

Leader-Gender Stereotypes in Female Congenial Workplaces

–Dhvani Patel*

ABSTRACT

The present study is an attempt to study the attribution patterns of employees toward descriptions of leaders in a female congenial workplace. 100 preschool teachers employed at various playschools located in Vadodara city served as sample for the study. The sample respondents completed a questionnaire that comprised of preliminary information and the Indian Gender Role Identity Scale (IGRIS) by Basu (2010). The data thus generated was subjected to ascending means to find out the frequency with which adjectives were chosen from the Scale. The results revealed that a leader in a female congenial workplace is largely described with masculine adjectives and lesser with feminine adjectives.

Keywords: *Stereotypes, Gender Congenial Workplaces, Female Leaders, Leader Stereotypes*

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalised society, the number of female employees at the workplace has witnessed a steady growth. However, the number of women reaching to leadership positions is still very low. Either owing to the phenomenon of 'glass ceiling' in male dominated workplaces, or due to the phenomenon of 'glass escalator' as visible in female dominated workplaces; the number of women making to the top of the hierarchy is a rarity. The advent of women into the workforce which has been a welcomed feature across cultures, has its own set of challenges. It is difficult to break the stereotypes stemming from the age old concept of the division of labour. Acceptance of women in the workplace is as difficult to accept as is the acceptance of men sitting at home and being consumed in household chores.

* Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Baroda, Gujarat, India. Email: dhvani.patel@gmail.com

Stereotyping is everybody's business! It is basically a process of making judgments about individuals by virtue of their being members of a particular group. Whenever an individual walks into a particular space, the first automatic categorization process that we engage in, is addressing them as male or female. Gender stereotypes are beliefs held toward the roles played by males and females in a particular social context that essentially differentiate the two genders. Since men have been more concentrated into leadership roles and other higher authority positions, they are attributed with agentic characteristics akin to dominance and assertion; and since women have been tied down to subordinate positions and caretaking behaviours, they are attributed with the communal characteristics of warmth, kindness and the like. Basu (2008) described leader-gender stereotypes as characteristics that differentiate between a male leader and a female leader.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It has become a well-researched fact that leader stereotypes are more in congruence with masculine traits (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011; Schein, Mueller, Lituchy, & Liu, 1996), thereby making males more desirable candidates for leadership positions and females as less desirable candidates for the same. Eagly and Karau (2002) in their Role Congruity Theory proposed that women in leadership position face a 'no-win' situation. They further explained that female leaders experience incongruence between gender roles and leader roles. Since leadership is largely attributed in masculine terms, females often face a challenge of fitting into the stereotypical image of a leader. But when a female does succeed to attain a leadership position, she is not as favourably evaluated as her male counterpart (Bass, 2000). If a female leader exhibits communal traits that are congruent with her gender role, she is perceived as a less effective leader, and if a female leader displays agentic traits that are congruent with her leader role, she is criticized for leaving behind her 'feminine-niceness' (Rudman & Glick, 2002).

Workplaces are either more congenial to male leaders or female leaders (Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995). Men have been found to be more effective in roles that are masculine in nature and women have been found to be more effective in roles that are less masculine in nature. Numerous studies in the past have focused on leadership styles and evaluations of female leaders in traditionally male dominated workplaces. These studies have compared and contrasted male and female leaders on

a number of dimensions (Eagly & Johannesen- Schmidt, 2001; Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Gardiner and Tiggemann (1992) pointed out that in an industry, both gender and the gender ratio affect the leadership styles and mental health of leaders. For instance, in an industry where males dominate numerically, female leaders experience more stress and worse mental health as compared to their male counterparts in the same industry. Relatively less research has focused on the leadership styles and patterns of attribution in female dominated workplaces.

Patel and Biswas (2016) reveal in their study that although male and female leaders are predominantly described in masculine terms, the feminine attribute of ‘understanding’ has emerged as a prerequisite to the leader being perceived as effective. This study finding signifies a change in the stereotypical image of the leader in general. In traditional male occupations (for instance, the police force), leaders, both male and female, are still largely described in masculine terms (Patel & Biswas, 2016). This could be very well explained by the concept of ‘organizational socialization’ (Eagly & Johnson, 1990) which states that men and women within the same organization are subjected to similar environments, thereby reducing the gender differences between male and female leaders. Coleman (2003) noted from his study that both men and women school principals incorporated both masculine and feminine attributes in their self-descriptions, although leaning more toward the feminine. On similar lines, Edwards and Perumal (2014) noted in their study on educational leaders in rural school communities, that there were exceptions to the ‘male stereotypical leadership image’ in a highly patriarchal community and these exceptions were tending toward a feminist approach and setting examples of an androgynous approach to educational leadership.

