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Perception of Female Leaders among Men and Women

Caitlin Ward[4]

Recent research studies have revealed that men and women have different perceptions of female leaders. Historically, men have predominantly held leadership roles. With the increasing demand for female leaders in our society, increasingly more women are holding higher-level positions today. The current study was designed to examine the perception of women's leadership by both men and women using an online survey. There were a total of 137 respondents. 38 were male and 99 were female. The average age of the participants was 33, ranging from 18 to 67. Among the participants, 87 reported to a female leader while 49 did not. The results of an independent t-test indicated that women perceive female leaders to be more independent, conscientious, risky, adaptable, challenging, decisive, and fearless than men do. Descriptive statistics indicated that gender stereotyping in relation to occupations still exists among nurses, construction workers, maintenance, farmers, engineers, first responders, and psychologists. A chi-square analysis was conducted to determine whether men and women perceive female leaders differently in the workforce. The result of the chi-square analysis was significant and indicated that men believe women are equally represented in the workplace while only 23.5% of women agreed. The findings of this research can help us better understand people's perceptions of female leaders, and in the future, perhaps help to eliminate prejudice towards women holding leadership positions.

In the past, men have predominantly held leadership roles. Today, there is an increasing push for women to hold higher leadership roles in the workforce, such as supervisors and managers. Although female leaders in the workforce have been at an increasing demand, it is still a fairly new topic. Baumeister and Bushman (2009) state that prejudice is the feeling of negativity toward a particular group outside of their own. Since the development of the debate between male and female leaders, a sense of prejudice towards female leaders is likely to erupt because it is not considered the norm. Eagly and Karau (2002) state that there are two forms of prejudice. The first form of prejudice includes perceiving women to be less qualified than men in leadership roles. The second form of prejudice involves evaluating the level of leadership less favorably if it were a woman instead of a man. For example, people would perceive a female

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construction worker to be less qualified than a male particularly because there are less female construction workers regardless of their qualifications and performance.

In a study demonstrating gender differences in leadership style, job stress, and mental health, Gardiner and Tiggemann (1999) found that both men and women in the labor force did not differ in relationship adjustment while in a male-dominated environment, but there were interpersonal (relationship adjustment) differences when the environment was female-dominant. This is important in order to notice that there are differences among male and female leaders. In turn, this shows that even today there are still gender stereotypes in the workforce. Jacobs and McClelland (1994) designed a study to assess motivation patterns in leadership among men and women. In a longitudinal study, they found no sex differences among motivational factors in leadership styles. Therefore, our perceptions of male and female leaders are what we make them. However, Pratch and Jacobowitz (1996) found that there is a differential pattern of relationships among male and female leaders. For example, their research supported the idea that men typically display greater levels of instrumental attributes to their approach while women characteristically tend to show greater levels of social qualities. Possible reasons for different findings may be due to the fact that individuals create certain expectations depending on what they believe is socially appropriate for men and women leaders. Therefore, it is possible that these findings are a result of preexisting stereotypes of masculinity and femininity (Pratch & Jacobowitz, 1996).

Along with prejudice, society tends to associate more positive perceptions of male leaders and negative associations are typically perceived toward female leaders (Peachey & Burton, 2010). For instance, if there are gender stereotypes associated with occupations, it is likely that a woman will be associated with negative perceptions for being a construction worker

regardless of her ability and performance. In other words, prejudice can be more passive and unconscious, while these types of perceptions are more active. Overall, the current research indicates that females are not perceived with equal positive regard and are still victims of prejudice. These findings underscore the importance of continued study on this topic, so that we can better understand and eliminate prejudice towards women in the workplace.

