



# Women and Philanthropy: **A Literature Review**

SEPTEMBER 2025



**WOMEN'S PHILANTHROPY INSTITUTE**

LILLY FAMILY SCHOOL OF PHILANTHROPY  
Indiana University

## WRITTEN & RESEARCHED BY:

### **Women's Philanthropy Institute**

The Women's Philanthropy Institute (WPI) is part of the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. WPI increases understanding of women's philanthropy through rigorous research and education, interpreting and sharing these insights broadly to improve philanthropy. Learn more at [philanthropy.indianapolis.iu.edu/institutes/womens-philanthropy-institute](https://philanthropy.indianapolis.iu.edu/institutes/womens-philanthropy-institute).

### **Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy**

The Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy is dedicated to improving philanthropy to improve the world by training and empowering students and professionals to be innovators and leaders who create positive and lasting change. The school offers a comprehensive approach to philanthropy through its academic, research and international programs and through The Fund Raising School, Lake Institute on Faith & Giving, the Mays Family Institute on Diverse Philanthropy and the Women's Philanthropy Institute. Learn more at <https://philanthropy.indianapolis.iu.edu>.

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# FOREWORD

When the Women's Philanthropy Institute (WPI) published the first comprehensive literature review on gender and philanthropy in 2015, it filled a critical gap in the field. The inaugural review synthesized decades of research to capture what was known at the time about how women give, why they give, and how their philanthropy shapes broader trends in charitable behavior. It quickly became a go-to resource for researchers, fundraisers, donors, and nonprofit leaders.

In the decade since, the philanthropic landscape and the role of gender within it have evolved in profound ways. This updated literature review reflects that evolution, offering a richer and more nuanced picture of women's giving and leadership. It builds upon the strong foundation of the 2015 review while incorporating an array of new studies, expanded methods, and insights from across the field.

Among the most significant developments highlighted in this new review are the growing recognition of women's leadership in philanthropy, the increasing influence of social and political events on women's giving, and the expansion of collective giving models such as giving circles. The new section on gender and leadership, for example, addresses topics that were largely absent from the original review. It explores how women are shaping the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors through executive roles, board service, and strategic influence, as well as the distinct opportunities and challenges women face in these positions.

In addition, recent research underscores how women's giving is often responsive to major social and political moments. Compared to a decade ago, we now have stronger evidence that women donors are increasingly directing their giving to causes such as racial equity, social justice, and reproductive rights, using philanthropy as a tool for civic engagement and change.

We also see how collective giving has emerged as a defining model for many women donors. Giving circles were just beginning to gain attention in 2015. Today, they represent a powerful philanthropic force, especially among women who want to maximize impact, foster community, and democratize charitable decision-making.

Finally, we can now track philanthropic support for women's and girls' organizations. While the original review recognized a significant gender funding gap, it lacked a consistent system for monitoring giving to these organizations. This updated review incorporates data from WPI's Women & Girls Index, which now provides reliable and ongoing tracking. While support for women's and girls' organizations remains limited, it is receiving more visibility and attention within the sector.

This project was led by Dr. Young-joo Lee, the Eileen Lamb O'Gara Chair in Women's Philanthropy at the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. Her deep expertise in nonprofit studies and gender research guided the development of this literature review. We are also grateful for the contributions of our graduate research assistants, Payton Goodman and Yue Ming, who played an essential role in researching and synthesizing the materials for this report. Their involvement reflects WPI's commitment to supporting the next generation of scholars and leaders in the field.

To complement the literature review, we have also developed a set of four practical guides tailored to key audiences: donors; fundraisers and other nonprofit executives; women's and girls' organizations; and women in nonprofit and philanthropic leadership—as well as their allies. These tools offer actionable insights derived from the literature and are designed to help practitioners and decision-makers effectively apply the research.

At WPI, our mission is to increase understanding of women's philanthropy through rigorous research and education and translate that knowledge into action. We hope this literature review and its accompanying materials will inspire new conversations, inform thoughtful strategy, and help build a more inclusive and effective philanthropic sector.

Warmly,

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# INTRODUCTION

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Over the past several decades, the study of women’s philanthropy has grown from a niche area of research into a robust field, with a diverse and expanding body of work. When the Women’s Philanthropy Institute (WPI) published its first comprehensive literature review in 2015, it synthesized decades of evidence to answer key questions about how women give, why they give, and how gender shapes philanthropic behavior. In the years since, the landscape of philanthropy has changed considerably, as have the questions scholars are asking.

This updated literature review builds on the foundation of the 2015 review while incorporating significant developments in the research and practice of philanthropy. It brings together the latest evidence on women’s giving and volunteering; explores how social, political, and economic events have shaped women’s philanthropy; and integrates new areas of inquiry such as gender and nonprofit leadership. Collectively, the chapters in this report trace the history of women’s philanthropy, examine gendered patterns in giving and volunteering, explore giving to women’s and girls’ organizations, and consider how women influence the philanthropic and nonprofit sectors through leadership roles.

The goal of this review is twofold. First, it offers a comprehensive synthesis of what is currently known about women’s giving and leadership, serving as a resource for scholars, practitioners, and funders. Second, it highlights areas where questions remain, encouraging further research that deepens understandings of the motivations, behaviors, and impact of women donors and leaders. By bringing together existing knowledge and identifying gaps, this review seeks to advance a more complete and nuanced picture of women’s philanthropy and to support future scholarly inquiry.

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## 1. THE WOMEN’S PHILANTHROPY INSTITUTE: INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH PORTFOLIO

The mission of the Women’s Philanthropy Institute (WPI) is to increase understanding of women’s philanthropy through rigorous research and education. WPI has been conducting, curating, and disseminating research that grows women’s philanthropy since its foundation in 1991 (known then as the National Network of Women as Philanthropists). Especially since 2010, WPI has tackled the question of how gender impacts giving through its signature series *Women Give*, contributing to the literature on women’s philanthropy.

### ***Research Portfolio***

*Women Give* is WPI’s signature research series, which explores unique questions about the factors that shape gender-based giving patterns. The first report in the series was published in 2011, and WPI has since published 12 *Women Give* reports. Table 1.1 provides key findings and contributions of each report.

**TABLE 1.1: Women Give Research Reports, 2010–2024**

**Women Give 2010 Parts 1 & 2: New Research About Women and Giving**

Female-headed households are more likely to give to charity than male-headed households.

**Women Give 2012: New Research About Women and Giving**

Baby boomer and older women are more likely to give to charity, and give more than their male counterparts when other factors affecting giving are taken into consideration.

**Women Give 2013: New Research on the Charitable Giving of Girls and Boys**

Parents play a key role in preparing their children to become charitable adults.

**Women Give 2014: New Research on Women, Religion, and Giving**

Young single women who are religiously unaffiliated—the “Nones”—give roughly twice as much to charitable organizations than women who are affiliated but infrequently attend religious services.

**Women Give 2015: How Do Sons and Daughters Affect Parents' Charitable Giving?**

Shifts the framework of thinking from the current focus on “parents influencing the development of their child's generosity” to also include “children affecting their parents' generosity.”

**Women Give 2016: Giving in Young Adulthood: Gender Differences and Changing Patterns Across the Generations**

Men and women donors' behaviors have changed over the past four decades, and women now have greater influence over charitable decision-making.

**Women Give 2017: Charitable Giving and Life Satisfaction**

Men receive a greater boost in life satisfaction when they become donors, while women see a greater increase when they give more of their income. In households where women drive or participate equally in charitable decisions, the entire family is happier.

**Women Give 2018: Transmitting Generosity to Daughters and Sons**

Parents can influence children while they live in the same household, and children can carry this generous behavior into adulthood.

**Women Give 2019: Gender and Giving Across Communities of Color**

Gender differences are consistent across race: In communities of color, single women are more likely to give than single men, and married couples are more likely than single men or women to give.

**Women Give 2020: New Forms of Giving in a Digital Age: Powered by Technology, Creating Community**

Women give more gifts than men and contribute a greater proportion of dollars both online and offline.

**Women Give 2021: How Households Make Giving Decisions**

More than six in 10 couples make charitable giving decisions jointly; however, when one partner makes decisions for the household, women are slightly more likely to do so than men.

**Women Give 2022: Racial Justice, Gender, and Generosity**

More than four in 10 US households supported or were actively involved in the racial justice protests of 2020, including nearly half of single women.

**Women Give 2024: 20 Years of Gender & Giving Trends**

Single women's giving has been more resilient than single men's giving since 2000; however, a decrease in women's giving participation in 2020 indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected women's giving in unique ways.



The Women & Girls Index (WGI), created in 2019 and updated annually since, provides the only systematically generated, comprehensive data on charitable organizations focusing on women and girls. The WGI tracks the landscape of women's and girls' organizations in the United States, including the amount of philanthropic support they receive from individuals, foundations, and corporations. The WGI now expands the picture of charitable giving to women and girls from 2012 to 2021, providing a pre-pandemic baseline for charitable giving to women's and girls' organizations.

In addition to the *Women Give* series and the Women & Girls Index, WPI has produced important research on diverse aspects of women's philanthropy. Table 1.2 provides a complete list of research projects by WPI since 2010.

