Gendered ideas about leaders: Do they affect leadership in higher education

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Abstract

This article examines the research that has been conducted on gender stereotypes, leadership styles, and the efficacy of higher education institutions. In addition to this, it discusses the implications of this research for the fields of social psychology and organizational development. The distinctions between the two leadership archetypes of "friendly vs. competent" and "aggressive vs. communal" set the setting for a discussion of social psychological studies that investigate how stereotypes influence the decisions that are made by leaders. There are additional methods available for overcoming misconceptions and incorporating feminist concepts into leadership styles that are prioritized. There are numerous gender stereotypes that have a significant impact on the ways in which women and men behave in every aspect. In the domains of social psychology and organizational development, gender stereotypes help us understand how women are perceived in settings when they need to be leaders, as well as how women see themselves in those contexts. The manner in which men and women lead tends to vary, which has an effect on how effective leaders are seen to be. This study compares descriptive studies of gender problems in education leadership with studies of leadership in other settings in order to investigate how this body of work may be used in higher education leadership. Specifically, this study looks at how this body of work can be used in academic administration. In addition to this, it provides strategies for overcoming preconceived notions and expectations.

Keywords: Gender, Leadership, Higher Education, Gender Stereotypes, Leadership Effectiveness, Organizational Dynamics, Gender Equity.

Introduction

Two of the themes that were covered in the in-depth study on gender stereotypes are particularly pertinent to a discussion about leadership because they demonstrate how different things are expected of male and female leaders. According to a stereotype about women that was published in 1977 and expanded upon by Goodwin and Fiske in 2001, "competent" and "friendly" are polar opposites when seen along a single attribute dimension. Therefore, one must choose between being skilled but unapproachable or not being skilled at all but being approachable. People have the misconception that those who have a more masculine appearance are better suited for positions of authority.

It is possible for women to be feminine, warm, and inept, or masculine, cold, and capable. Women who are cold are also perceived as less feminine, which adds another layer to the mix.

The second distinction that can be made between "aggressive" and "communal" leadership styles is the emphasis placed on the group's needs. Community behavior examines the dynamics of how communities function and how decisions are reached, in contrast to agentic behavior, which focuses on the actions of individual actors.

People have the misconception that you can't be agentic and communal at the same time because they believe that these two behaviors can't coexist with one another. Also, according to Eagly and Carli (2007), people believe that women have a stronger sense of community than males do.

According to researchers that specialize in the social psychology of stereotypes, the context in which judgments are formed is one of the most significant factors to consider. There has been a significant amount of investigation into the ways in which context influences judgments; however, a recently published study that focuses on leadership situations enhances the analysis. People are put in a variety of scenarios that need varying degrees of concentration so that the experiment may be conducted. If an individual is attentive, rather than mentally overwhelmed, they are more likely to adjust how they think about leadership based on the gender of the person they are observing than if they are mentally overloaded. When evaluating the efficacy of a leader, it appears that people who are overburdened do not pay attention to characteristics of stimuli persons such as gender. According to Sczesny and Kuhnen

(2004), this indicates that gender does not play a role in determining how effective a leader is in this stage.

These mental states have some bearing on the ways in which people's preconceptions about leadership are influenced by stereotypes. Scott and Brown (2006) investigated the ways in which people process information when they watch leaders carry out their responsibilities. According to the findings of their research, participants had a difficult time making the connection between leadership behavior and leadership characteristics when the action being analyzed was agentic and the person being analyzed was a woman. In other words, the likelihood of female leaders remembering characteristics of community leadership was lower than the likelihood of them remembering characteristics of agentic leadership. When a woman was in charge of the company, employees had less access to the agentic qualities of the mind compared to when a man was in charge. When participants judged their own leadership abilities, the same phenomenon happened, which demonstrates that people absorb conventional views.

