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Women in Leadership:

The Stereotyping of Women

Amanda L. Crawford

Communication Studies Department

Northwestern University

Abstract

Combining research in leadership, gender roles, stereotyping and politeness, this study looks at expectations of how women in leadership positions utilize polite speech within the business world and how those expectations change when the job is no longer male oriented. We found women, in typically female jobs, are not held to the communal stereotype that would expect them to use democratic leadership style, indirect requests, and low status-modifiers, when speaking with subordinates. Women in typically female jobs are much more accepted when leading in an autocratic style than women in typically male jobs as found in Experiment 1. We also found that subordinate gender did effect perception of a female leader, even in typically female jobs. Male subordinates found women to be less polite than female subordinates in typically female settings as found in Experiment 2.

An Analysis of Women in Leadership

Leadership

Leadership in past studies has been attributed to two things: intrinsic traits (perceived or real) and situation. Carlyle in 1907 hypothesized that great leadership was a result of truly great men (Carlyle, 1907). Since then we have learned much more about leadership – enough to know it is not the result of just one factor. Most importantly, leadership is at the very least, found in the eye of the follower (Chemers, 2000).

Leadership and Gender Role

Chemers (2000) suggests there are three theoretical explanations for the types of differences between male and female leaders: Biologically Different (hormones, temperament etc.), Culturally Different (socialized for different roles), and Structurally Determined (relative standing in organizational structures). However, practical differences yielded very few differences in actual leadership ability (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992; Chemers, 2000). Leadership styles vary, especially in request directness and therefore perceived politeness, but there is negligible difference in real leadership ability between men and women. Practical differences aside, the real problem with women in leadership positions seem to be the attitudes of those around them. Disparaging feelings toward women in the workplace consisted of attitudes such as, "[women] lacked career orientation, leadership potential and were undependable and emotionally unstable – all of which made women unsuitable candidates for management." (Bass, Krusell, & Alexander, 1971). Even as recently as 1989, Heilman Block, Martell, & Simon replicated the study, still finding little change in attitude. Polls about women in business said

that despite executives more favorable view of women, the majority still think only a truly exceptional woman can succeed in the business world (Sutton & Moore, 1985).

Why, if there is insignificant ability difference, are women perceived as less competent leaders? The unfounded attitudes we hold are the larger concern for our understanding of women in leadership.

Leadership and Stereotypes of Gender

The widespread attitudes people have about women in leadership positions are a perception with no objective basis, hence called stereotypes. The Gender-Role Theory (Eagly, 1987) says that people develop expectations for their own and other's behavior based on beliefs about what is appropriate for men and women. In a more concrete example, if a woman were to open a car door for a man before she walked around to get in the car herself, we might find her behavior odd based on what we know of men and women's typical behavior. It would be an example that is in conflict with our expectations. The Correspondent Inference Theory states the less likely an act, given the actor's situation, the stronger are perceiver's inferences that the actor's underlying disposition corresponds to the actor's behavior (Jones & Davis, 1965; Jones & McGillis, 1976). In other words, when a behavior is in conflict with our expectations, we seek to find a state of cognitive consistency. Using the Fundamental Attribution Error to explain the cognitive inconsistency, we assume the behavior is an outward show of underlying attributes or traits.

These two theories also hold true in the workplace. A term known as Gender-Role Spillover is the idea that gender-based expectations of behavior carry over from social interactions into the workplace (Gutek & Morasch, 1982). So in addition to the expectations and

stereotypes people hold socially, when in an organizational setting they also rely leadership and management stereotypes (Phillips & Lord, 1982). As women enter the workplace, stereotypes of women and leaders and gender role all must be taken into account to understand how they are viewed.

Stereotyping is one of the larger hurdles for women in leadership positions. As previously mentioned, leadership is as much (or more) an idea in the minds of followers as a reality of leaders themselves (Eden & Leviatan, 1975). When a person is perceived by a negative stereotype, it is very hard to change because one would have to change the co-workers attitude. However, when provided with unambiguous and undeniable information about performance effectiveness, undervaluation of women does not occur (Heilman, Martell, & Simon, 1988; Nieva & Gutek, 1980; Pheterson, Keisler, & Goldberg, 1971). For example, when a female leader's management success is proven and known to be outstanding, her performance will not be evaluated using gender stereotypes but instead by the available known information. It is as if women leaders are assumed incompetent until proven competent.

