Evaluating leadership: Gender and subjective performance evaluations by Midshipman

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Women are less likely than men to hold leadership positions, especially in traditionally masculine occupations. Largely experimental research has found that this may be partly explained by gender bias and stereotypes in the workplace, which influence women’s perceived competency and performance evaluations. Drawing on evidence-based organizational practice data from a U.S. military service academy, we examine how women are evaluated by their peers in subjective performance evaluations in a leadership context. We find that women are ranked lower, receive fewer positive comments, and more negative comments than their male peers, regardless of performance, but that high performing women are not doubly penalized. This research offers evidence from actual organizational practice, in the masculine-type occupation of military leadership, and thus provides one of the few real-world, large-scale behavioral analyses of gender bias in leader evaluations. Implications, extending beyond the military (e.g., STEM) are discussed.