

# Does the media influence how we perceive women in leadership?



# CEOs & Gender: A Media Analysis

Gender inequality in the workplace is one of the biggest issues facing corporate America today. Women hold just 4% of leadership positions in Fortune 500 companies and one in four Americans say there are no women in leadership positions at their current job.<sup>1</sup> According to a study on women in leadership conducted by The Rockefeller Foundation in May, nine in 10 Americans say that traditions of and expectations for male leadership in workplace cultures contributes to women's lack of representation in top positions.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, only 34% of Americans say their current workplace puts a high priority on having women in leadership positions.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the heightened awareness on gender equality, corporations are not doing enough to address the fact that the C-suite remains predominantly male. 78 percent of companies report that gender diversity is a top priority for their CEO, yet less than half of employees think their company is doing what it takes to improve gender diversity. These beliefs are not misguided. **In 2015, 90% of new CEOs were promoted or hired from roles with profit-and-loss responsibility, and 100% of them were men.**

Corporate America has a clear role to play by making significant investment to change company practices and culture to ensure more women have the opportunity to reach the highest level of management. The media also has an important voice in the matter, especially because 76% of U.S. adults trust the information they hear from national news organizations. Journalists have a responsibility to ensure the tone, the information they include in a story, even the order in which the information appears reflects men and women equally, rather than contributing to conventional stereotypes associated with female and male leaders.

The Rockefeller Foundation is committed to achieving gender inclusivity in the workplace and bringing more women to the C-suite. In May, The Rockefeller Foundation launched 100x25, a campaign aimed at ensuring 100 female CEOs of the Fortune 500 by year 2025. As part of the campaign, The Rockefeller Foundation and Global Strategy Group recently conducted an analysis of media coverage of 20 CEOs to evaluate the way male and female CEOs are covered in the press. Global Strategy Group identified 20 CEOs across major companies including those in the Fortune 500, Fortune 1,000, and tech industry in the following four scenarios: those who have been hired or appointed from within the company; publicly fired or stepped down due to public pressure; retired; or were involved in a crisis. The analysis demonstrates that the media is shaping the perceptions of business leaders based on their gender.



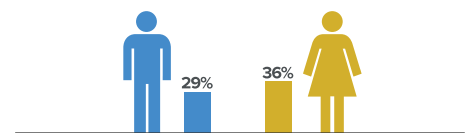
**90% of new CEOs** were promoted or hired from roles with profit-and-loss responsibility. **100% of them were men.**<sup>2</sup>

**78% of companies report that gender diversity is a top priority for their CEO.**<sup>3</sup>



**But less than 1/2 of employees surveyed think their company is doing what it takes to improve gender diversity.**<sup>3</sup>

And less than 1/2 of companies surveyed said they hold senior leaders accountable for performance against gender diversity metrics.



**76% of US adults** said they trust a lot or some of the information they receive from national news organizations.<sup>4</sup>

1. *Women in Leadership: Why It Matters*, 2016. The Rockefeller Foundation & Global Strategy Group <https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/report/women-in-leadership-why-it-matters/> 2. *CEOs and Transitions*, 2015. Spencer Stuart. [https://www.spencerstuart.com~/media/pdf%20files/research%20and%20insight%20pdfs/2015-ceo-transitions\\_063016.pdf](https://www.spencerstuart.com~/media/pdf%20files/research%20and%20insight%20pdfs/2015-ceo-transitions_063016.pdf) 3. *Women in the Workplace Study*, 2016. LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company. <https://womenintheworkplace.com/> 4. *Women in Leadership: Why It Matters*, 2016. The Rockefeller Foundation & Global Strategy Group <https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/report/women-in-leadership-why-it-matters/>

# The media is much more likely to focus on gender if the CEO is female

Articles focusing on female CEOs are more likely to discuss their personal life than those featuring male CEOs. 16% of the articles analyzed about female CEOs talked about their personal life, compared to only 8% of the articles about male CEOs.

When discussing a female CEO's personal life, 78% of the articles mentioned family. There were no articles that discussed a male CEO's children or family. Instead, articles highlighted a