On the backdrop of existing research on gender and leadership in the gendered context, the present paper raises the following research questions?

- Would leaders in a female congenial workplace be described in congruence with leader roles?
- Would leaders in a female congenial workplace be described in congruence with their gender roles?

METHODOLOGY

Sample- In order to meet the requirements of the study, the researcher identified playschools as workplaces more gender congenial to females.

The sample for the study comprised of preschool teachers, from playschools located within Vadodara city. The total sample size for the study was 100 respondents, with the mean age of 32.15 years. From the total sample, 98 were female respondents and only two were male respondents. The sample respondents were either working under the designation of a teacher, an assistant teacher or as a counsellor. Out of the 100 sample respondents, 32 were reporting to a male head (principal/director) and 68 were reporting to a female head (principal/director).

Tools- A questionnaire packet was made, consisting of preliminary information (age, gender, occupation, name of the organization, gender of the leader and designation of the leader) and the Indian Gender Role Identity Scale (IGRIS) by Basu (2010). The scale comprises of 30 adjectives, grouped as ten masculine, ten feminine, and ten neutral adjectives. The list of adjectives is displayed in table 1. The researchers, through a random process of chit picking, arranged the 30 adjectives in a random order. Respondents were required to rate their respective leaders on each of these 30 adjectives on a seven-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Table 1: The Items for the Masculinity, Femininity and Neutral Categories of IGRIS

Sr. No	Masculine	Feminine	Neutral
1	Active	Affectionate	Adaptive
2	Adventurous	Domestic	Disciplinarian
3	Ambitious	Easily expresses tender emotions	Friendly
4	Athletic	Feminine	Flexible
5	Courageous	Graceful	Generous
6	Hard working	Nice	Happy
7	Independent	Quiet	Helpful
8	Masculine	Submissive	Pleasant
9	Powerful	Sympathetic	Reserved
10	Strong Personality	Understanding	Tender

Note: From “Development of the Indian Gender Role Identity Scale” by J. Basu, 2010, Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology, 36 (1), 25-34.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data was coded and subjected to SPSS package 21 for statistical analysis. In order to find out how a leader is described in a female congenial workplace, descriptive statistics was used and a command for ascending means was given. For the convenience of discussions, the present paper will focus on the five more frequently chosen attributes, and five least chosen attributes for descriptions of the leaders.

Table 2: The Most Frequently Chosen and Least Chosen Attributes and Their Mean Values of Leader Descriptions in Female Congenial Workplaces

Sr.no	Most frequently chosen attributes	Mean values	Least chosen attributes	Mean values
1	Hardworking (M)	6.31	Feminine (F)	4.99
2	Strong personality (M)	6.28	Domestic (F)	4.84
3	Active (M)	6.18	Quiet (F)	4.72
4	Nice (F) Independent (M)	6.08	Masculine (M)	4.69
5	Understanding (F)	6.04	Reserved (N)	4.49

M= Masculine, F= Feminine, and N= Neutral

Table 2 displays the five most frequently chosen and five least chosen attributes in descriptions of a leader at female congenial workplaces. The mean scores indicate a greater use of the masculine adjectives of ‘hardworking’, ‘strong personality’ and ‘active’ in descriptions of the leader. Along with the masculine adjectives, the feminine adjectives of ‘nice’ and ‘understanding’ are also maximally used in leader descriptions. This finding is in tune with the study finding by Patel and Biswas (2016) that revealed that in order for a leader to be perceived as effective, he/she needed a display of both masculine and feminine attributes. This finding applied to leaders belonging to both male- and female-congenial workplaces. Cann and Siegfried (1990) further noted that effective leadership is a possibility when leaders display masculine (structuring) as well as feminine (consideration) behaviours.

Research studies in the past have highlighted that the perceiver’s gender has a major role to play in the evaluation of male leaders and female leaders. Eagly, Makhijani and Klonsky (1992) report that males evaluate female leaders less favourably than their female counterparts.

Furthermore, a study on college students by Deal and Stevenson (1998) report male students as less likely to evaluate female managers on the lines of agentic qualities. Out of the 100 sample respondents for this study, 98 were female preschool teachers. The attribution pattern of leaders in a female congenial workplace (playschools) is largely reflecting the perceptions of females. Along with masculine attributes, feminine attributes have gained a position in descriptions of even a female leader, in a female congenial workplace. As evidenced by Vinnicombe and Singh (2002), women are still on the lines of ‘think manager, think male’, that continues to erode their confidence in putting themselves forward for promotions.