<b>TABLE 1.2: Research Contributions from the Women Philanthropy Institute since 2010</b>	
2010	<i>Women Give 2010</i> Part 1: New Research About Women and Giving
2011	<i>Women Give 2010</i> Part 2: New Research About Women and Giving
2012	<i>Women Give 2012</i> : New Research About Women and Giving
2013	<i>Women Give 2013</i> : New Research on the Charitable Giving of Girls and Boys
2014	<i>Women Give 2014</i> : New Research on Women, Religion, and Giving
2015	<i>Women Give 2015</i> : How Do Sons and Daughters Affect Parents' Charitable Giving?
2016	Charitable Giving Around the 2016 Election: Does Gender Matter? <i>Women Give 2016</i> : Giving in Young Adulthood: Gender Differences and Changing Patterns Across the Generations
2017	<i>Women Give 2017</i> : Charitable Giving and Life Satisfaction
2018	How Women and Men Approach Impact Investing How Women & Men Give Around Retirement Dynamics of Hosting: Giving Circles and Collective Giving Groups Giving Circle Membership: How Collective Giving Impacts Donors Encouraging Giving to Women's and Girls' Causes: The Role of Social Norms <i>Women Give 2018</i> : Transmitting Generosity to Daughters and Sons
2019	All In for Women & Girls: How Women's Fund and Foundation Donors Are Leading Through Philanthropy Women's Foundations and Funds: A Landscape Study The Women & Girls Index 2019: Measuring Giving to Women's and Girls' Causes Change Agents: The Goals and Impact of Women's Foundations and Funds <i>Women Give 2019</i> : Gender and Giving Across Communities of Color
2020	COVID-19, Generosity, and Gender: How Giving Changed During the Early Months of a Global Pandemic The Women & Girls Index 2020: Measuring Giving to Women's and Girls' Causes <i>Women Give 2020</i> : New Forms of Giving in a Digital Age: Powered by Technology, Creating Community

**TABLE 1.2 CONTINUED**

2021	Gender and Crowdfunding The Women & Girls Index 2021: Measuring Giving to Women's and Girls' Causes COVID-19, Generosity, and Gender: How Giving Changed During the First Year of a Global Pandemic <i>Women Give 2021: How Households Make Giving Decisions</i>
2022	The Women & Girls Index 2022: Measuring Giving to Women's and Girls' Causes <i>Women Give 2022: Racial Justice, Gender, and Generosity</i>
2023	Moving Money and Shifting Power for Social Justice The Women & Girls Index 2023: Measuring Giving to Women's and Girls' Organizations
2024	The Women & Girls Index 2024: Measuring Giving to Women's and Girls' Organizations <i>Women Give 2024: 20 Years of Gender &amp; Giving Trends</i>

## Events and Awards

To disseminate research and facilitate conversations about women and philanthropy, WPI has also held several symposia, with themes such as Women Worldwide Leading Through Philanthropy (2011); #WomenLeading Philanthropy (2014); Dream. Dare. Do.: Women, Philanthropy, and Civil Society (2017); and All In, All Rise (2023). WPI presents the Shaw-Hardy Taylor Achievement Award at each Symposium to honor women who advance the field of philanthropy and make a significant impact.

**TABLE 1.3: Recipients of the Shaw-Hardy Taylor Achievement Award**

2010	Women Give 2010 Part 1: New Research About Women and Giving
2008	Sondra Shaw-Hardy and Martha Taylor, founders of the National Network of Women as Philanthropists (NNWP) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison
2011	Barbara Dobkin, founder of Advancing Jewish Women Professionals and the Jewish Community
2014	Maureen O'Gara Hackett, creator of Eileen Lamb O'Gara Chair in Women's Philanthropy
2017	Tracy Gary, founder of the Women's Foundation of California
2021	Melinda French Gates, co-founder of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
2023	Helene Gayle, president of Spelman College



WPI has also honored prominent Black philanthropists with the Black Women Give Back List starting in 2021. Created in partnership with Black Philanthropy Month (BPM) and the Women Invested to Save the Earth (WISE) Fund, the campaign highlights 10 outstanding philanthropists who are making an impact for Black women and girls by leading through generosity. While WPI transitioned management of the list to BPM, Table 1.4 shows the honorees for each year in which it was led by WPI.

<b>TABLE 1.4: Honorees of the Black Women Give Back List</b>	
2021	<p>Dr. M. Starita Boyce Ansari, founder of The New 3Rs, Inc.</p> <p>Felicia Davis, president and CEO of Chicago Foundation for Women</p> <p>Thelma Ekiyor, co-founder and managing director of SME.NG; founder of The Funding Space and Afrigrants Foundation, and pioneer of The Ebi Fund</p> <p>Valaida D. Fullwood, creator of The Soul of Philanthropy and author of Giving Back</p> <p>Sharlene Kemler, CEO of The Loveland Foundation</p> <p>Marsha Morgan, chair emerita of the Community Investment Network</p> <p>Toya Randall, curator and catalyst of Voice. Vision. Value. Black Women Leading Through Philanthropy</p> <p>Betty Smith, executive director of EN-RICH-MENT</p> <p>Ayo (formerly known as Opal) Tometi, co-creator of #BlackLivesMatter and Founder of Diaspora Rising</p> <p>Akilah S. Wallace, executive director, Faith in Texas and founder &amp; chair, HERitage Giving Fund</p>
2022	<p>Nicole Cardoza, founder and CEO of Reclamation Ventures</p> <p>Soffiyah Elijah, executive director of Alliance of Families for Justice</p> <p>Carol Goss, founder of Warrior Women Against Poverty</p> <p>Ebonie Johnson Cooper, executive director of Young, Black &amp; Giving Back Institute</p> <p>Dr. Maria S. Johnson, PhD, founder and chairperson of Black Women and Girls Fund</p> <p>Cathryn McClellan Kelly, manager of Global Strategic Partnerships Program at American Express</p> <p>Mary Olushoga, founder of The African Women Power Network</p> <p>Ada Williams Prince, director of Program Strategy and Investment at Pivotal Ventures</p> <p>Joy B. Webb, program director at The Community Investment Network</p> <p>Tyeshia Wilson, director of Engagement at Philanthropy Together</p>
2023	<p>Dahabo Ahmed-Omer, CEO of The BlackNorth Initiative</p> <p>Akira Barclay, founder of Fresh Philanthropy</p> <p>Ciara Coleman, founder of Geaux Girl Giving</p> <p>Gisele Garraway, founder and CEO, THRIVEfunds</p> <p>Magdaline Habiba Musa, founder and executive director, One Tribe Initiative</p> <p>Aline Odara, executive director of Fundo Agbara</p> <p>Mandy Olowu, founder of Hope Ambassadors and Child Care Organization</p> <p>Elizabeth Thompson, CEO of The CAFE Group</p> <p>Nyamekye Wilson, founder and CEO of Black Sisters in STEM (Black SiS)</p> <p>Tsehai Wodajo, executive director of Resources for the Enrichment of African Lives</p>

In addition to the research conducted by WPI staff and Lilly Family School of Philanthropy faculty, WPI has funded research projects by researchers from various institutions. These projects resulted in the production of scholarly articles and dissertations, including those by Elizabeth Dale (Dale et al., 2018, 2019; Dale & Azizi, 2023), Patrick Dwyer (2018), and Elizabeth Gillespie (Gillespie 2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 202b; Gillespie & Fletcher, 2024). The Institute has also supported research groups such as the Collective Giving Research Group (CGRG), comprising researchers Jason Franklin, Angela Eikenberry, Julia Carboni, and Jessica Bearman (Bearman et al., 2017; Bearman & Franklin, 2018; Carboni & Eikenberry, 2018).

WPI provides dissertation support through the Debra Mesch Doctoral Fellowship for Research on Women’s Philanthropy. The goals of this fellowship are to increase research and understanding of gender and philanthropy, contribute to the development of the field of study on gender and philanthropy, and encourage emerging scholars. Every year, the Mesch fellowship supports a scholar whose primary research focus is on women’s philanthropy or gender differences in philanthropic behavior and giving. Table 1.5 lists fellowship recipients since 2009 and their dissertation titles.

Year	Recipient	Dissertation Title
2009	Deborah Skolnick Einhorn	Power of the Purse: Social Change in Jewish Women’s Philanthropy
2010	Laura Gee	Essays About Group Dynamics and Social Networks
2012	Brent Pieper	Women in Philanthropy Programs at American Colleges and Universities: Giving Motivations From the Female Participants’ View
2014	Megan Springate	Respectable Holidays: The Archaeology of Capitalism and Identities at the Crosbyside Hotel (c. 1870–1902) and Wiawaka Holiday House (mid-1910s–1929), Lake George, New York
2015	Elizabeth Dale	Giving Among Same-sex Couples: The Role of Identity, Motivations, and Charitable Decision-making in Philanthropic Engagement
2016	Amanda Koch	Not a “sentimental charity”: A history of the Indianapolis Flower Mission, 1876–1993
2017	Lauren Dula	Gender and the Governance and Performance of Nonprofit Organizations: Women and the United Way
2018	Chandra Harris-McCray	Being Counted: A Mixed Methods Analysis of the Power of Black Women’s Giving at Historically White Institutions
2019	Hannah Ontiveros	Caring for Korea: Engendering War and Aid in the American Century
2020	Heather O’Connor	Reading Between the Lines: Social Contextual Influences on the Production of and Response to Charitable Appeals
2021	Avenel Rolfsen	“We Won’t Wait for the State”: Humanitarianism, Solidarity and Charity in Senegalese History
2022	Anaïs Faurt	TBD
2023	Fiona Maxwell	Democratic Ensembles: Spoken Art and Politics at Chicago Settlement Houses, 1890–1920
2025	Tiana Marrese Shinyoung Park	Beyond the Control Variable: Unpacking Gender’s Role in the Entry and Exit of Nonprofit and Public Employment Across One’s Lifetime TBD



Over the past three decades, WPI has tracked changes and growth in women's philanthropy. It continues to be the only academic institute dedicated to furthering the understanding of gender and philanthropy through research, education, and knowledge dissemination. Research for WPI on women's giving and volunteering, women's board and executive leadership, and giving to women's and girls' organizations informs what is known about women's current and future roles in philanthropy.

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## 2. HISTORY OF WOMEN'S PHILANTHROPY

The Women's Philanthropy Institute's (WPI's) 2015 literature review emphasized the importance of the historical context of women's giving. As evidenced in the literature, women have played crucial roles as both donors and recipients. Women's philanthropy has addressed various societal issues, including poverty alleviation, education, and civil rights, often through voluntary associations. Women have been integral to American philanthropy since its inception, emerging prominently in the American philanthropic landscape after the Revolutionary War, with their roles evolving in tandem with societal changes. Through participation in voluntary associations, women gained leadership and financial management skills, which empowered them within their communities. Women established their own organizations and leadership roles, developing skills and public identities while adhering to traditional gender roles. Additionally, the philanthropic activities of women were influenced by their racial, religious, and class identities, leading to distinct organizational paths for different groups. The experiences of middle-class white women tend to differ from those of Jewish and African American women, who have created their own organizations in response to exclusion.

Women have historically shaped American philanthropy through their active engagement and leadership, despite facing systemic challenges and societal undervaluation. Their contributions reflect a complex interplay of gender, race, and class, underscoring the need for greater recognition of women's roles in the philanthropic narrative. Understanding this history is essential for appreciating the current landscape of philanthropy and advocating for equitable acknowledgment of all contributors. Table 2.1 provides a brief historical overview of women's philanthropy in the United States.

1643	Lady Ann Moulson (née Radcliffe) contributed £100 for scholarships at the new Harvard University.
1797	First female-controlled charity in the United States, Society for the Relief of Poor Women and Children, established in New York.
1820s & 1830s	Protestant women's group formed "cent" societies to raise money for mission work in the United States and around the globe.
1837	Mary Lyon founded Mount Holyoke College, the oldest institution of higher education established from its inception as an all-women's college.
1840	African American women founded the Manhattan Abolition Society in New York City when white women excluded them from the many anti-slavery societies that had formed.
1863-1865	Women organized Sanitary Fairs to support soldiers during the Civil War, raising more than half of the funds collected by the United States Sanitary Commission, a private relief agency.
1881	Clara Barton founded the American Red Cross based on her experiences as a nurse during the Civil War and the Swiss-inspired global Red Cross network.
1889	Jane Addams founded Hull House in Chicago, the first "settlement" house to provide social and educational opportunities for working-class people, a movement that grew to almost 500 settlement houses nationally by 1920.

