

Biases in Appraisals of Women Leaders

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In a variety of group settings, members favor men over women when selecting and evaluating leaders, even when actual leadership behaviors are held constant. Leadership categorization theory (R. B. Lord & K. J. Maher, 1991) and social role theory (A. H. Eagly, 1987) suggest that these biases result from discrepancies between individuals' stereotypes about women and their implicit prototypes of leaders. The authors examined this role-incongruence hypothesis in small groups led by women who adopted a relationship- or task-oriented leadership style. Group members with liberal attitudes regarding women's roles responded positively to both leadership types. Group members with conservative attitudes felt the task-oriented leader was more effective, but they also rated her more negatively on measures of collegiality. These results suggest that individuals' reactions to women leaders are tempered by their expectations about the role of women and men in contemporary society.

Studies of men and women in positions of leadership reveal no convincing evidence of male superiority (e.g., Eagly, Karau, & Makhi-jani, 1995), but evaluative and perceptual biases among group members persist (Eagly, Makhi-jani, & Klonsky, 1992; Rojahn & Willemsen, 1994; Shackelford, Wood, & Worchel, 1996). Both men and women, when surveyed, express a preference for male bosses (e.g., Rubner, 1991). Men more so than women gradually emerge as leaders in small, unstructured discussion groups (Bartol & Martin, 1986; Eagly & Karau, 1991). Women leaders are perceived as less dominant than men leaders (Snodgrass & Rosenthal, 1984). Women receive lower evaluations and fewer promotions than men even when actual performance data or behaviors are held constant (Geis, Boston, & Hoffman, 1985; Heilman, Block, & Martell, 1995). Despite changes in the public's overall attitude toward women, group members continue to be biased against women leaders (Gallup, 1990).

Leadership categorization theory (Lord & Maher, 1991) and social-role theory (Eagly,

1983, 1987) suggest that these biases result from discrepancies between individuals' stereotypes about women and their implicit prototypes of leaders. Leadership categorization theory assumes group members possess "implicit leadership theories" that describe the behaviors, abilities, and traits needed for effective leadership. Drawing on Rosch's (1975) theory of category structure, categorization theory explains individuals' evaluations of leaders in terms of prototypicality (Lord, Foti, & De Vader, 1984; Lord, Foti, & Phillips, 1982). Prototypicality refers to the extent that a particular stimulus and its attributes may be classified as representative of a category. As applied to leadership, Lord and his colleagues postulate that individuals possess leadership prototypes and match the target leader to their leadership prototype in order to form perceptions of the target's leadership. Hence, a target who is perceived to possess attributes matching an observer's leader prototype will be attributed leadership by that observer, whereas a target who is perceived to possess attributes matching an observer's non-leader prototype will not be attributed leadership by that observer.

Eagly's (1987) social-role theory suggests that people's leadership prototypes are more congruent with their assumptions about the roles men traditionally occupy. Because women are typically excluded from leadership positions group members may be more familiar with men in positions of leadership (Heilman, 1995).

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Group members may also assume that the skills and abilities needed for successful leadership are masculine ones (Dodge, Gilroy, & Fenzel, 1995; Nye & Forsyth, 1991). Although successful leadership depends upon two basic factors—the ability to motivate the members to reach task completion and ability to meet socioemotional needs of the group—many group members overemphasize the task (masculine) side of leadership (Stogdill, 1974). If women are considered to be the socioemotional experts rather than the task experts, their basic leadership skills will be undervalued (Forsyth, Schlenker, Leary, & McGown, 1985). In sum, group members may question the ability of women leaders because of the alignment of this role “with stereotypically male qualities and therefore with the male gender role” (Eagly et al., 1995, p. 126).

Do group members' implicit leadership prototypes, coupled with their stereotypes about men and women, contribute to their bias against women leaders? The current study examined this question by exposing individuals with differing views about women's roles to a woman who used either a relationship-oriented leadership style or a task-oriented leadership style. The woman leader worked with two men and two women on a series of group and individual tasks in a laboratory setting. The leader, who was selected from among the group members on the basis of her scores on a leadership test, was in actuality a confederate of the experimenter. In some groups she enacted a task-oriented leadership style, but in others she focused on the socioemotional side of leadership. Each group included two individuals who were conservative in their attitudes toward the role of women in contemporary society, and two more liberal-minded individuals, based on their scores on the Attitudes Towards Women Scale (Spence & Helmreich, 1978).