Table 2 further reveals that the feminine attributes of ‘quiet’, ‘domestic’, and ‘feminine’ are less likely to be used in describing an individual in leadership position. Also, the attributes of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are less frequently adopted in descriptions of leaders.

Table 3: The Adjectives in the Order of Ascending Means Showing Descriptions of Leader in Female Congenial Workplace

Sr.no	Adjectives	Mean values
1	Reserved (N)	4.49
2	Masculine (M)	4.65
3	Quiet (F)	4.72
4	Domestic (F)	4.85
5	Feminine (F)	4.99
6	Submissive (F)	5.10
7	Tender (N)	5.13
8	Easily expresses tender emotions (F)	5.29
9	Affectionate (F)	5.35
10	Athletic (M)	5.38
11	Adventurous (M)	5.45
12	Flexible (N)	5.45
13	Sympathetic (F)	5.48
14	Ambitious (M)	5.71
15	Adaptive (N)	5.72
16	Disciplinarian (N)	5.76
17	Pleasant (N)	5.78
18	Generous (N)	5.89
19	Friendly (N)	5.91

20	Graceful (F)	5.94
21	Helpful (N)	5.96
22	Courageous (M)	5.96
23	Powerful (M)	5.98
24	Happy (N)	5.98
25	Understanding (F)	6.04
26	Independent (M)	6.08
27	Nice (F)	6.08
28	Active (M)	6.18
29	Strong personality (M)	6.28
30	Hardworking (M)	6.31

M= masculine, F= feminine, N= neutral

Table 3 displays all of the 30 adjectives of the IGRIS in the ascending means. The mean values indicate that out of a total ten, the sample respondents have used masculine attributes more frequently in descriptions of a leader in the female congenial workplace. Crawford (2000) has also stated that “women in typically female jobs are more accepted when leading in an autocratic style than women in typically male jobs”. The lower mean values of feminine attributes indicates toward its lesser use in descriptions of the leader. The middle range mean values belong to the neutral attributes. This pattern of attribution reveals that although lesser feminine attributes are still used to describe a leader, few feminine attributes are considered essential for a leader’s description. Use of neutral attributes in leader descriptions indicates that in a female congenial workplace, the stereotypical image of the leader is still evolving and undergoing changes. A definite picture of the leader is yet to emerge. Gray (1987) has already emphasized on the feminine culture of primary schools and asserted on the requirement of appropriate management styles from heads. A recent study by Schein (2001) points toward a less stereotypical image of leadership, held more among women than among men in the United States. Furthermore, Patel & Biswas (2016) reported in their study findings differences in the attribution pattern between male and female leaders. While male leaders were predominantly described in masculine terms, uniformly and consistently by employees across varied organizational sectors, attributions toward female leaders observed a lot of variations. The use of neutral attributes in the present study indicates the same. Though the conceptualizations of male leaders in traditional male

occupations denotes clarity and uniformity, the same cannot be said about conceptualizations of leaders in a female congenial workplace.

CONCLUSION

Research findings in the past have repeatedly and consistently described effective leadership in largely masculine terms. However, the present study points out the effectiveness of a leader being gauged by requiring both the 'consideration' behaviours as well as the 'structuring' behaviours; behaviours that represent the feminine and masculine attributes respectively. Thus, we can say that leaders in a female congenial workplace are described more in congruence with their leader role, and lesser in congruence with their gender role. Perhaps a shift in focus on an androgynous nature in leader descriptions would change the age old mind set of perceiving leadership in masculine terms only. An extended effort may be required by future researchers to study the leadership styles and behaviours of leaders in the female congenial workplaces. In addition, the focus has to shift from the gender of the leader to the situational determinants and organizational demands in descriptions of effective leader behaviours.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In an attempt to study gender stereotypes in a female congenial workplace, the present study selected playschools as the sample organizations, thereby restricting the study's generalizability. Attempts should be made to explore leader gender stereotypes in other traditional female occupations, for instance in the health sector (nursing) and the development sector (NGOs) in order to draw a common consensus on leader stereotypes at the female dominated workplaces. Furthermore, playschools drawn for the present study were located within Vadodara District, and therefore, careful considerations may be taken in generalizing the findings of the study. In addition, a small sample size (n=100) also serves as a limitation for the study. Lastly, the present study mainly focused on the descriptive leader stereotypes of the existing leaders but was unable to generate whether these descriptive stereotypes would result in a positive or a negative evaluation of the leader's functioning. Further research efforts in this direction should be able to provide an understanding of the prescriptive and proscriptive leader stereotypes in female congenial workplaces.

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