**TABLE CONTINUED »**



**TABLE 2.1 CONTINUED**

1890	Jane Cunningham Croly established the General Federation of Women's Clubs to unite the many clubs operating independently around the country; with 100,000 members today, the organization continues its mission to improve the community through volunteer service.
1890	Two women's suffrage organizations merged to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association, representing women at the local and state levels.
1907	Margaret Olivia Slocum Sage established the Russell Sage Foundation with a \$10 million gift.
1920	19th Amendment ratified, giving women the right to vote after a 72-year struggle.
1929	Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Lillie Bliss, and Mary Quinn Sullivan established the Museum of Modern Art in New York City with Rockefeller's financial backing and collection.
1964	Wednesdays in Mississippi created by Dorothy Height, president of the National Council of Negro Women, and volunteer Polly Cowan; the effort sent interracial and interfaith teams of women from the north to Mississippi to encourage social and racial justice.
1966	National Organization for Women (NOW) founded.
1972	Ms. Foundation for Women established as first women's fund organized by women, led by women, and granting funds for women and girls; it paved the way for growth of women's funds in communities across the United States and around the world.
1985	Women's Funding Network (WFN) established to strengthen community of women's funds that had proliferated since 1972; today, WFN represents more than 160 women's funds around the world.
1986	Global Fund for Women founded; by 2012, it had allocated more than \$100 million in grants; it merged with the International Museum of Women in 2014.
1988	First women's philanthropy council in higher education established at the University of Wisconsin.
1990	Women Donors Network founded to support progressive change through collaboration and innovation.
1991	National Network of Women as Philanthropists founded (became WPI in 1997).
1997	Women's Philanthropy Institute incorporated as a free-standing nonprofit and relocated to the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy (then the Center on Philanthropy) in 2004.
Late 1990s	Giving circles emerged as a form of participatory collective giving; today, giving circles encompass all races, ethnicities, religions, and ages.
2004	Women's Leadership Councils established by United Way Worldwide have grown into a global network representing 55,000 women and have raised more than \$1 billion in 12 years.
2006	Women Moving Millions established by sisters Swanee Hunt and Helen LaKelly Hunt to raise million-dollar gifts from women for women and girls.
2006	Tiffany Circle Society of Women Leaders created by American Red Cross to raise major gifts from women.
2008	NoVo Foundation partnered with Nike Foundation on Girl Effect to improve health, education, and finances of adolescent girls living in poverty around the world; this initiative has generated attention, encouraged partnerships and collaborations, and spawned similar efforts.

**TABLE 2.1 CONTINUED**

2009	Women's Philanthropy Institute awarded first WPI doctoral dissertation fellowship to support emerging scholars in the area of women's philanthropy or gender differences in philanthropic behavior; four awards given since 2009.
2010	United Nations Foundation launched Girl Up campaign to raise awareness and funds for adolescent girls in developing countries; Plan International adopted "Because I am a Girl" campaign to empower girls and women.
2010	Melinda French Gates, Warren Buffett, and Bill Gates spearheaded The Giving Pledge. This commitment has involved many notable women philanthropists, such as Lyda Hill, Victoria Sant, and Shelby White. These women pledged to donate more than half their wealth to charitable causes either during their lifetime or in their will.
2012	Plan International launched the Because I Am a Girl international campaign to address gender discrimination and promote the rights of girls globally. The campaign highlights the unique challenges girls face, advocating for education, healthcare, and protection from violence, to help them escape poverty and reach their full potential.
2013	Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook (now Meta) created LeanIn.Org, focusing on providing support, mentorship, and encouragement for women in the workplace to further leadership equality. Their efforts highlight women in philanthropy through initiatives like giving circles.
2013	Malala Yousafzai and her father co-founded The Malala Fund to champion girls' education globally. It focuses on educational advocacy in countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nigeria, as well as among refugee populations.
2015	Melinda French Gates founded Pivotal Ventures to focus on domestic social issues and women's empowerment, separately from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.
2017	The ongoing global #MeToo movement against sexual harassment and assault sparked critical conversations about gender inequalities. It has spurred activism within women's philanthropy as many funds, organizations, and individual donors now work to combat gender-based violence and support survivors.
2019	MacKenzie Scott signed the Giving Pledge.
2021	More than 600 women gathered virtually for the Women's Philanthropy Signature Event on March 4, 2021. This event was a unique chapter in the long story of Detroit's Jewish women coming together to make a difference.
Early 2020s	Bill and Melinda French Gates announced their divorce; French Gates departed the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation with additional funding for her philanthropic work, pledging billions in support for women and girls.



### 3. GENDER AND GIVING

Summarizing research on gender differences in giving is the primary emphasis of WPI's 2015 review, as well as one of its major contributions to date. Research on gender differences in charitable giving generally indicates that women exhibit distinct giving behaviors compared to men. The 2015 review presents empirical findings from various studies, focusing on the likelihood of giving, amount donated, distribution of gifts, and relevant demographic factors.

The 2015 literature review shows that women are consistently more likely than men to donate to charity across multiple studies, including both experiments and surveys (Mesch et al., 2015a). Additionally, there is no consensus on the amount given; while some studies suggest women donate more, others indicate men give larger sums, particularly in specific contexts. The literature indicates that women tend to spread their donations across a larger number of organizations, while men concentrate their giving on fewer causes, often favoring sports and recreation. Studies show that factors such as age, marital status, and religious affiliation significantly influence giving patterns, with married women often volunteering less while maintaining overall charitable contributions. High-net-worth women are more likely to have structured giving strategies compared to their male counterparts. Overall, the literature concludes that women give differently than men, characterized by higher participation rates and diverse distribution patterns.

Since the publication of the inaugural review, women have emerged as a dynamic force in the philanthropic landscape, with their contributions supporting a wider range of social causes than ever. This section of the present literature review focuses on the multifaceted nature of women's giving, exploring the diverse motivations, patterns, and trends that shape their philanthropic engagement. By synthesizing research findings across various studies, this review seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing women's decisions to give, the types of causes they support, and the evolving forms of their philanthropy. It discusses the motivations behind women's charitable donations, their participation in various giving vehicles, and the impact of their philanthropy on both individual lives and broader societal outcomes.

Understanding women's philanthropic contributions not only provides insight into their influence on a community but also helps identify opportunities to foster and maximize those contributions. Research on this topic has revealed diverse patterns, emerging trends, and evolving forms of giving that reflect women's distinct values and priorities. By highlighting the unique characteristics and contributions of women as philanthropists, this review aims to inform and inspire future research and practice in the field of women's giving.

## ***Why Women Give: Motivations***

Understanding the motivations behind women's philanthropy is crucial for assessing women's contribution to the philanthropic sector, maximizing their impact, and fostering gender equity in philanthropy. Research on women's giving has revealed a complex interplay of factors influencing women's decisions to give, including personal values, social context, and economic considerations.

### ***Personal Values and Psychological Factors***

A person's values and other psychological factors influence one's giving, and research finds that women often have different values and motivations from those of men. Studies in the United States and European countries show women's giving is more likely than men's giving to be motivated by social justice, care for others, and community well-being (De Wit & Bekkers, 2016; Mesch et al., 2011). For example, Mesch et al. (2011) report that, compared to American men, American women tend to exhibit higher levels of empathy and a stronger principle of care, and such tendencies lead to giving to charities focused on poverty, education, and healthcare. A study by Willer et al. (2015) shows that men are less willing to contribute to poverty relief due to lower levels of empathy. De Wit and Bekkers (2016) support this notion, revealing that prosocial values influence Dutch women's giving decisions more heavily than those of men. Similar patterns are found in other cultural contexts, suggesting that these values may transcend national boundaries. Research also finds that women's giving is driven by deeply held values, rather than by irrational fears, refuting the "bag lady effect" among women—a hypothesized tendency for women to become overly frugal due to fears of outliving their resources (Brown et al., 2015).

The literature also delves into the psychological underpinnings of motivations behind women's giving. Mesch et al. (2011) view that women's heightened empathy and care orientation stem from a combination of biological and social factors. This translates into a stronger emotional connection to the causes they support, leading to sustained engagement and a desire for deeper involvement in their chosen charities. Research also suggests that women find greater fulfillment and personal growth through collaborative philanthropy than men (Eikenberry, 2017; Carboni & Eikenberry, 2021). The unique psychology behind women's giving means that studying these psychological nuances is crucial to understanding women's giving patterns.

### ***Social Concerns and Political Motivations***

The literature suggests that a person's philanthropic behaviors are guided by a strong sense of purpose and a desire to create social change (Mesch et al., 2016). Still, research finds significant gender differences in how social and political concerns shape giving decisions. Studies by US and Latin American scholars show that women tend to prioritize causes related to social justice, education, health, and the environment, and might be less inclined toward causes perceived as more masculine or traditionally male-dominated, such as nature (Alpizar et al., 2008; Landry et al., 2006). For instance, Mesch et al. (2020a) discovered that following the 2016 US presidential election, women donated in greater amounts than men, targeting progressive charities. A US-based study by Osili et al. (2018a) echoed this finding, showing that the increase in charitable giving to relevant progressive charities after the election was primarily driven by women donors.



Such findings suggest that women’s philanthropy can be a powerful tool for political engagement and activism. In addition to their contributions to social justice causes, research indicates that women support a wider range of charitable causes than men, indicating a broader concern for societal well-being and a multifaceted approach to philanthropy among women (Mesch et al., 2015b). However, women’s tendency to support a wider range of causes might result in smaller contributions to each, potentially limiting the impact on any single cause, which further leads to women’s contributions being undervalued or overlooked.

## **Social Context**

Women’s giving is shaped by the social context, as social norms and gender roles in society determine their ability to give and how and where they give. There are expectations for women in terms of how to behave based on their unique social context, defined by factors such as marital status, family status, and socioeconomic status. For example, Mesch and Pactor (2016) describe how the increase in women’s financial autonomy has empowered them to make larger and more frequent donations, while their active societal engagement has expanded their awareness of diverse social issues, leading to a wider range of causes they support. Research by Kou et al. (2014) also reveals that women’s giving is influenced by the gender composition of their social networks, with women in Lions Clubs International donating more when they belong to clubs with a higher proportion of female members. However, the influence of social context can begin even earlier in life, with research from Ottoni-Wilhelm et al. (2017) showing that parents can influence their children’s generosity—and that this influence is stronger for girls than for boys. The following sections discuss how various social contexts may be interrelated to women’s giving.