The stereotype of women in society is what researchers call "Communal" (Bakan, 1966). Women are seen as friendly, unselfish, concerned with others and emotionally expressive. Men on the other hand are stereotyped as "Agentic" (Bakan, 1966). They are independent, masterful, assertive and competent. The differences in these roles are obvious by the nature of the descriptions. What complicates them more is the similarity between the Agentic stereotype and the stereotype of a good leader. Strong leadership is also characterized as independent and assertive and competent. Women generally lead in a more democratic and participative style than men (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). Men are autocratic in leadership style (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). But when women don't lead in the style that is expected of them

and lead in a more "manly, autocratic" style, the attributes, which were ascribed to them as, distinct from men and from successful managers, are hardly pleasant ones (Heilman, Block, Martell, & Simon, 1989). Women are noted for negative qualities, such as bitter, quarrelsome and selfish, and others suggest they have an unbridled ambition for power and achievement. This description seems to conform to the "Bitch" role-type, which often has been alluded to in characterizations of high-power career women (Heilman, et al., 1989).

Men and women also differ largely in "task orientation" (i.e. perceptions of tendencies to have subordinates follow rules and procedure, maintain high standards and make leader and subordinate rules explicit. Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). Men are rated lower in task orientation and therefore more favorably. Women, however are rated more highly in task orientation and therefore less favorably (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). These results occur even when the task orientation is at the same level for both men and women. People only perceive a difference. Seeing women as more task oriented may be a reflection of the greater contrast between the leadership role and the gender stereotype (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). Women with masculine leadership styles exacerbate their role conflict and increase the likelihood of unfair negative evaluation (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992).

With task orientation and communal and agentic stereotypes, it is logical that studies have found the skepticism of women's capability in leadership is exaggerated when they take charge in an especially authoritative manner (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). When women deviate as greatly as to seem autocratic where the stereotype would suggest they should be communal, the distance between the stereotype and the behavior causes discomfort to the subordinate and they will try to reconcile the two. Eagly et al. would suggest the reconciliation takes place by using negative stereotypes. Female behavior, when autocratic, is regarded as

more extreme than men's, as a result of deviation from stereotypes (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992).

Yet another deviation amplification of the female stereotype results from fewer women than men in high-status positions (Crocker & McGraw, 1984; Kanter, 1977; Taylor et al., 1978). This connects logically to Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky's findings in 1992, stating the more masculine a stereotype a woman portrays in a business leadership position, the more at odds others will be with her stereotype and will seek to "mediate their discomfort." Assertive and forceful behaviors when exhibited by a woman become negatively evaluated.

Unfortunately there is a "lack of fit" perception between women and power (Eagly, 1987; Heilman, 1983; Heilman, Block, Martell, & Simon, 1989). The more autocratic and directive mannerisms a female shows, the more negatively she is seen. Gender stereotypes cause women's behavior to be interpreted differently than if a man were in the same situation. The very same behavior that would have been deemed acceptable for a man is now unacceptable because the actor is a woman (Fiske, Bersoff, Borgida, Deaux, & Heilman, 1991). This gives men a much greater flexibility of management styles (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992).

Politeness Theories and Women in Leadership

Part of the "lack of fit" perception is caused by the way in which men and women speak and are expected to speak. People vary their request directness to a certain degree because they are looking to increase compliance (Jordan & Roloff, 1990). However, using uncertain or tentative language limits women's ability to express themselves and puts them at a disadvantage when interacting with others (Lakoff, 1975). In fact, individuals who speak tentatively are evaluated less favorably than those who speak assertively (Wiley & Eskilson, 1985) and are

considered less credible and attractive (Erikson, Lind, Johnson, & O'Barr, 1978). Moreover, women who speak tentatively are considered less intelligent and knowledgeable than men who speak tentatively (Bradley, 1981), so the use of tentative speech would appear to interfere with a women's ability to influence more than a man's ability to influence (Carli, 1990).