We predicted that conservative subordinates would be less satisfied with a woman leader, regardless of her leadership style, than liberal subordinates. We also predicted differences in their reactions to the two types of women leaders. The relationship-oriented woman leader matches traditional stereotypes about women, but likely violates conservative members' leadership prototypes. Moreover, even though a task-oriented leader may fit their leadership prototypes, she violates their sex-role stereo-

types. Prior studies suggest that individuals are more negative toward women leaders who use autocratic or directive forms of leadership, perhaps because such leadership behaviors are particularly gender-incongruent (Eagly et al., 1995). Hence we expected that the conservative individuals would rate the task-oriented leader as less effective than the relationship-oriented leader.

Method

Participants

A total of 85 individuals (41 men and 44 women) recruited from introductory psychology classes participated in mixed-sex groups led by one of three women confederates. All sessions were conducted by one of three male experimenters. All groups—except in several cases when one of the participants failed to keep his or her appointment—included two individuals who were conservative in their attitudes toward the role of women in contemporary society and two liberal individuals, as measured by the Attitudes Towards Women Scale (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). The three confederates ran a balanced number of groups across the two experimental conditions.

Procedures

The woman confederate joined the participants as they waited for the experiment to begin, and acted as an ordinary participant might. Once all participants had arrived the experimenter explained he was investigating “factors that affect patterns of behavior in groups.” He also noted that because most groups work on a variety of tasks, their group would be performing various activities individually and in face-to-face groups. He also stated that because most groups have leaders, one would be selected for this group: “Because you do not know one another well we have devised a questionnaire that measures attributes that are important determinants of a leader's ability.”

After participants signed consent forms the experimenter distributed a bogus but face-valid “Leadership Assessment Survey.” It included general attitude measures, an index of social sensitivity, and short descriptions of leadership situations and possible responses. Participants recorded their answers on machine-scorable testing forms.

When all participants were finished, the experimenter took several minutes to score each test. He then called out the confederate's name and asked her to identify herself. He explained to her, and the group as a whole, that she would be acting as the group

leader during the session. He told groups randomly assigned to the task condition that the woman had been selected to be leader because her scores on the leadership inventory indicated that she would

guide the group toward the successful completion of tasks. As group members, we become dissatisfied when we fail to successfully complete the task at hand, so it is very important for a leader to facilitate group performance by structuring tasks, proposing solutions, coordinating group members' actions, and improving communication.

He told groups assigned to the relationship condition that the leader was selected because she would

create positive interpersonal relationships between all group members. As group members, we become dissatisfied when people can't work well with one another because of interpersonal conflicts and lack of cooperation, so it is very important for a leader to promote good intermember relations by developing a positive group atmosphere, reducing or avoiding conflict, and showing concern for others as individuals.

The confederate, after some hesitation and specific instruction from the experimenter, guided the group as it worked on several tasks. Although nonverbal behaviors such as gaze, smiles, posture, and gestures were standardized, verbal comments made during the group discussion were manipulated. Each leader was required to make eight standardized comments during the intervention, with the content of the comments stressing either task orientation or relationship orientation. In the task-oriented leader condition the leader emphasized the importance of succeeding at the task and outperforming other comparable groups. She suggested ways to approach the tasks and reminded group members of procedures as necessary. For example: "Well, I guess I'm supposed to lead the group, so why don't we get started on the task. The directions make our task pretty clear, so let's start by everyone reading out their clues to the group. I'll start." and "Let me interrupt for a second. Can anyone think of a better way to get the task done? Any improvements? Okay, just checking." When groups were assigned the relationship condition, the leader asked members to introduce themselves, and she used their names throughout the session. She encouraged members to work together, and asked them several times if they felt comfortable with the procedures. For example: "Well, I guess I'm supposed to lead the group, so why don't we start by introducing ourselves by first names. There's no reason why we can't be friendly." and "Let me interrupt for a second. Does anyone feel like they want to add something? Feel like they've been left out? Okay, just checking."