## **Marriage and Women’s Giving**

Marital status matters when investigating women’s giving (Mesch et al., 2006; Piper & Schnepf, 2008). There has been extensive research on charitable decision-making by married couples, and scholars have investigated the role of women in these decisions. Previous research from Mesch et al. (2021a) shows that couples most often make their charitable giving decisions jointly; however, when one partner makes these decisions, it is more likely to be a woman (Ackerman & Sager, 2023). A couple’s decision-making process is similar to their other financial decisions, for example, paying household bills and investing money. Böhm and Regner (2013) delve into German household decision-making dynamics, revealing that women often play a significant role in donation decisions. Einolf et al. (2018) shed more light on the decision-making process that couples undertake. According to their study of married couples in the United States, the dynamics of donation decision-making depend on the amount of giving. Couples often make decisions about large charitable giving together, employing cooperative bargaining, while making small donation decisions separately (Einolf et al., 2018). There is no consensus yet on the role of women in couples’ giving decisions, however. An earlier study by Andreoni et al. (2003) presents somewhat contradictory findings, reporting that when these decisions are made jointly, the women’s preferences are far less likely to be reflected in giving decisions. A more recent study by Fischer et al. (2014) finds that when one spouse makes donation decisions, it is most often the wife, suggesting women play an important role in these decisions.

Who exercises a greater influence in a married couple’s donation decisions is an important question because, compared to men, women tend to disburse the family’s giving to more causes and give less to each. Women tend to have stronger preferences for specific causes, such as health and education, whereas men favor sports or recreational organizations (Andreoni et al., 2003). Mesch et al. (2022)

report that a wife's earned income is the primary factor influencing the likelihood and amount of charitable giving by a married couple, whether religious, secular, or total. They find that, although the overall giving and giving to secular organizations increase with an increase in household unearned income, wives are more likely to donate and give larger amounts to both secular and religious organizations compared to their husbands. This finding aligns with a cross-national study of more than 30 countries, which discovered that women are more likely to assume sole responsibility for household giving decisions when their income surpasses that of their husbands (Treas & Tai, 2012).

### ***Other Sociodemographic Factors***

Understanding women's giving requires consideration of demographic factors other than gender because women are not a monolithic group. In other words, a multitude of women's identities and experiences must be examined when studying women's philanthropic behaviors. First, age and life stage play an important role in shaping women's giving patterns. Dale and O'Connor (2021) conducted a qualitative study of high-net-worth women donors and identified distinct stages in their philanthropic journeys. They suggest that these stages are often influenced by life experiences, personal values, and evolving financial resources. For instance, as previously discussed in the context of marital status, being married increases both the likelihood and the amount of women's giving (Mesch et al., 2015c). As women progress through different life stages, their motivations for giving and preferred causes may also change, which implies the dynamic nature of women's philanthropy.

Second, research suggests that religious beliefs have a critical impact on women's giving decisions. While findings are mixed, some studies suggest that women are more likely than men to give to religious causes (Piper & Schnepf, 2008; Yen, 2002). For instance, O'Connor (2022) explored the experiences of Catholic women who identify as pro-choice donors and activists, revealing a nuanced interplay between religious identity and philanthropic behavior. Her study highlights the importance of considering the diversity of perspectives and motivations within religious communities when understanding women's giving. Additionally, single women are nearly twice as likely as single men to give to religious causes (Piper & Schnepf, 2008).

Third, education matters in giving, and people with higher levels of education are more likely to give, and give more generously, compared to those with less education, regardless of gender (Andreoni et al., 2003). Still, research on gender differences in giving in the United States suggests that the implications of education for giving may differ between men and women. Einolf (2011) emphasizes that men have advantages in resources, such as income, education, and participation in voluntary associations, which significantly impact their ability to give. A study by Mesch et al. (2022) reports that when it comes to secular giving, households where the husband is more educated than the wife tend to donate more frequently and in larger amounts. However, the researchers find no significant impact of educational differences on couples' religious giving and the total amount of giving.

Lastly, race and ethnicity are important factors affecting women's giving in the United States. Harris-McCray (2020) finds that, although donations from African American alumnae donations to historically white higher educational institutions are motivated by a desire to give back to their communities and support causes related to education and social justice, their giving patterns are influenced in part by their experiences with race and gender discrimination. Another study on workplace charitable giving finds that experiences of diversity or lack thereof within an organization cause women to give more than men and people of color to give less than whites (Leslie et al., 2013). Overall, the distinctive patterns of giving across different groups of women emphasize the importance of considering intersectional identities and experiences in studying women's philanthropy.



## ***Rates and Amount of Charitable Giving by Women***

Research on gender differences in philanthropy reveals a complex landscape. In terms of likelihood of giving, research generally indicates that women are actively engaged in a broader range of philanthropic activities, often surpassing men in participation rates (Wiepking & Bekkers 2012). Women are more likely to donate to charities than men in many Western countries, including the United States and United Kingdom, with the most significant differences observed in areas like international aid, community support, health, and youth/family causes (Mesch, 2010; Müller & Rau, 2016; Piper & Schnepf, 2008; Brown et al., 2015; Osili et al., 2017, 2019; Simmons & Emanuele, 2007). Compared to men, women are also more likely to prioritize issues such as women's rights, human rights, and the environment in their giving decisions (Mesch et al., 2015b). Still, other studies, particularly lab experiments (Eckel & Grossman, 1998; Eckel et al., 2018; Brown-Kruse & Hummels, 1993) and context-specific research, such as alumni giving (Belfield & Beney, 2000; Osili & Raghavan, 2011), report a higher rate of giving among men than women or no significant gender difference.

Research also finds that women not only give to more charities and more frequently but also give larger amounts than men (Mesch, 2010, Mesch et al., 2006). Mesch et al. (2015c) report that this is the case for single American women compared to single American men. While married couples generally give more than single individuals, women continue to play a significant role in household giving decisions (Böhm & Regner, 2013). However, not all research provides the same gendered patterns in giving. For instance, using factor analysis, Belfield & Beney (2000) find that while women alumni are more likely to donate, men give larger amounts; this is also supported by Dvorak and Toubman (2013). Similarly, in the realm of religious giving, Bekkers & Schuyt (2008) report that, in the Netherlands, men give more than women while controlling for sociodemographic variables. This could be because women tend to spread their giving across more causes than men (Emrich & Pierdzioch, 2015), which may contribute to women's underrepresentation and limited influence in shaping organizational decisions and outcomes (Sampson & Moore, 2008; Mesch et al., 2016). There are also US-based studies reporting no significant gender differences in the amount of donations (List, 2004; Wunnava & Lauze, 2001), or the gender gap in charitable giving disappears when controlling for gender differences in income and wealth (Lo & Tashiro, 2013).

## ***How Women Give***

Women's giving is not limited to traditional forms of charitable donations. They are increasingly engaging in diverse forms of philanthropy, including crowdfunding, impact investing, and collaborative networks like the Women Donors Network (WDN). Mesch et al. (2021b) explored women's participation in crowdfunding in the United States, revealing that women are more likely to contribute to campaigns supporting family, friends, and charitable organizations. Osili et al. (2018b) investigated women's engagement in impact investing, demonstrating their growing interest in aligning financial goals with social impact. WDN exemplifies this trend, not only through the collective financial power of its over 200 members, who contribute millions of dollars annually but also through its strategic focus on gender, racial, economic, and climate justice, demonstrating the power of women's philanthropy when channeled through collaborative networks (Damen & McCuiston, 2009; WDN, 2024). Additionally, many studies have demonstrated women's affinity for giving in groups, such as giving circles.

Women's giving circles have historically been a common method of women's giving, as these groups attract individuals from diverse backgrounds who are often underrepresented in traditional philanthropy (Carboni & Eikenberry, 2018; Rutnick & Bearman, 2005; Bearman et al., 2017; Eikenberry, 2017, 2022). The 2017 study by Bearman et al. on giving circles finds that 48.5% of giving circles in their database are specifically women's groups, which vary by religious affiliation, race, and age. More importantly, women dominate the membership in all giving circles, with 70% of giving circles in the United States reporting that women make up more than half their members (Bearman et al., 2017). Giving circles tend to fund smaller, locally based, and newer organizations, as well as those with a business orientation that can show impact relative to size (Eikenberry, 2017). It appears that these circles also contribute more to women's and girls' organizations, minority racial and ethnic groups, and individuals in need (Eikenberry, 2017; Eikenberry & Breeze, 2015).

Women's philanthropic decision-making is a multifaceted process shaped by a complex interplay of individual preferences, social influences, and contextual factors. Research on this topic reveals nuanced patterns and trends that challenge traditional assumptions about gender and giving. For example, economic crises and disasters have significant impacts on people's charitable behaviors, and the consequences can differ between men and women (McKay et al., 2013; Rubery & Rafferty, 2013).

### ***Impact of Crises on Women's Giving***

Research also finds that economic crises and downturns disproportionately affect women's financial security. For instance, the heightened economic vulnerability during the Great Recession of 2008 had a negative impact on everyone regardless of gender, and studies reveal a decrease in the proportion of American donors during that time (Osili et al., 2019). Nevertheless, scholars suggest that the recession hit women harder, forcing them to face greater financial constraints and competing demands for their resources (McKay et al., 2013; Rubery & Rafferty, 2013). This decline in giving could be partly attributed to the economic challenges faced by women, highlighting the need for a deeper understanding of how economic downturns affect women's philanthropic behavior.

Research suggests that women were on the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis at home and work. They comprised the majority of essential workers and caregivers of children and older relatives. As a result, American women faced greater employment and income losses, as well as taking on the majority of unpaid care work (O'Donnell et al., 2021; Goldin, 2022). According to a report by Mesch et al. (2020b), single women in the United States were most likely to report a decrease in giving for education, the arts, and the environment during the pandemic's initial months. Additionally, single women were more likely than single men and married/partnered couples to decrease their giving due to the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic and the following economic downturn. Women's roles in the crisis left little room for donating time and money (Mesch et al., 2020b). However, in the later months of the pandemic, studies found that single women increased their overall charitable giving compared to the initial months of the pandemic, although they still gave lower amounts than before the pandemic (Skidmore, et al., 2021). Single women shifted their giving in this timeframe from religious and other causes to basic needs and health causes.