In spite of this, women have a tendency to speak less directly then men do (Lakoff, 1975). According to Lakoff (1975), women's tendency to use less powerful speech is manifested in their tendency to swear less, speak more politely and use more tag questions, intensifiers, and hedges.

Several reasons have been suggested for women's less direct request patterns. One is that status changes the directness of a request (Carli, 1990). The Expectation States Theory suggests that inequalities in face-to-face interactions are a function of the relative status of participants (Berger, Fisek, Norman, & Zelditch, 1977). Status is culture specific and situation dependent. In America, age occupation, attractiveness and gender can all act as diffuse status characteristics: characteristics of a person that are used particularly in the absence of specific information, to assess his or her competence, ability or value (Berger & Fisek, 1974; Berger, Rosenholtz, & Zelditch, 1980; Eagly, 1983). Diffuse status characteristics act in the same way as a heuristic or stereotype.

Men and women are stereotyped as inherently high and low status respectively as witnessed by findings that stereotypical feminine traits are evaluated less favorably than stereotypical masculine traits (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972) and that women are considered to be less competent than men (Lockheed & Hall, 1976; Meeker & Weitzel-O'Neil, 1977).

In the workplace gender can act as a diffuse status characteristic. Consequently, dominant or assertive behavior among women would be least appropriate when they are interacting with men (Berger et al., 1980; Meeker & Weitzel-O'Neil, 1977). This fits with the research on women in leadership and how they are less desirable when their style is too agentic. It is likely that subjects in past research on language have used gender to infer status, because in much of this research subjects have been strangers who had little specific information about one another (Carli, 1990). Diffuse status characteristics are more likely to be used under such conditions (Carli, 1990).

Along the lines of status effecting request directness, which in turn effects perceived politeness, exhibiting competent or dominant behavior can be construed as an attempt to gain status or influence, and such attempts are considered inappropriate in people who are low in external status, regardless of their level of competence (Meeker & Weitzel-O'Neil, 1977).

However, stereotypical gender differences in languages may occur for reasons unrelated to status (Carli, 1990). Brown and Levinson (1987) also subscribe to this idea, and would instead suggest stereotypical gender differences in language are a result of saving face. There are two kinds of face we could be trying to save: negative face, which is the concern for our own autonomy and ability to make our own decisions, or positive face is our concern for our solidarity and belonging to the in-group (Brown & Levinson, 1987). As requests become more indirect, multiple meanings are more possible and so the request becomes less face threatening because the receiver retains their own autonomy to do as they please and feel accepted in the group because the speaker is polite.

However, leadership intrinsically involves being able to issue imperatives, without consistently taking into consideration other's face concerns. Brown and Levinson (1987) found

that higher-status and polite speech have a negative correlation. Therefore, the higher-status the person, the more likely they are to forgo niceties. This finding, combined with the Expectation States Theory would suggest that women, as a result of their lower stereotypical status, are already expected to use less direct requests (Berger, Fisek, Norman, & Zelditch, 1977). These factors would only seem to exacerbate the already existing problems when applied to women in leadership positions because women could be seen as consciously lacking consideration for positive face, aggravating the problem women in leadership already encounter.

Most research that has been done on gender and leadership style does not go so far as to even specify job type. Knowing that most jobs are typically male oriented (business, finance, law, marketing, telecommunications, etc.), it stands to reason that the research done in the past has been in typically male jobs. What should change our expectations, stereotypes, and justifications is if the leadership position occurs in a typically female job (nursing, teaching, interior decorating, special events, etc.).

As mentioned, women in typically male jobs are expected by stereotype to be polite, but are actually perceived as impolite and autocratic. Even when gender behavior in reality is the same between both male and female leaders, women are still seen as less polite. Following this logic, as a main effect I expect that in typically female jobs, women are expected to be in leadership positions and as such will be perceived as significantly more polite than women in typically male jobs, even when their style is increasingly autocratic.

I also expect that politeness perception will vary depending on the sex of the subordinate. It is most likely that male subordinates, even when in a more typically female job, will still find women leaders more impolite that female subordinates.