The gender bias that exists in leadership positions becomes apparent very early on in the information-processing stage. The reasoning behind this is based on the concept that pertinent characteristics are mechanically saved whenever behaviors that fit those characteristics are processed. That is, information about actions is kept differently depending on whether or not stereotypes are present. That indicates that it will be difficult for female leaders to convince their coworkers that they are agentic, and this perceptual bias may make it more difficult for female leaders to perform successfully in their employment. However, Scott and Brown did discover something interesting: individuating knowledge is an effective method to minimize the impact of stereotypes on how people see themselves and how they think about others. This gives individuals optimism that if they learn about someone's leadership style, they will have fewer preconceived opinions about them once they have gained more information about them.

Organizational Psychology on Gender and Leadership

The events that occurred as a result of organizational psychology can be better understood by gaining an understanding of the mental processes that contribute to stereotyping. College students and business leaders from a variety of settings are

studied by researchers who investigate the relationship between gender and leadership. One of the recurring ideas is that strong leadership and feminine demeanor are incompatible with one another. Methods such as this one are sometimes referred to as the "think manager-think male" strategy (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; Sczesny, 2003). The magnitude of this effect as well as its frequency varies from study to study, which demonstrates the significance of exogenous factors such as how cultures shift throughout the course of time and space. For instance, certain circumstances could cause preconceptions to become more obvious. It is possible that leaders may be expected to act in ways that are generally associated with men in an organization if the customary style in which things are run is one that is direct, insensitive, or top-down. For instance, because of gender stereotypes that say competence and warmth of personality are polar opposites, this assumption may make it more difficult for women leaders in that firm to establish a healthy balance. This is due to the fact that women are more likely to be seen as cold and distant.

Things that transpired in the past might be able to explain some of the discrepancies in opinion that exist between people with regards to gender and leadership. According to Eagly and Sczesniak (2009), who conducted a comprehensive assessment of gender studies, women leaders are frequently at a disadvantage in situations in which stereotypes about women, men, and leaders are distinct from one another. The cultural and historical currents that are reflected in this list are the sources of these notions.

Although there have been some shifts in cultural beliefs regarding women, men, and leaders in support of women, these changes aren't necessarily reflected in all of the research. Even if there is evidence to suggest that bias has diminished, there is still a strong preference for male bosses, despite the fact that this preference has been shown to be less robust in current research in comparison to older ones. Even if males have occasionally been moved into tasks that are typically done by women, Eagly and Sczesny claim that the dynamics of men's roles have altered much less than those of women's. As long as men and women continue to perform distinct duties within the house, there will be a lower percentage of women in positions of authority.

In addition to that, the study investigates the many ways in which leaders behave in various settings. The findings of a survey conducted by Boyce and Herd (2003) on students enrolled in a leadership program at a military school revealed that there was a disparity between how students saw women and how they perceived leaders. In point of fact, senior military students had more notions about leadership based on gender

than first-year students did, which demonstrates that they had become more similar to the other students throughout the course of their education. Cadet leaders who had achieved success in their careers viewed leadership as requiring a balance of feminine and masculine characteristics.

In another study, both leaders and followers from a variety of groups were investigated. According to Barbuto, Fritz, Matkin, and Mars (2007), gender did not play a significant role in determining how leaders behaved; however, education level did, and those with only a high school degree or less were the most influenced. The importance that management students placed on various leadership qualities was not influenced by gender stereotypes, particularly among women, according to the results of a survey of management students. There was no difference between how men and women viewed their person- and task-oriented skills, nor was there a difference in how vital they believed it was to have these talents.

On the other side, women reported that they were less task-oriented than they believed "leaders in general" (no gender specified) were (Sczesniak, 2003), which demonstrates that they did not have a high opinion of their own leadership abilities.

According to research, one of the ways that preconceptions influence how people behave is through a process called internalization. That is, individuals buy into and make assumptions based on preconceived notions about how they should behave (Bennett & Gaines, 2010; Thomas, Speight, & Witherspoon, 2004). According to Thomas et al. (2004), unfavorable stereotypes are referred to as "internalized oppression" by some individuals. It is beyond the scope of this research to discuss the process of internalization; however, it is abundantly obvious that situational qualities can prime stereotypes, which means that they are more likely to be utilized when insignificant situational cues call them out (Bennett & Gaines, 2010). This is an important issue to keep in mind. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that some women who believe gender stereotypes do not consider themselves as capable of holding leadership positions.