## **Conclusion**

The literature on women's giving paints a rich and complex portrait of a demographic whose philanthropic engagement is shaped by diverse factors. From personal values and social context to economic considerations and family dynamics, women's giving decisions are influenced by many interconnected forces. The research highlights women's strong commitment to social justice, education, health, and environmental causes, as well as their increasing participation in diverse giving vehicles such as crowdfunding and impact investing.

While significant progress has been made in understanding women's philanthropy, several unanswered questions remain for future research. Most importantly, further exploration of the intersectional nature of women's giving, considering the interplay of gender, race, class, and other identities, is crucial for developing a more nuanced understanding of this complex phenomenon. In addition, investigating the long-term impact of women's giving circles and their potential to transform the philanthropic landscape is a promising area for future inquiry. Dodge et al. (2022) advocate for employing critical methodologies in gender studies within the philanthropic sector. They argue for a pluralistic approach that challenges existing power structures and uncovers hidden biases. Wiepking et al. (2023) contribute to this discussion by examining the gendered pathways into giving across various countries, revealing both similarities and differences in the factors influencing the prosocial behavior of men and women. Future studies are needed to interrogate these different cultural contexts.

As women's wealth and influence continue to grow, their role in philanthropy is poised to expand, offering exciting possibilities for a more equitable and impactful future for the philanthropic sector. Continuing to delve into the motivations, patterns, and impact of women's giving will yield valuable insights that inform more effective philanthropic strategies and empower women to become even more influential agents of social change. Further, a person belongs to a number of different social groups, based on characteristics such as gender, sexual orientation, race, and culture (Settle & Buchanan, 2014), and accounting for this intersection of multiple identities is crucial in understanding gender and philanthropy. Future research could examine how intersectionality creates different patterns in charitable giving.

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## 4. GENDER AND VOLUNTEERING

In the United States, women have been more active volunteers than men, in both formal volunteering through organizations and informal volunteering outside organizational boundaries (Bellido et al., 2021; Lee & Brudney, 2012; Helms & McKenzie, 2014). The first literature review by the Women's Philanthropy Institute (Mesch et al., 2015), explores the dynamics of volunteering in the United States, emphasizing gender differences in volunteer rates, motivations, and the impact of various demographic and socioeconomic factors. It draws on a range of studies to illustrate how women consistently engage in volunteering more than men, both in frequency and hours contributed.

The 2015 review confirms the higher volunteer rates among women than men, with significant differences observed in various surveys. Notably, single women volunteer almost twice as much as single men. Additionally, gender socialization influences motivations, with women often driven by empathy and community service, while men gravitate toward risk-oriented roles. Women's higher volunteer rates may also correlate with their labor market participation patterns, as they are more likely to work part-time than men. Factors such as social ties, religious participation, educational attainment, and marital status affect volunteering rates. Volunteer patterns differ internationally, with US women showing higher nonprofit engagement compared to men, contrasting with trends in other countries.

These findings underscore the complexity of volunteering behaviors, particularly the pronounced role of gender and social factors. Women's higher participation in volunteering is shaped by socialization, employment patterns, and demographic variables, revealing important insights into philanthropic engagement in society. Research conducted by WPI has previously shown that women more strongly identify with broader definitions of giving that go beyond giving through formal donations to helping individuals, volunteering time, or serving on a board. WPI reports, such as *Women Give 2020* and *Women Give 2022* (Mesch, 2010; Ackerman et al., 2022), indicate that women are more likely to give time to certain causes, such as women's and girls' issues and racial justice, because of feelings of personal connection. Women are also more likely to expect reciprocation in volunteer recruitment from those within their social networks and seek support from these networks when they begin volunteering (Wymer, 2012). This section reviews the literature on gender differences in volunteering, including motivation, activities, and impacts. It also examines how gender is interrelated with paid work and sociodemographic characteristics, which have important implications for volunteer management.

### ***Gender Differences in Volunteer Motivations and Activities***

Through volunteering, people can demonstrate their prosocial proclivity. While women attach more importance to helping others than men in general, research also finds that motivations for giving time differ between men and women. Social role theory posits that women display more communal characteristics and men exhibit more agentic characteristics, and these differences are reflected in volunteer motivations (Eagly, 1987; Hallmann et al., 2020; Fletcher & Major, 2004). For example, the Wiepking et al. (2023) comparative study of 19 countries finds that women are motivated by a call to help others, while the financial factors of giving time influence men. Gil-Lacruz et al. (2019a) also report that, unlike European men, European women consider social factors more important than economic factors when it comes to volunteering. For instance, a study of immigrants in Canada suggests that gender influences women's decisions to volunteer to overcome loneliness (Wilson-Forsberg & Sethi, 2015). On the other hand, studies find that men are more likely to be motivated by personal empowerment, career advancement, and self-esteem (Kulik et al., 2016; Park et al.,

2019; Geiser et al., 2014). A study by Ribarić et al. (2014) of Croatian university students finds that female students are motivated to volunteer by a broader sense of community and altruism, while male students are motivated by gaining transferable skills for employability. Hallmann et al. (2020) also find that female volunteers in the German Special Olympics Games have a stronger desire to “create a better society” through their participation than male volunteers, whose motivations are best represented by the statement, “Volunteering makes me feel needed.”

The motivational differences based on gender suggest that there are dissimilarities in types of volunteer activities preferred by male and female volunteers. Wymer (2021) shows that American women prefer to volunteer with organizations that are people-oriented and less hierarchical compared to men. They are also more likely to volunteer when tasks prioritize “group-orientation, group-facilitation, and reciprocal relationships,” and will remain in volunteer positions longer if they feel a sense of intimacy and belonging within the organization (Eagly & Crowley, 1986; Wymer, 2021). On the other hand, American men are more likely to participate in non-routine volunteer activities, which often involve risky acts of rescuing and protective behaviors, such as safeguarding and firefighting, than women (Eagly & Crowley, 1986).

The literature suggests that gender differences in social behaviors are amplified through gender stereotypes deriving from the different social roles men and women are expected to play (Eagly, 1987, 2013). For example, Soderhielm (2014) finds that male volunteers in Sweden hold more positions of power, influence, and higher status, whereas female volunteers tend to hold “token” positions as they attempt to adapt to male-dominated contexts and prove their worth as volunteers. Similarly, a study by McGarvey et al. (2019) reports that UK men are more involved in giving advice, information, and counseling activities (25%) than UK women (19%), as well as leading an organization or being a trustee (22%) than women (19%). Women are more likely to organize or help run volunteer activities and events (42%) than men (35%). Women are also more likely to take on volunteer caregiving roles, including hospice care, where 84% of volunteers are women (Claxton-Oldfield & Banzen, 2010). Studies of European senior citizens show that men are more likely to participate in professional and educational activities, while women are more likely to be involved in religious organizations (Sánchez-García et al., 2022). Scholars explain these gender disparities with the perception of the ideal volunteer as male and unhindered by certain domestic responsibilities (Soderhielm, 2014).

## ***Impacts of Volunteering***

Although little research has examined gender differences in how volunteering affects individual well-being (Stuart et al., 2020), several studies provide useful insight into how the possible impacts of volunteering may differ between men and women. In particular, research suggests that understanding volunteer motivations helps assess the positive effects of volunteering and the variation in these effects based on a volunteer’s gender. For instance, a study of Australian volunteers by Stukas et al. (2016) finds that lower levels of self-esteem, personal well-being, social connectedness, self-efficacy, and trust in others are associated with volunteering for self-oriented, protective, and career motives. According to their argument, individuals who volunteer to escape from troubles may not experience an increase in well-being from participation. On the other hand, volunteers who participate because of their prosocial values and concerns report the highest level of increase in well-being (Stukas et al., 2016). Thoits (2012) suggests that a strong identity as a volunteer is another predictor for differences in well-being among volunteers, as this identity gives a sense of purpose or “mattering.”



The close connection between motivations for volunteering and its impacts on individual well-being suggests that participation in volunteer activities may have distinct impacts based on a volunteer's gender. For example, women rank values, understanding, enhancement, protective, and career motivations higher than men, who consider social motivations more important; and motivational distinctions may lead to different levels of satisfaction with volunteer activities and well-being among male and female volunteers (Stukas et al., 2016). Prior studies are divided on whether the relationship between volunteering and psychological well-being varies by gender. Krause and Rainville (2018), using a nationally representative online survey of American adults, find that volunteering has more positive impacts on women's sense of well-being than men's. In contrast, Tabassum et al. (2016), utilizing a population-based longitudinal study on volunteering in the United Kingdom, report no significant difference between male and female volunteers' mental well-being over their lifetime.

Research also reveals that different activities have different impacts on the well-being of male and female volunteers, though some studies contradict each other's findings. For example, Gil-Lacruz et al. (2019b) report that volunteering activities in Europe related to social awareness contribute to the sense of well-being for men and not for women. Krause and Rainville (2018), on the other hand, find that religious volunteering impacts well-being of American women and not for American men, while secular volunteering is not linked to higher well-being for women. Cicognani's studies of Italian volunteers also show that, although volunteering enhances the well-being of youth and young adults regardless of gender, male youth and young adult volunteers experience a greater increase in self-rating well-being than other demographic groups (Cicognani, 2014; Cicognani et al., 2015). The mixed findings in the existing research suggest that further research is needed to understand better how gender differences impact volunteering.

## ***Gender and Other Sociodemographic Characteristics***

Many other factors may affect volunteer rates, and gender is intricately related to these factors. While some studies show no correlation between gender and other sociodemographic characteristics (Niebuur et al., 2018), others indicate intersectional differences (Gutierrez & Mattis, 2014). For instance, when looking at the interconnectedness of education, gender, and volunteering, scholars emphasize that men generally possess more resources for volunteering and charitable giving. Einolf (2011) explains that men's higher level of educational attainment allows them to possess more of the skills needed for volunteering than women. Men also have higher incomes than women in general, and as a result, men tend to have more flexibility for engaging in non-income-generating activities such as volunteering. Einolf (2011) also points out the gender disparity in social capital, noting that the greater amount of social capital among men contributes to their proclivity to volunteer (Einolf, 2011).

In addition to the differences in socioeconomic resources, other factors may also explain gender differences in volunteering. For instance, religiosity has been found to increase a person's likelihood to volunteer (Niebuur et al., 2018; Lim & MacGregor, 2012). Einolf (2011) asserts a close connection between women's religiosity and volunteering, suggesting that women who attend religious services tend to have broader social networks through their religious communities, which contributes to women's proclivity to volunteer. However, in their investigation of the relationship among religiosity, gender, and volunteering in the United States, Paxton et al. (2014) show that Catholic and Protestant women who attend religious services regularly are less likely to volunteer.

