outweighed potential effects of stereotypes on perceived derailment potential.

It should be noted that examining the statistical main effects and interactions of race and gender is only one way to examine intersectionality. In fact, some researchers suggest that the reliance on such interactions falls short of explicating the nuanced theoretical concept of intersectionality (Cole, 2009; Hancock, 2007). For instance, Cole (2009) states that statistical interactions fail to account for the fact that social categories, such as race and gender, are not mutually exclusive traits within an individual. They go on to say that the reliance on such statistical analyses focuses on social categories as property of an individual rather than a
reflection of macrolevel social practices. Further, Hancock (2007) asserts that a statistical interaction approach presumes that social categories are static and contain predetermined relationships between them. Though the current study’s goal was to find differential perceptions regarding hypothetical candidates, a deeper analysis examining the interaction between individual and institutional actors (Hancock, 2007) is required to understand the differential effects of organizational performance and leadership level on leadership selection processes for individuals that hold multiple marginalized identities. While some researchers may claim that qualitative methods are more suitable for research on intersectionality (e.g., Bowleg, 2013), future research may benefit from mixed methods in which quantitative and qualitative research complement one another (Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016).

Other exploratory analyses also lend some evidence toward the impact of the social movements. Female candidates were perceived to have more leader task and relational competence than male candidates, and Black candidates were perceived to be more competent than White and Latinx candidates. Further, female candidates were perceived as more likely to be promoted than males, and Black and Asian candidates were perceived as more likely to be promoted than White and Latinx candidates.

Interestingly, candidate attractiveness and perceived change signaling were correlated with all the leadership selection outcome variables and were dependent upon race and gender. Such findings are consistent with previous research regarding the link between candidate attractiveness (Marlowe et al., 1996) and change signaling (Morgenroth et al., 2020) and leadership selection processes. Preliminary analyses in the current study suggest that both candidate attractiveness and perceived change signaling may be important factors. Yet, due to time constraints, the complex analyses required to examine the effects of both factors and,
thereby, the ability to discern whether both variables are underlying factors in the emergence of the glass cliff will need to be examined in future research.

The present research has several limitations. The nature of vignette studies does not elicit real world processes involved in leadership selection. For instance, the information provided by a candidate in a job search exceeds the brief organizational and candidate profile provided in the current study. Further, while the dependent variables in the current study focused on perceived leader suitability, derailment potential, and tenure potential, these variables are certainly not an exhaustive list of variables leader selectors consider when choosing the right candidate for a job. To what extent these cognitive processes influence actual hiring practices is unclear. Therefore, research should consider gathering data through either a field or archival study in which real world mid-level leadership appointments and the cognitive processes involved are monitored.

Another possible limitation is that the candidates’ reported education may have influenced perceived leader outcomes. Though each candidate was reported to have earned an MBA from an ivy league university in order to increase consistency and reduce any potential covariation based on education, having each candidate hold a degree from such a prestigious program may have influenced perceptions of leader suitability, diminishing the potential effects of leadership level and organizational performance. Perhaps if candidates held a degree from a less prestigious university, leader selectors may rely on other contextual factors, such as candidate gender and race/ethnicity, thereby perceiving a candidate’s ability to manage an organization through crisis or different leadership levels differentially. Therefore, future research should examine the extent to which candidates’ educational attainment interacts with leadership factors and influence perceptions of leader outcomes.
Finally, the current study is cross-sectional nature. The data for the current study was collected during a time in which society was largely focused on social justice movements for Asian and Black communities in the United States, making race specifically salient. Therefore, social desirability may have impacted the results of the current study. Such social desirability poses the question of whether the results found in the current study is reflective of idealized or actual cognitive processes used in leadership selection. Considering the recent widespread focus on racial and gender equity in the United States, I argue that the greater perceptions of leader suitability for Asian and Black candidates may be idealized in nature, meaning that such reported perceptions may not contribute to actual changes in leadership selection processes and, thereby, greater representation among Black and Asian leaders. Though idealized processing may be a precursor for behavioral change, such idealized processing suggests that the findings in the current study should be interpreted cautiously. Future research should utilize a longitudinal approach to examine whether the glass cliff emerges at the mid-level when racial/ethnic issues are not as prominent in society and if current societal movements have a longstanding impact on cognitive and behavioral processes involved in leadership selection.

Despite the limitations of the current study and the fact that the proposed hypotheses were not supported, the evidence suggesting the importance of societal movements based on gender and race elicits practical implications for selection- and promotion-based decision-making practices. While analyses overwhelming showed that Black and Asian candidates were perceived as more suitable than white candidates, it should be noted that Latinx people, who are currently experiencing no major societal movement, may continue to be susceptible to biased leadership selection processes. Therefore, I would recommend HR specialists, hiring managers,
and executive board members increase their awareness regarding biases associated with prototypical leaders and gender and racial/ethnic minorities.

Also, while it is encouraging to see that Asian and Black candidates were not subjected to biased leadership selection processes in the current study, it should be noted that such increased perceptions of suitability may lead to increased scrutiny and surveillance, limiting their ability to be evaluated fairly and objectively, especially in organizations with little diversity (Glass & Cook, 2019). Therefore, though biases may not play as much of a role in leader selection processes, leadership appraisals may still be subjected to racial and gender biases. This is particularly important as minorities tend to be blamed and face social backlash for struggles that were already in place prior to their appointment (Cook & Glass, 2014). Not only can increasing such awareness potentially reduce the occurrences of the glass cliff, but it can also reduce the potential for the “savior effect” to occur and enhance leadership possibilities for future minority leaders. As a result, we may see more female and racial/ethnic minority leaders appointed to more leadership positions, receive fairer appraisals and, ultimately, enhance their chances of upward career mobility and increase representation of occupational minorities among the upper echelons of management.

Conclusion

Overall, the present research implies that gender and racial stereotypes may not have as strong of an impact on leadership selection processes as predicted. It appears that major societal movements, such as the Black Lives Matter, Stop Asian Hate, and Me-Too movements, may be a major contributor to the relationships between race, gender, and leadership selection outcomes. Black, Asian, and female leadership candidates were perceived in a much greater light than
White, Latinx, and male candidates. Such findings have important implications for understanding the role that the dynamics of race and gender has on leadership selection processes.
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