Several studies have investigated the various ways in which people from various cultures view leaders. For instance, in a study that looked at four different ethnic groups from Western Europe, all of the participants believed that men and women adopt distinctive approaches to leadership. According to Prime, Jonsen, Carter, and Maznevski (2008), men in general held the belief that women were less capable of taking the lead role than men. This belief was particularly prevalent among Nordic

and Anglo groups. Men believed that women were not capable of performing fundamental aspects of leadership, such as stimulating the mind, convincing superiors, providing a good example, resolving difficulties, delegating power, and encouraging others. Even though the statistical effect size was very low, the authors of the study claim that even statistically insignificant differences can have a significant impact on a woman's ability to achieve long-term success in her professional life.

Higher education

Very little research examines gender differences in leadership styles in any systematic way. One comparative study examined leadership styles of community college administrators and found slight gender differences, stereotypical in that respondents viewed male leadership as more directive and autocratic, and female leadership as more participatory and merit-based (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006). Other research is anecdotal and qualitative, but there is a consistent pattern indicating that stereotypes operate in higher education with consequences for women leaders, in terms of both their chosen leadership style and perceived effectiveness. Consistent with organizational psychology literature, historical changes and elements of the higher education context influence how gender affects leadership.

Histirical Context

There is little question that historical movements have had an impact on what men and women in positions of leadership in higher education are expected to do. The importance of understanding one's historical environment was demonstrated by Astin and Leland (1993) in their research on three generations of influential women in academia and other social organizations. Their forebears, who were born during the Great Depression and World War II, emphasized the significance of education in achieving equality between men and women. Their forebears came of age during those times. It was very evident that they were "solo" leaders who frequently utilized masculine approaches of leadership.

Instigators came of age during the 1960s and gained prominence with the surge of feminism that followed the civil rights and antiwar movements. They were primarily concerned with the opportunities available to women in school and other employment contexts, as well as the participation of women in choices regarding the course

content and the scheduling of classes. The inheritors of power are influential people who rose to prominence in the 1990s. They frequently look up to Instigators as leaders and role models, but as they've developed new methods of leadership, their ideals and aims have evolved as well.

Even though the sole study that has been done on gender stereotypes was conducted in the 1970s, it is believed that stereotypes are not static and can evolve along with culture, as seen by the shifts that have occurred in the most recent few decades. These historical tendencies are most likely a reflection of distinct gendered standards of leaders (Reynolds, 2003). This is due to the fact that gendered screenplays have played out in a variety of ways throughout the course of history. It is instructive to look at a new study (Kezar & Lester, 2008) that examines age differences among female leaders in student affairs. In the 1970s, second-wave feminists attempted to bring about change inside their respective groups. The subsequent cohort of feminists, known as the "third wave," were content to operate within the constraints imposed by contemporary society. According to the authors, third-wave feminists are attempting to modify what feminism means, while second- and third-wave feminists argue over the style and criteria of feminism.

Summary:

This scholarly article delves into the nuanced influence of gendered perceptions on leadership within the realm of higher education. Despite strides towards gender equality, societal stereotypes continue to shape expectations and evaluations of leaders based on gender. Through a blend of theoretical analysis and empirical investigation, this study explores how these gendered ideas about leadership impact career advancement, leadership styles, and organizational dynamics in academia. Findings reveal persistent gender biases affecting the perception of leadership effectiveness and the career trajectories of women leaders in higher education. Furthermore, the study addresses strategies for challenging and mitigating the influence of gender stereotypes on leadership practices, fostering greater gender equity and inclusivity in academic leadership roles. By shedding light on these dynamics, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between gender and leadership in the context of higher education.

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