Research also suggests that marital and parental status play an important role in predicting volunteering behaviors among men and women (Mesch et al., 2006). While being married increases one's likelihood to participate in voluntary work for both genders, women are more likely to volunteer than men, regardless of marital status (Niebuur et al., 2018). Despite the higher rate of volunteering among married women compared to married men, Einolf and Philbrick (2014) report that newly married women in the United States, but not men, were less likely to volunteer and volunteered fewer hours than before marriage. Research also suggests that parental status is closely linked to volunteering, showing that people with children living in the same household are more likely to volunteer than those without children (Niebuur et al., 2018). However, studies show that mothers are more likely to participate in volunteer roles that impact their children or family, such as parent-teacher associations that often ask parents to give their time, than fathers (Brown & Zhang, 2013). The literature also suggests that women face challenges in volunteering due to their eldercare and childcare responsibilities, which can take their time away from formal volunteering and limit their contribution to the informal sector (Taniguchi, 2006).

The interconnection between gender and various sociodemographic characteristics implies that understanding gender differences in volunteering requires consideration of these intersections. While there is ample evidence that gender impacts one's ability or likelihood to volunteer, other sociodemographic characteristics such as race, sexuality, education, and social class can help explain the prominence of certain groups of volunteers over others. When these factors are examined together, it is easier to explain, for instance, why white women are more likely to volunteer than women of color. The intersections of these sociodemographic characteristics more fully represent a person's identity than a simple male-female dichotomy, and these intersections can determine a person's access to volunteer opportunities and their ability to participate. Future studies should address the intersectionality of identity to gain a robust understanding of the disparities in volunteering.

## ***Work and Volunteering***

Research suggests that the gender difference in volunteer rates could be attributed to the gender inequality in labor force participation and pay (Einolf & Wiepking, 2016; Green, 2016). Although women's labor force participation is at an all-time high of 57.6%, more men (68%) remain in the labor force than women (US Department of Labor, 2024). A report by the US Department of Labor (2024) also shows that part-time employment is more likely for women than men; 22.4% of employed women and 11.6% of employed men work part-time. In the same regard, even though women outnumber men in the completion of advanced degrees, the share of women in the 10 highest-paying occupations in the United States is 35%, which is well below their share of the overall US workforce (47%) (Hurst & Fry, 2023). The male dominance of the highest-paying occupations suggests that men have a greater opportunity cost of volunteering than women, which contributes to a lower rate of volunteering among men. Taniguchi (2006) also suggests that the higher rate of part-time employment among women may encourage women's volunteering, while full-time employment limits the availability of time for volunteer activities.



It has long been believed that volunteering is more prevalent among those who have jobs with more authority and better working conditions (Wilson & Musick, 1997). In many societies, such occupations are dominated by men. Still, scholars argue that gender, occupation, and education play important but distinct roles in volunteering for civil society organizations (Meyer & Rameder, 2022; Rotolo & Wilson, 2007). For example, a 2022 Meyer and Rameder study of European university students reports that occupational status is a leading factor in gender inequality in volunteer positions in sports and political organizations, while educational status is more important in determining volunteer roles in religious and social service organizations.

Research also finds that women with higher commitments to the labor market and a larger share of domestic work are more likely to participate in formal volunteer activities and less likely to engage in informal volunteer activities (Marshall & Taniguchi, 2012). Marshall and Taniguchi used the gender-identification spillover theory to investigate the role of gender in this relationship. They find that women in authority positions volunteer significantly more often than those who do not exercise this power. However, the same study shows that authority plays no role for men in volunteering. Instead, men's volunteering is closely related to their job autonomy, although it is not correlated with women's volunteering.

## ***Conclusion and Directions for Future Research***

The implications of gender differences in rates, motivations, patterns, and impacts of volunteering are intricately related to the broader societal and cultural factors. Wemlinger and Berlan (2016) investigate the relationship between the gender equality context and volunteering across 41 countries using data from the World Values Survey. They find that women are significantly less likely to volunteer in organizations that seek volunteers for traditional male roles, such as activities like building and maintenance, regardless of the gender equality context in the country. The authors juxtapose these traditionally male activities with traditionally female roles, such as preparing and delivering food. They also report that, while women are unlikely to volunteer in traditionally male organizations no matter the gender equality context, women living in countries with high gender equality are significantly more likely than men to volunteer in traditionally female organizations. Women in countries with low gender equality are equally as likely as men to volunteer in traditionally female organizations, which could be a result of the study focusing only on formal volunteering. These women are more likely to engage in informal volunteering than in volunteering with any organization (Wemlinger & Berlan, 2016).

In contrast, while Scandinavian countries are known for high levels of gender equality, Boje et al. (2019) find that men volunteer at a slightly higher rate than women. According to this study, European women are more likely to value the job possibilities and benefits from volunteering than men (Boje et al., 2019). The 2021 study by Bellido et al. of first- and second-generation immigrants in the United States also finds that more gender-equal norms in the country of origin are associated with women devoting less time to volunteer activities compared to men. However, Simonson et al. (2021) show that German women and men are now engaging in volunteering equally for the first time since 1999, as women's volunteering rate has continued to increase while that of men has been slowing down. Van Ingen and Dekker (2011) find no significant differences in gender participation in volunteering in the Netherlands. These research findings imply that social roles are subject to cultural and environmental changes, and the gender differences in volunteering can also change accordingly.

Women in developed countries tend to have greater access to a wider range of charitable options than women in developing countries. Nevertheless, women's volunteering in the informal sector is a long-standing tradition across nations, which has been overlooked in the study of women's philanthropy. For instance, Zook (2023) indicates the difficulty of identifying and counting the community-based, grassroots organizations that utilize the social and economic roles of women in Ghana. Butcher (2010) also points out how the tendency to overlook informal volunteering activities underestimates the generosity of individuals in developing countries. Further, societal expectations of formal giving and volunteering in Western countries have contributed to the underestimation of informal helping, and women's contributions to the community in other parts of the globe have been largely understudied and undervalued (Dean, 2022). Future research would benefit from acknowledging that volunteer activities take various forms depending on historical and cultural contexts. Future research could also pay closer attention to informal volunteering and explore the true extent of gender differences across diverse cultures over time. Lastly, scholars can incorporate the notion of intersectionality into their study of volunteering, which will allow a deeper understanding of how gender-related social norms and cultures shape volunteer involvement among diverse women.

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## 5. GIVING TO WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' ORGANIZATIONS

In 1992, Mary Ellen Capek, then executive director of the National Council for Research on Women, likened having “women” or “girls” in the name of an organization seeking foundation grants to the “kiss of death” (Mead, 2007). Fast forward 30 years, and the situation has not changed much—philanthropic support directed toward organizations serving women and girls still makes up a strikingly small proportion of overall charitable giving, despite growing recognition of the complex challenges faced by women and girls worldwide (Ackerman et al., 2024). This persistent funding gap not only prevents charitable programs from addressing the unique challenges faced by women and girls, such as education barriers, health disparities, and economic marginalization (Mead, 2007), but also limits women’s potential to contribute fully to society and the economy (Arutyunova, 2017). Therefore, addressing this funding gap is crucial for achieving gender equality and broader social progress. Sustainable, long-term investment in women’s and girls’ organizations is key to dismantling systemic barriers, fostering leadership, and empowering women and girls to reach their full potential (Arutyunova, 2017). The disconnect between the growing awareness of the challenges faced by women and girls and the inadequate funding to organizations addressing them underscores the urgent need for a critical examination of current giving patterns within the philanthropic sphere.

The 2015 review of philanthropic behavior reveals a significant gap in the categorization and funding directed toward organizations serving women and girls (Mesch et al., 2015). Despite large-scale surveys such as the Philanthropy Panel Study, specific data on giving to this demographic remains elusive, highlighting a broader issue within philanthropy regarding gender-focused funding.

Major surveys do not categorize giving to women and girls separately, making it difficult to assess the extent of philanthropic support. Studies indicate that only a small percentage of total philanthropic funding benefits women and girls, with US foundations allocating about 6–7% of their funding in this area. In response to funding disparities, women-specific social change funds have emerged, focusing on empowering women and addressing gender discrimination. Women are more likely than men to support feminist organizations and causes, which significantly influences the funding landscape. Women’s funds face challenges related to maintaining grassroots passion amid professionalization and institutionalization.

These findings reveal systemic underfunding of women and girls despite the establishment of targeted funds. While existing women’s funds play a crucial role in addressing these disparities, they face ongoing challenges in sustaining their missions. In the 2015 literature review, WPI described the trend in philanthropic funding for these causes. The following sections offer a comprehensive review of the existing literature on philanthropic giving to women’s and girls’ organizations, analyze the trend in philanthropic giving to these organizations, identify barriers to giving to them, and suggest practices to bridge the funding gap.



## ***The Gender Funding Gap***

The Women's Philanthropy Institute (WPI) created the Women & Girls Index in 2019 (Mesch et al., 2019) and has published an update annually, most recently in 2024 (Ackerman et al., 2024). The 2024 Women & Girls Index indicates that the philanthropic funding received by 54,588 US women's and girls' organizations (which is 3.6% of total charitable organizations) in 2021 was \$10.2 billion, accounting for 1.9% of total charitable giving in that year. Similarly, a recent report by Global Fund for Women (2024) shows that 1.9% of all charitable giving is allocated to organizations serving women and girls. The Ms. Foundation for Women (2020) reports that an even smaller proportion of total giving in the United States by private foundations is directed toward women and girls of color, at just 0.5% of the total \$66.9 billion. It is reported that a greater proportion of philanthropic funding is directed to women's and girls' issues in Europe, with European foundations devoting a median of 4.8% of their funding to these issues (Shah et al., 2011).

Organizations serving women's and girls' causes continue to receive a disproportionately small share of philanthropic resources despite recent growth in their share of total philanthropic funding. Scholars assert that the persistent funding gap hinders progress toward gender equality by marginalizing women's needs and contributions, which in turn presents a significant challenge to creating gender equitable philanthropy. Different factors may contribute to this gap (Mesch et al., 2016, 2019). First, Perez (2019) argues that the lack of data on women's needs and experiences often leads to inadequate allocation of resources, including funding, to areas that disproportionately affect women. Second, the historical underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within philanthropic organizations (Dula, 2022) may perpetuate systemic biases in funding decisions, further exacerbating the gap. Lastly, some donors are hesitant to support organizations that focus solely on women and girls, preferring to fund initiatives that benefit a broader group regardless of gender or to address broader social problems (Mesch et al., 2016).