After the exercises the leader was apparently dismissed and the remaining members completed questionnaire measures of the leader's abilities, their

perceptions of the leader, and a checklist adapted from the SYMLOG General Behavior Descriptions Inventory (Bales, 1980). SYMLOG consists of 27 adjective phrases that tap into three dimensions of interpersonal behavior: dominance/submission ("active, dominant, talks a lot" vs. "passive, introverted, says little"); friendly/unfriendly ("friendly, equalitarian" vs. "unfriendly, negativistic"); and instrumentally controlled/emotionally expressive ("analytical, task oriented, problem solving" vs. "shows feelings and emotions"). Scores could range from +18 (more dominant, friendly, or instrumentally controlled) to -18 (more submissive, unfriendly, emotionally expressive). We debriefed all participants when they finished the questionnaires.

Results

Manipulation Check

Group members' responses to the item "The person who was chosen to be the group leader was most concerned with" could range from *creating positive interpersonal relations* (1) to *accomplishing the group task* (9). A $2 \times 2 \times 2$ (Sex \times Attitudes Toward Women \times Style of Leader) analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed only a significant main effect of leader on this item, $F(1, 84) = 6.27, p < .05$. The means for the task- and relationship-oriented confederates were 4.61 and 3.16, respectively.

Perceived Leadership Effectiveness

A multivariate analysis of three 9-point items assessing satisfaction with the leader, willingness to accept the leader in other group settings, and perceived leadership effectiveness revealed a significant main effect of sex and an interaction of leader and attitudes toward women; Pillai's trace F approximations with dfs of 3 and 74 were 2.93 and 2.60 ($p < .05$). The sex main effect reached univariate significance on only the satisfaction item; men were less satisfied than women. The means, with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction, were 7.12 and 7.77, respectively.

The means for the two-way interactions of leader's style and attitudes toward women on these three items are shown in Table 1. All three items reveal a similar pattern. Contrary to expectations, conservative participants were more satisfied with the performance of the task-oriented group leader. Liberal participants

Table 1
Effects of Attitudes Toward Women and Leadership Style on Ratings of the Leader's Effectiveness

Item and attitude toward women	Leadership style	
	Task	Relationship
"How satisfied are you with the performance of the group's leader?"		
Conservative	7.70 _a	6.61 _b
Liberal	7.30 _{a,b}	7.95 _a
"Would you be willing to accept this person as your leader in other group settings?"		
Conservative	6.96 _{a,b}	6.68 _{a,b}
Liberal	6.55 _b	7.26 _a
"In your opinion, was your group leader effective or ineffective?"		
Conservative	7.17 _{a,b}	6.82 _b
Liberal	7.05 _{a,b}	7.42 _a

Note. Higher scores indicate more positive ratings. Means without a single common subscript differ at $p < .05$.

were more satisfied with the relationship-oriented leader, although this preference only reached statistical significance for the item *Would you be willing to accept this person as your leader in other group settings?* As a result the conservative participants were more negative than the liberal participants when their leader adopted a relationship-oriented style.

Liking for the Leader

Multivariate analysis of three 9-point items assessing attraction to the leader revealed only a marginally significant main effect of attitudes toward women; Pillai's trace F approximation with dfs of 3 and 75 was 2.22 ($p < .10$). Relative to liberal participants, conservatives liked the leader less, $F(1, 77) = 4.99$, $p < .03$; the respective means were 6.90 and 6.28. They were also more negative than liberal participants when asked if the leader would be "easy to get along with," $F(1, 77) = 4.34$, $p < .05$, with respective means of 7.46 and 7.97.

SYMLOG Ratings

Differences emerged on the instrumental and friendliness dimensions of SYMLOG. On the instrumental dimension, only the main effects of sex and leader reached significance, $F_s(1, 75) = 4.47$ and 6.45, $p_s < .05$. Women rated the

confederate as higher in instrumental control relative to the men; the means were 2.36 and 1.12, respectively. In addition, the task-oriented leader was viewed as more instrumental than the relationship-oriented leader; the means were 2.50 and 0.98.