Experiment 1

Since the expectation for women in typically male jobs has already been established in previous studies there was no need for a pretest. In my first experiment, I will examine the expectation that women in typically female jobs, women are expected to be in leadership positions and as such will be perceived as significantly more polite than women in typically male jobs, even when their style is increasingly autocratic. Using Appendix 1, I would expect that cells b and d will be lower than cells a and c as research suggests. However, I also expect that cells f and h will be higher than cells b and d, and will be at a minimum equal to cells e and g, if not higher (especially higher in cell g).

Method

Overview and Design. The experiment is a 2x2x2 design. The eight cells cross leadership style: autocratic/democratic, leader gender: male/female, and job type: typically male/typically female (Appendix 1).

Participants. The subjects are approximately 120 MBA students enrolled at the Kellogg Graduate School of Management at Northwestern University who have had an average of four years field experience and hence time to create their own ideas about women in leadership. The study is a requirement in a general management class and is tested in groups of approximately 10 to 20 (according to class size).

Procedure. The study is designed to test the basic idea of the aforementioned hypothesis in the effect job type has on the perception of women in leadership positions.
The subjects are given a written dialogue between leader and subordinate. The directions simply state: Please read the following dialogue and then answer the questionnaire. There are three

different manipulations in the dialogue: autocratic leadership style/democratic leadership style, male/female leader, and typically male/female jobs (Appendix 2). After reading the dialogue, the subject is asked to answer a questionnaire. The questionnaire has the subjects rate the leadership style of the fictitious leader in the dialogue. Students utilize a 7-point semantic differential scale where they record the strength of their attitude regarding attitudes and stereotypes of the leader in the dialogue (Appendix 3). Dependent measures are divided between autocratic or democratic and polite or impolite as shown in Appendix 4.

Leadership Style Manipulation. As seen in Appendix 2, leadership style is varied by the use of imperatives for autocratic style and unifying pronouns, tag questions, polite words, and intensifiers for democratic style.

Leader Gender Manipulation. As seen in Appendix 2, leader gender is varied by the use of names. "Ms Clevenger" is used for the female leader and "Mr. Barrett" is used for the male leader.

Job Orientation Manipulation. As seen in Appendix 2, changing the "place" seen at the top of the form varies job orientation. A typically female job is shown as "Saint Alban's High School" and a typically male job is shown as "Morgan Stanley, Wall Street."

Experiment 2

Once we have the results from Experiment 1, we can then determine the effect it would have if the "assistant" were not genderless. According to past research, since dominant or assertive behavior among women is least appropriate when they are interacting with men (Berger et al., 1980; Meeker & Weitzel-O'Neil, 1977), I expect that politeness perception will vary depending on the sex of the subordinate, even in typically female jobs. It is most likely that male

subordinates, even when in a more typically female job, will still find women leaders more impolite that female subordinates. This study is designed to test the same interactions as above, only adding sex (male or female) to the assistant.

Method

Overview and Design. The experiment is the same as Experiment 1, only this time it asks the student to imagine he or she is the assistant in the dialogue. The variables cross leadership style: autocratic/democratic, leader gender: male/female, and job type: typically male/typically female and subordinate gender: male/female.

Participants. The subjects are approximately 120 MBA students, half men and half women, enrolled at the Kellogg Graduate School of Management at Northwestern University who have had an average of four years field experience and hence time to create their own ideas about women in leadership. The study is a requirement in a general management class and is tested in groups of approximately 10 to 20 (according to class size).

Procedure. The study is designed to test the basic idea of the aforementioned hypothesis in the effect job type has on the perception of women in leadership positions.
The subjects are given a written dialogue between leader and subordinate. The directions simply state: Please read the following dialogue and then answer the questionnaire. There are four different manipulations in the dialogue: autocratic leadership style/democratic leadership style, male/female leader, typically male/female jobs, and male/female subordinate (Appendix 5). After reading the dialogue, the subject is asked to answer a questionnaire. The questionnaire has the subjects rate the leadership style of the fictitious leader in the dialogue. Students utilize a 7-point semantic differential scale where they record the strength of their attitude regarding

attitudes and stereotypes of the leader in the dialogue (Appendix 3). Dependent measures are divided between autocratic or democratic and polite or impolite as shown in Appendix 4.