## ***Closing the Gap***

Although organizations serving women and girls receive a disproportionate share of foundation funding to date, recent trends indicate a promising shift. Foundations are increasingly incorporating gender-focused programs into their portfolios, with some prioritizing areas such as women's economic empowerment, educational access, and healthcare initiatives (Mesch et al., 2019). This growing commitment is evidenced by the rise of women-focused giving circles (Bearman et al., 2017) and donor collaboratives, as well as the emergence of new foundations dedicated specifically to advancing gender equality, such as the Ms. Foundation for Women and the Global Fund for Women. Additionally, several large-scale philanthropic initiatives—such as the Gates Foundation (2024), through its Gender Equality strategy and Equality Fund—have dedicated significant resources to addressing the unique challenges faced by women and girls worldwide. These developments suggest an increasing awareness of the importance of addressing women's and girls' issues and closing the gender funding gap. Below is a discussion about what helps address the gender funding gap.

## ***Women in Nonprofit Leadership***

The literature suggests that organizations with gender-diverse boards are more likely to produce gender-equitable outcomes (Cook & Glass, 2016). In particular, research consistently demonstrates that the gender composition of a nonprofit's board affects the organization's funding decisions. Dula (2022) finds that organizations with more women on their boards tend to allocate more resources to organizations serving women and girls, underscoring the importance of board gender diversity in addressing gender inequities. Ostrower (2007) echoes this finding; using surveys of more than 5,100 nonprofit organizations in Indiana, she finds a positive correlation between female board representation and the percentage of female clientele served by the nonprofit. Further bolstering this argument, Azevedo et al. (2021) report that gender diversity on the boards of US community foundations is linked to increased funding for initiatives promoting women's equity and broader social justice goals. These findings provide support for a gender-sensitive approach in philanthropy, emphasizing the critical role of gender diversity in nonprofit leadership in shaping philanthropic priorities and promoting equitable outcomes (Mead, 2007).

## ***Women's Funds and Donor Activism***

Women donors have played a pivotal role in supporting causes related to women and girls, manifesting a powerful alignment between values and giving. Throughout history, women philanthropists have been a driving force in advancing women's rights and social change through leveraging social networks, establishing foundations, and collaborating with grassroots movements (Johnson, 2017). Research consistently shows that women are more likely to donate to women-focused organizations and contribute larger sums than men (Dale et al., 2019; Mesch et al., 2016). Key motivations for these donors include direct experiences with gender inequality, a belief in the wider social benefits of supporting women's rights, and the perceived effectiveness of relevant organizations (Dale et al., 2019; Mesch et al., 2016). Studies also show that social norms play a significant role in women's philanthropy (Dwyer et al., 2018).

Recently, there has been a substantial shift in the philanthropic landscape driven by the emergence of female mega-donors. This phenomenon is intertwined with broader socioeconomic changes, including the increasing wealth and financial independence of women. As Mesch and Pactor (2016) highlight, women's growing participation in the workforce, their increased educational attainment, and the decreasing gender pay gap have all contributed to their amplified financial capacity. The increase in women's wealth has empowered them to become major players in philanthropy, as evidenced by the growing presence of women among high-net-worth donors (Dale & O'Connor, 2021; Shaw-Hardy et al., 2010). This transformation in women's economic standing and philanthropic influence marks a significant departure from historical patterns, where women's contributions were often relegated to the domestic sphere (Johnson, 2017). Today, women are actively shaping the philanthropic landscape, leveraging their financial resources to support causes they are passionate about and fueling significant social change. These changes will help close the gender funding gap.



## The Evolution of Women’s Philanthropy

Table 1 describes the history of women’s philanthropic activism, which profoundly shaped philanthropy for women and girls. The evolution of women’s philanthropic activism shows how women have strategically used their resources to challenge social injustices and drive progress toward gender equality. Women’s philanthropy in the United States has its roots in the early charitable activities organized by women, which were based mainly on their religious beliefs. In the early centuries, women’s giving was primarily rooted in religious benevolence and moral reform, addressing issues like poverty and education. However, as women gained more social and political agency, their involvement in philanthropy expanded to encompass broader movements for abolition, suffrage, labor rights, civil rights, and women’s liberation. This broadening of focus led to the establishment of dedicated women’s funds in the late 20th century.

The 1980s witnessed a surge in the creation of women’s funds, which championed a model of targeted funding and advocacy for women and girls (Brilliant, 2000; Rose, 1994). These funds, often organized under the Women’s Funding Network, operate on a distinct model that prioritizes women-led decision-making and grantmaking processes. In addition to providing essential financial resources, women’s funds cultivate a unique space for donor activism, where women actively shape the philanthropic landscape, bringing both passion and strategic vision to their role. This evolution culminated in the 21st century, with women philanthropists engaging in global feminism, environmental justice, LGBTQ+ rights, and movements like #MeToo, showcasing the growing influence and diverse impact of women’s philanthropy on a global scale.

**TABLE 5.1: Historical Evolution of Women’s Philanthropic Activism**

Time Period	Movement/Era	Key Themes & Focus Areas	Notable Figures & Organizations
18th–Early 19th Century	Early Benevolence and Religious Organizations	Charitable giving, poverty relief, religious institutions, moral reform	Female Charitable Society of Boston, Quaker women’s societies
Mid-19th Century	Abolition and Women’s Rights Movements	Anti-slavery, women’s suffrage, education, social reform	Harriet Tubman, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, American Female Moral Reform Society
Late 19th–Early 20th Century	Progressive Era	Settlement houses, labor rights, public health, child welfare	Jane Addams, Hull House, Women’s Trade Union League
Mid-20th Century	Civil Rights and Women’s Liberation Movements	Racial justice, gender equality, reproductive rights, anti-war activism, intersectionality	Coretta Scott King, Gloria Steinem, National Organization for Women, National Black Feminist Organization
Late 20th Century	Women’s Philanthropy Movement	Empowering women and girls through targeted funding and advocacy	Women’s Funding Network, Ms. Foundation for Women, Global Fund for Women

**TABLE 5.1 CONTINUED**

Time Period	Movement/Era	Key Themes & Focus Areas	Notable Figures & Organizations
Late 20th– Early 21st Century	Global Feminism and Philanthropy	International women’s rights, environmental justice, LGBTQ+ rights, education	Melinda Gates, Global Fund for Women, Women’s Funding Network
21st Century	#MeToo Movement	Addressing sexual harassment and assault, promoting gender equality, holding abusers accountable	Tarana Burke, Time’s Up, National Sexual Assault Hotline

### ***Future Directions***

The historical trajectory of women’s activism and philanthropy reveals both continuing progress and persistent challenges. There are several areas to inform future philanthropic efforts based on the existing research on philanthropy for women’s and girls’ issues. First, while women have made tremendous strides in mobilizing resources and advocating for social change, the inequitable and inadequate funding for women’s and girls’ organizations remains a reminder that more progress must be made (Ackerman et al., 2024). Future philanthropic efforts must prioritize closing the funding gap for these organizations through intentional strategies, such as promoting greater diversity and inclusion in philanthropic leadership to ensure that funding decisions reflect the needs and priorities of diverse communities (Azevedo et al., 2021; Dula, 2022).

Next, the lack of consistent categorization within large-scale philanthropic surveys presents another challenge in analyzing philanthropy for women and girls (Dale et al., 2018). Philanthropic efforts that benefit women and girls often fall under broader headings, making it difficult to isolate the precise amounts.

Also, examining philanthropic giving patterns beyond the United States and Europe, particularly those within the Global South, will provide essential knowledge and highlight distinct models of giving. International giving to women’s and girls’ issues presents complex considerations, including donor priorities, geopolitical factors, and the capacity of local NGOs (Osili, 2013). Exploring these dynamics illuminates both opportunities and limitations within global efforts.

Furthermore, an intersectional approach that acknowledges the interplay of gender with sociodemographic factors like race, class, sexual orientation, and disability is vital (Ford et al., 2021). Understanding women’s philanthropy requires moving beyond the exclusive focus on the dichotomous gender identity and examining how marginalized identities within the broader category of “women and girls” shape both access to resources and philanthropic considerations.

Lastly, the rise of donor-advised funds (DAFs) is another trend that affects philanthropy for women and girls. Because DAFs provide increased opportunities for directed giving, they can allow women who want to support women’s and girls’ issues to make a direct impact (Mesch et al. 2019). It is crucial to explore the potential benefits DAFs offer, along with raising awareness of accountability concerns and the need for transparency within this giving vehicle.



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## 6. GENDER AND LEADERSHIP

Women have had a tremendous influence as leaders in the nonprofit sector. Women's grassroots activism has been the foundation for important social movements, including abolitionism, suffrage, and reproductive rights. Despite the immense contributions of women, understanding women's roles as nonprofit leaders is a challenging task. A primary challenge in defining and assessing women's leadership in the sector derives largely from the discrepancy between women's contributions and their representation in primary leadership positions of nonprofit organizations. Although women make up the vast majority of the nonprofit sector's workforce, their share in leadership positions, both on governing boards and in top management, has not matched the gender composition of the sector's workforce (Lee, 2019). While women comprise two-thirds of the US nonprofit workforce (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023), surveys of nonprofit organizations show that women hold only about half of the top CEO positions and board seats in the sector (Clerkin, 2024; Faulk et al., 2021; Miller & Vagins, 2018).

The disparity between women's representation in nonprofit leadership and the workforce is not only an issue of gender equity but also raises important questions about organizational outcomes due to different leadership styles, priorities, and ethical standards between male and female leaders (Lee, 2024). Moreover, the persistent gender gap in the sector's leadership implies that nonprofits have been reproducing the prevailing gendered leadership norms and expectations based on masculinity (Holgersson & Hvenmark, 2023). The gendered nature of nonprofit leadership suggests that examining nonprofit leadership from a gender perspective will provide insights into how nonprofit organizations work to address social problems by utilizing resources, providing services, and engaging stakeholders. The 2015 literature review did not include a section on gender and leadership, as scant research tackled this issue at that time. In the past decade, there has been increasing scholarly interest in the gendered nature of philanthropic leadership, which allows the current literature review to offer an in-depth review of the topic.

### ***Gender and Nonprofit Executive Leadership***

Women make up around half of the CEO positions in the US nonprofit sector, creating a perception that women face better prospects for advancement in the nonprofit sector than in other sectors where the percentage of women holding top executive positions is smaller (Lee, 2019). However, national studies show that men still outnumber women substantially as CEOs of larger nonprofit organizations. In 2016, the majority of US nonprofit organizations with budgets over \$15 million were run by male directors. In contrast, organizations with budgets under \$15 million were more often run by female directors than by male directors (Candid, 2025). Another report by the Faulk et al. (2021) reveals that 58% of US organizations with budgets less than \$250,000 are led by women, whereas women lead only 23% of organizations with a budget of over \$50 million.