The means for the interaction of leadership style and attitudes toward women on the friendliness dimension, $F(1, 75) = 4.12$, $p < .05$, indicated that the task and relationship leaders were rated equivalently by liberal group members. The means were 8.00 and 7.95, respectively. Conservative participants, in contrast, felt the task-oriented leader was less friendly than the relationship-oriented leader ($p < .05$). The means were 6.21 and 8.95.

Discussion

Social-role theory argues that women in leadership positions face a dilemma: When they perform the behaviors required for effective leadership, they violate subordinates' "conventions concerning appropriate female behavior" (Eagly et al., 1992, p. 5). As a result they are often evaluated more negatively than men leaders. This negativity, furthermore, may be more apparent when women use autocratic or domineering management methods, because these leadership strategies are particularly gender incongruent.

The current findings support Eagly's (1987) analysis, for individuals who likely possessed more traditional stereotypes about women—high scorers on the Attitudes Towards Women Scale—judged women leaders more harshly than individuals whose attitudes about women were less stereotyped. Conservative participants liked their leaders less than the more liberal group members, and they felt she would be harder to work with. Conservative participants were also more negative than the liberal participants when the leader enacted a relationship-oriented style. They felt such leaders were friendlier, but they nonetheless gave higher effectiveness ratings to the task-oriented leader.

These findings generally affirm both categorization and social-role theory, with some limitations. Conservatives reacted more negatively to the task-oriented leader as predicted, but only when rating her likability. They actually rated these leaders more positively in terms of effectiveness. This mixed reaction to the task-

oriented leaders may reflect the incongruity between their prototypes about leadership and their stereotypes about women. They may have responded more favorably, at the cognitive level, to the task-oriented woman leader because she more closely matched their stereotypically masculine leader prototypes. At the affective level, however, they may have responded more favorably to the relationship-oriented woman leader because she more closely matched their stereotypical views of women. As a result, they were more accepting of the performance of the task-oriented leaders, but they rejected them at the personal level.

The results also suggest that biases against women are not restricted to men. Men were less satisfied with the woman leader relative to women, and they rated her low in terms of instrumental control. Overall, however, attitudes toward women, and not biological gender, accounted for appraisals.

These findings have implications for leaders working in a variety of settings. We examined reactions to leaders in short-term groups meeting in an experimental setting, so the findings themselves should not be generalized to other settings until additional research is conducted. The theoretical models that were supported by the research, however, are not specific to short-term groups, for they describe cognitive and perceptual processes that operate in any group no matter what its context. Employees in a business setting have expectations about the proper qualities and behaviors of a leader and they may also believe that certain behaviors are more appropriately performed by men rather than women. Perceptual repercussions are likely if their manager acts in ways that are inconsistent with those leadership prototypes or sex-role stereotypes.

These cognitive biases may also influence perceptions of leaders in therapeutic groups. Prior studies of general leadership prototypes suggest that group members expect their leaders to be dominant, friendly, and instrumentally controlled (Nye & Forsyth, 1991). Prototypes about the leaders of therapeutic groups, however, may differ substantially from prototypes about leaders in managerial or decision-making contexts. Studies of leadership in therapeutic groups have identified the task and relationship clusters found in studies of general leadership (e.g., Lieberman, Yalom, & Miles, 1973; Waldie,

1982). Task components include setting limits and rules, identifying goals, monitoring time spent on issues, and demonstrating technical or theoretical expertise. Relationship components include monitoring interpersonal conflict, increasing cohesiveness, expressing warmth and support, and facilitating emotional expressions. Group members, however, may not enter therapy with clear expectations about their therapist's behaviors and qualities, or their therapist may act in ways that are inconsistent with those expectations (Dies, 1994). Their expectations may also be predicated on their stereotypes about men and women in general, and hence may create incongruities for men and women therapists and add complexities to groups with male and female coleaders (Marshall & Kratz, 1988). Clearly additional research is needed to describe both the content of clients' and laypersons' prototypes regarding group psychotherapists and the impact of these prototypes on their reactions to treatment.

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