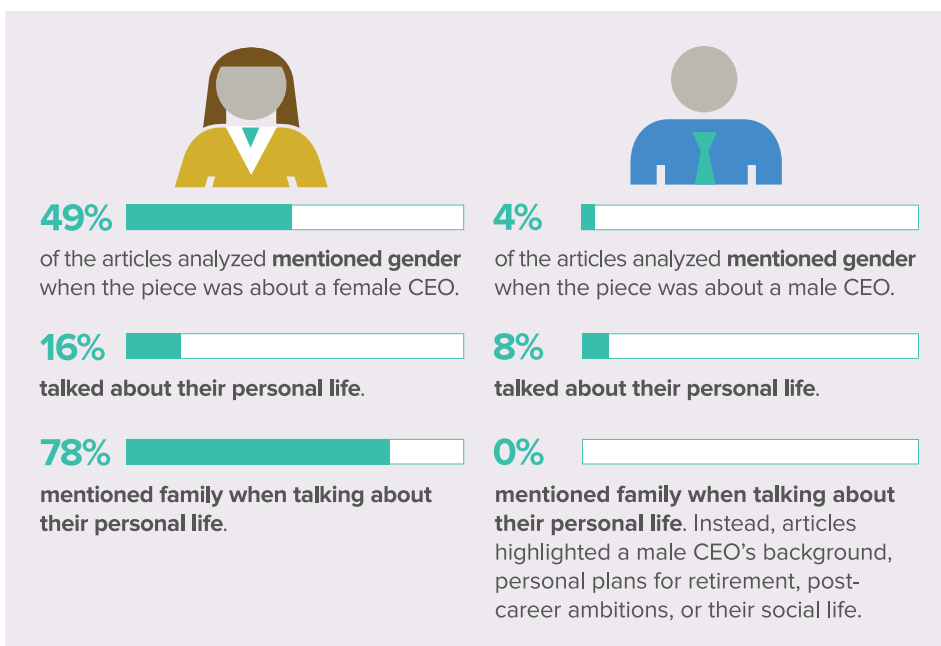
male CEO's background, personal plans for retirement, post-career ambitions, or their social life.

**Americans, men and women alike, unequivocally agree that men and women are equally qualified to lead businesses (96%) - yet corporate communications change when the CEO is a woman.** While corporations' announcements around female CEOs contained higher levels of confidence than male CEOs, the words corporations

use to describe CEOs can be different. The words "experience," "proven," and "business" are most often associated with male CEOs, whereas "strategic," "knowledge," and "growth" are more likely to be used when describing female CEOs.

**Male and female CEOs are portrayed differently in times of crisis.** The skills and performance of a CEO should matter most in a crisis. The framing of the crisis is different based on the CEO's gender. Female CEOs are more likely to be blamed as the source of the crisis (80% of stories), than male CEOs (31% of stories).

The Rockefeller Foundation analyzed the media coverage of 20 CEOs during a transition or time of crisis to determine if there are differences in the way male and female CEOs are covered in the press.



Despite the odds being stacked against women CEOs, women CEOs response to a crisis is nearly as positive as a male CEO's response – 20% and 25% respectively. Moreover, women CEOs jobs are less likely to be called into question (27%) than male CEOs in times of crisis (31%).

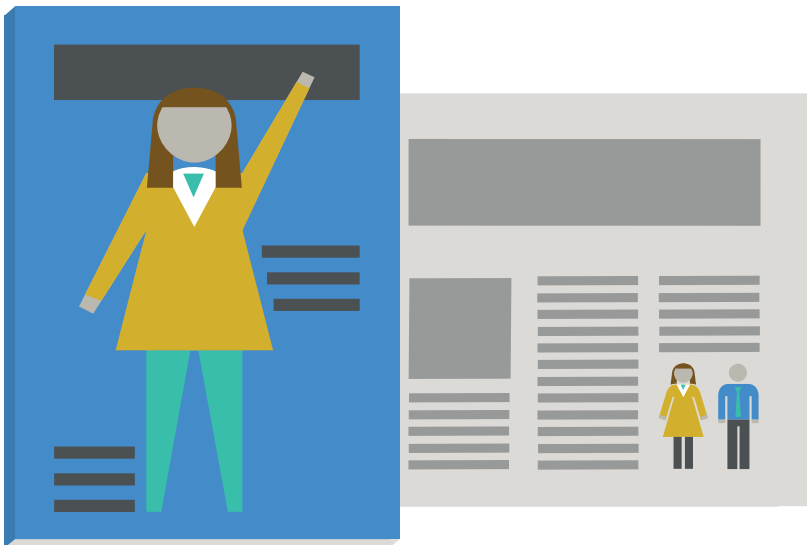
**The media has an important role to play in advancing gender parity in the workplace – from the ground floor to the C-suite. #100x25**

# Methodology

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The goal of the media analysis was to understand the media coverage of CEOs in various situations and determine if there are differences in the way male and female CEOs are covered. To conduct the audit, Global Strategy Group identified 20 CEOs across major companies including those in the Fortune 500, Fortune 1,000, and tech industry in the following four scenarios: those who have been hired or appointed from within the company; publicly fired or stepped down due to public pressure; retired; or were involved in a crisis. 55% of the CEOs analyzed were female (11), 45% were male (9). More than 100 news articles from 37 top tier media outlets were reviewed and scored on a range of metrics including but not limited to: the language used, tone, and inclusion of specific details such as gender, personal life, and qualifications.

The analysis also utilized IBM Watson's tone analyzer to measure the tone of quotes included in official company press releases announcing the hiring of the current women CEOs of Fortune 500 companies and the men who lead the top 20 Fortune 500 companies. This part of the analysis focuses on a measure of language tone and confidence, described as a person's degree of certainty. The IBM Watson tool outputs a score from 0 – 1. If the language is scored less than 0.25 (low value), the text contains little or no evidence of confidence in tone. If it receives a score of more than 0.75 (high value), the text is more likely to be perceived as assured, collected, hopeful, or egotistical.



Source for data/industry studies: Pew Research Center. (2016, July 7). *The Modern Consumer*. <http://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/trust-and-accuracy/>



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