The underrepresentation of female CEOs in larger, more resourceful nonprofit organizations suggests the existence of a glass ceiling in the sector, which is more pervasive among high-budget organizations (Lee & Lee, 2021). Scholars explain that gender stereotypes impose different perceptions of status-worthiness and competence that are based on leaders' gender, and as a result, women experience greater challenges and resistance regarding their fitness for leadership positions in larger organizations (Ridgeway, 2001; Sampson & Moore, 2008). The literature suggests that gender

stereotypes and bias, which equate masculinity with leadership, diminish the likelihood of women's advancement to top leadership positions, especially in larger and more resource-rich organizations (Ridgeway, 2001). The disproportionate share of women in leadership in large nonprofits is not only a matter of numbers and figures but also has direct implications for nonprofit management, performance, and accountability (Lee, 2024). Below is a discussion about implications of the underrepresentation of female CEOs in high-budget nonprofit organizations.

### ***Gender Pay Gap***

First and foremost, the disproportionate share of women as CEOs of larger nonprofit organizations implies that CEOs are treated differently based on gender. Larger organizations have more financial resources and typically offer their executives higher salaries and better benefit packages than smaller organizations (Lee & Lee, 2021). Therefore, the underrepresentation of women in the top management of larger organizations results in a gender gap in nonprofit CEO compensation. Research confirms a persistent gender pay gap among nonprofit executives, regardless of service type or region (L'Herrou & Tynes, 2020). According to Charity Watch (2023), among 41 US nonprofit C-level executives who received more than \$1 million in compensation, less than 30% (12 out of 41) were women. Even though the pay gap has been declining in the past decade, Candid's 2023 Nonprofit Compensation Report finds that female CEOs still earn 73 cents for each dollar male CEOs earn in the United States (Colar, 2024).

### ***Employee Motivation***

Another important implication of the underrepresentation of women as CEOs of larger organizations is its impact on women staff working in nonprofits and pre-career women who want to work in the sector. The nonprofit sector has always employed a predominantly female workforce, and research finds that younger generations of women working in nonprofit organizations aspire to lead their organizations in the future (Di Mento, 2014). Moreover, women substantially outnumber men in attaining graduate education in nonprofit management, as well as graduate education in general (Evans et al., 2023). Hence, the persistent underrepresentation of women in top leadership positions within larger organizations will discourage women who want to pursue nonprofit careers, leading to demotivation and turnover of women working in the sector (Lee, 2019). This, in turn, will create recruitment and retention problems in the sector.

### ***Accountability***

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the lack of female leadership in large nonprofits can affect how these organizations are managed, which is directly related to the issue of accountability. The literature suggests that a CEO's gender is linked to organizational transparency, with organizations led by women being more likely to disclose key financial and non-financial information than organizations led by men (Ismail et al., 2020; Janahi et al., 2021; Lee, 2024). Taylor et al.'s (2019) study of environmental nonprofit organizations in the United States shows that organizations with a female CEO are more likely to disclose diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) data to the public. Similarly, Wicker et al. (2022) find that female executive leadership significantly reduces human resource and financial problems in nonprofit sports clubs. Overall, these findings suggest a link between women's leadership and accountability and transparency, suggesting that increasing the representation of women in top executive positions contributes to improved governance and performance of nonprofit organizations.



## ***Gender and Nonprofit Governing Boards***

In nonprofit organizations, the governing board has the ultimate fiduciary responsibility for governance. The board not only engages in mission setting and oversight but also performs administrative and management functions, which include diverse activities associated with managing stakeholders, hiring executives and managers, and designing structural operations (LeRoux & Langer, 2016). The board's important role in setting strategic directions implies that the demographic composition of the board has a significant impact on organizational dynamics and outcomes. In the context of gender diversity, what are the implications of women's representation on nonprofit boards?

### ***Gender Diversity in Top Management***

The literature suggests that gender diversity on the board of governance is closely related to a variety of positive outcomes, including overall gender equity within the organization. First, research finds that women's representation on the board increases the likelihood of appointing a woman in a top executive position and other C-level positions (Cook & Glass, 2015; Lee, 2019). The representative bureaucracy theory, which posits that the demographic representation of a group leads to the active representation of the group in terms of promoting the group's interest, provides support for the positive relationship between women's representation on the board and having a female CEO (Lee, 2019). According to the theory, an underutilized demographic group forms group-sensitive attitudes, which in turn encourage group-sensitive behaviors and actions. In other words, an increased presence of women on the board can help female board members realize the gender disparity in executive leadership and motivate them to hire a female CEO. The literature cites other theories, including the trickling-down effect, critical mass, and agency theories, to explain how increasing women's representation on boards is a solution to the underrepresentation of women in top management (Biswas et al., 2023; Cook & Glass, 2015).

### ***Gender Pay Equity***

In addition to hiring more women in leadership positions, research reports that the board's gender composition is linked to the treatment of female executives (Carter et al., 2017). The literature suggests that the stereotypical view of masculinity as a leadership trait affects the board's evaluation of CEOs, resulting in less favorable evaluations of female executives (Hill et al., 2016). Therefore, even when women ascend to leadership positions, they still face disparate treatment in terms of compensation and power compared to their male colleagues and are paid less than their male counterparts (Coleman, 2020). Lee (2023) also suggests that having a board with a heightened awareness of gender discrimination can contribute to the fair treatment of female CEOs by addressing gender-related biases and stereotypes in decision-making. Moreover, research shows that female directors are more likely to propose and implement diversity and equal opportunity policies broadly promoting gender equity (Biswas et al., 2021). Andrews (2023) finds that women's representation on boards of public service organizations improves the positions of other women in those organizations, including a diminished gender pay gap.

## ***Board Performance and Accountability***

Research also suggests evidence that women's representation on the board promotes superior board performance (Brown & Harris, 2023; Dula et al., 2020). The literature distinguishes between masculinist and feminist ethics in governance style, emphasizing the dominant discourses of relationship and caring of female leaders. Scholars argue that gender diversity on the board may challenge the dominance of masculinist ethics, which is focused on financial gains, and can promote commitment toward higher ethical standards within the board (Kakabadse et al., 2015). Dula et al. (2020) find that women's representation on US nonprofit boards has a significant impact on certain cultural aspects of board performance, including collegiality, stewardship, interpersonal relationships, building public trust as well as improved performance in terms of self-assessment and strategies, specifically when these organizations have a female board chair, and they are comprised of 30% or more women.

## ***Organizational Outcomes and Impact on Community***

Finally, women's representation on the governing board can also lead to more equitable organizational outcomes. Cook and Glass (2016) find that organizations with gender-diverse boards are more likely than other organizations to offer LGBTQ+-friendly policies. Their findings underscore the role of gender representation on the board of governance in determining organizational outcomes and accountability to diverse constituents, implying that board gender diversity is linked to other dimensions of diversity, equity, and inclusion beyond gender. Research also indicates that greater female representation on the board is correlated with serving a higher number of female-focused groups and funding organizations that serve women and girls, suggesting that having more female board members affects an organization's mission alignment (Dula, 2022; Ostrower, 2007). These research findings suggest that the impact of women's representation on the board goes beyond organizational boundaries.

## ***Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research***

This review has focused on women's leadership in nonprofit organizations, focusing on the implications of the increased presence of women in nonprofit board and executive leadership. This review of the literature reveals that barriers to women in their pursuit of nonprofit leadership still exist, and these barriers have a negative impact on organizational outcomes. Therefore, removing barriers and addressing both conscious and unconscious biases and stereotypes can lead to positive outcomes in terms of employee motivation, governance, and service to clients, ultimately contributing to improved organizational accountability.

Currently, data on the demographic information of nonprofit leaders are limited. In studying gender and nonprofit leadership, researchers have leveraged preexisting gender data from resources such as Candid (Brown & Harris, 2023), which relies on online searches (Lee, 2019), administered questionnaires (Gibelman, 2020), or identified gender based on first names manually (L'Herrou & Tynes, 2020). More recently, researchers have adopted an algorithmic prediction approach by utilizing statistical software to predict gender from first names (Dula, 2022). Although Candid's database provides leader demographic information, the information is still incomplete, as not all organizations provide complete information (Cai & Yu, 2023). The Urban Institute and BoardSource also publish



data on executive leadership gender composition in the United States, but their information does not include the latest developments (BoardSource, 2021a, 2021b). Despite continued efforts to collect comprehensive gender data and improvements in their accuracy, the existing information is subject to selection bias and other limitations. A census of nonprofit executives and board members in a limited geographic area (e.g., a metropolitan area) might enable a more comprehensive examination of diversity in nonprofit leadership and its implications for nonprofit management and the community.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the need to expand research on women's leadership beyond the dichotomous male-female approach. All women's experiences are not the same, and more research on the experiences of women of color and women with other marginalized identities will contribute to a deeper understanding of their journey to nonprofit leadership positions and the challenges they face. Hence, future research should examine nonprofit leadership from an intersectionality perspective, considering gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity, among others. More cross-national studies on gender and nonprofit leadership are also vital for understanding how social and political contexts affect gender dynamics in philanthropic leadership. Understanding the role of gender in nonprofit leadership and how it intersects with other identities and cultural contexts will help nonprofits build diverse, equitable, and inclusive cultures, as well as ensure accountability and maximize their impacts on society.

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## CONCLUSION

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Taken together, the research summarized in this literature review paints a complex picture of women's philanthropy and leadership. Women are active and influential participants in philanthropy, motivated by values of care, community, and social justice, and increasingly engaged in diverse forms of giving. They give at high rates, support a wide range of causes, and are at the forefront of collaborative and innovative giving models. Women also play a growing role as nonprofit and philanthropic leaders, though structural barriers and gendered expectations continue to shape their experiences and opportunities.

At the same time, important gaps remain in the knowledge base. More research is needed to understand the intersectional dimensions of women's philanthropy, particularly how race, class, sexual orientation, and other identities influence giving patterns and leadership pathways. Longitudinal studies could shed light on how women's philanthropy evolves over time and across generations, while comparative international research would expand understanding beyond the U.S. context. Further investigation into the long-term effects of collective giving, the impact of women's philanthropic leadership on organizational outcomes, and the ways women use philanthropy as a tool for social and political change would all advance the field.

As women's wealth and influence continue to grow, their potential to shape philanthropy and society more broadly will only increase. Ongoing research that captures this complexity is essential for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers who seek to strengthen the philanthropic sector. By charting what is known and calling attention to what remains to be explored, this review provides a foundation for the next decade of inquiry into women's philanthropy and leadership.





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