Leadership Style Manipulation. As seen in Appendix 5, leadership style is varied by the use of imperatives for autocratic style and tag questions, polite words, and intensifiers for democratic style.

Leader Gender Manipulation. As seen in Appendix 5, leader gender is varied by the use of names. "Ms Clevenger" is used for the female leader and "Mr. Barrett" is used for the male leader.

Job Orientation Manipulation. As seen in Appendix 5, changing the "place" seen at the top of the form varies job orientation. A typically female job is shown as "Saint Alban's High School" and a typically male job is shown as "Morgan Stanley, Wall Street."

Subordinate Orientation Manipulation. As seen in Appendix 5, "assistant" is now replaced with "you."

Discussion

By using a controlled environment as an alternative to a field study, it will be easier to actually assure the actions of males and females in leadership positions will be exactly the same. It is important to remember that politeness is not the only factor effecting how subordinates see their managers, and so by having the exchange in writing, we limit other factors such as source attractiveness, tone of voice and non-verbal communication (gesticulations).

Also, by using MBA students I have used a very specific group. Firstly, they are highly cognizant of research on gender and leadership. This could affect the results of their

questionnaires. Secondly, they are also largely from typically male jobs and might have a bias when answering a questionnaire about a more typically feminine job. Both should be taken into consideration when cumulating and interpreting results.

By placing a woman in a typically female job, she is brought closer to the communal stereotype and it is therefore expected to mediate the effect of gender stereotypes in leadership. Because she holds a more typically feminine job and is not competing with men, she becomes less of a threat to the "in-crowd" or the "old boys network." If leadership is indeed in the mind of the followers, then this should help to rectify the stereotypes and alter the idea of a successful leader.

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Appendix 1

Study design: Corresponding methodological diagram

	Autocratic Style		Democratic Style	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Perceived Politeness in Typically Male Jobs	a	b	c	d
Perceived Politeness in Typically Female Jobs	e	f	g	h

Appendix 2

Experiment 1: Dialogue

Place: Morgan Stanley, Wall Street (Saint Albans High School)

Mr. Barrett (Ms Clevenger): I need you to (Would you please) get the information I (we) need for the meeting this afternoon. Have it ready by (Would you please have it prepared by) three o'clock so that I (we) can go over it (to make sure nothing is missing).

Assistant: Sure, no problem.

Mr. Barrett (Ms Clevenger): Also compile (Oh, and would you also compile the) budget numbers (so if we are asked any questions we will be able to answer them knowledgeably). If you have (any) problems, look at old budget reports (feel free to ask Mary in accounting for help).

Mr. Barrett (Ms Clevenger): (Any questions?)

Appendix 3

Experiment 1: Depended measures decoded

Independent	Autocratic/Democratic
Masterful	Autocratic/Democratic
Assertive	Autocratic/Democratic
Competent	Autocratic/Democratic
Autocratic	Autocratic/Democratic
Democratic	Autocratic/Democratic
Direct	Autocratic/Democratic
Strong	Autocratic/Democratic
Friendly	Polite/Impolite
Selfish	Polite/Impolite
Respectful	Polite/Impolite
Polite	Polite/Impolite
Charismatic	Polite/Impolite
Emotionally Expressive	Polite/Impolite
Concerned with Others	Polite/Impolite

Appendix 4

Experiment 2: Dialogue

Place: Morgan Stanley, Wall Street (Saint Albans High School)

Mr. Barrett (Ms Clevenger): I need you to (Would you please) get the information I (we) need for the meeting this afternoon. Have it ready by (Would you please have it prepared by) three o'clock so that I (we) can go over it (to make sure nothing is missing).

Assistant: Sure, no problem.

Mr. Barrett (Ms Clevenger): Also compile (Oh, and would you also compile the) budget numbers (so if we are asked any questions we will be able to answer them knowledgeably). If you have (any) problems, look at old budget reports (feel free to ask Mary in accounting for help).

Mr. Barrett (Ms Clevenger): (Any questions?)