The purpose of this study was to determine some common perceptions of female leaders. The study further examined the findings from Peachey and Burton (2010) by surveying participants and asking them what gender they associate with certain occupations. The work of Pratch and Jacobwitz (1996) pertains to the study as well since participants were able to characteristically define a female leader on a five-star rating scale, where the higher the rating, the more likely it is that a female leader displays that characteristic. This ties into the work of Pratch and Jacobwitz (1996) to determine whether women are perceived with more social attributions. I hypothesized that prejudice still exists today. Although there is an increasing demand for women holding higher-level positions, people still hold different perceptions and stereotypes of occupations and individual leadership styles. Participants took an online link to take the survey that consisted of eight questions at their convenience. A majority of the questions pertained to how an individual perceived characteristics and the importance of female leaders. Results were analyzed using an independent t-test, multivariate, chi-square analysis, and descriptive statistics.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from those who are members of the Lindenwood Participant Pool (LPP), classmates, coworkers, friends inside and outside of Lindenwood University, and

persons connected to the PI on social media. The LPP recruits participants from participating social science courses on campus. If students who use the LPP sign up for a study, they are eligible to receive compensation in form of extra credit points. Although participants can only participate if they are 18 or older, those who are members of the LPP and are under 18 had a parental consent form on file. Thus, they were be able to participate in the study.

The survey was accessed by a total of 171 participants. The results of 35 participants were incomplete and had to be discarded. Therefore, I analyzed data from 136 participants. The participants included 38 (27.7%) men and 98 (72.3%) women. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 67; the average was 33. Sex and age were the only two demographic data that were collected.

Students who participated using the LPP were recruited via Sona Systems while the remaining participants were recruited through work and social media. Upon choosing to participate in the study, the participants completed an online, anonymous survey at their convenience. The survey consisted of eight questions from demographics to questions pertaining to one's perception of both female and male leaders. The PI did not know whether or not an individual participated.

Materials and Procedure

Both Sona Systems and Survey Gizmo were used to recruit participants and administer the survey. Sona Systems is a cloud-based research tool that allows the primary investigator to recruit participants and administer the survey online to students and faculty at the University. Survey Gizmo is an online survey software program that allows the primary investigator to build the survey and analyze results descriptively. There was no setting designated for this survey since participants accessed the link to take the survey online at their convenience. Upon clicking

the link to participate in the study, participants read the informed consent form. An informed

consent statement (see Appendix A) contained information about the study that may have

influenced a participant's willingness to participate in the study and provided consent to choose

whether or not to participate. A participant at any time during the study could choose to

discontinue the survey at no penalty at any point during the study. The consent statement also

verified that the participant was at least 18 years of age or that they had parental consent (with

the LPP) to participate in the survey.

Upon choosing to participate in the study, the participant then started the survey (see

Appendix B). The survey was available to the participant to complete via Survey Gizmo on Sona

Systems. The survey, excluding the informed consent, and feedback letter contained eight

questions. The first two questions pertained to the demographics of the participants such as their

age and sex. The following questions asked for the participant to rate characteristics of both male

and female leaders. For example, question four asked whether the participant generally reports to

a male or female leader. Question five asks how the participant attributed certain characteristics

to female leaders in general. The participant was given a trait, and then they were asked to

indicate the extent to which they thought a female leader characterized a given trait on a scale of

1 to 5. Question six asked the participant to identify whether they agree or disagree with certain

statements describing female leaders in society today. Question seven provided several

occupations and asked the participant to associate either male, female, or neutral to which would

be more suitable for the position. Questions eight and nine on the survey asked the participant's

opinion on what has both hindered and helped women's participation in the workforce.

Descriptive statistics, multivariate, chi-square analysis, and an independent t-test will be used to

analyze the data. All information obtained will be anonymous. After completing or choosing to

discontinue the study, the participant was provided a feedback statement (see Appendix C). The feedback letter provided the participant with the contact information of the PI in case they had any further questions or comments.

Results

The purpose of the study was to determine whether or not men and women perceive female leaders in the workforce differently using an online survey. While analyzing the data, results supported that men and women perceive female leaders differently. A series of independent *t*-tests were conducted in order to determine whether there were any sex differences in how participants perceived traits of female leaders.

Table 1 shows the results when participants were asked to rate specific traits of a female leader. The results revealed that women perceived female leaders to be more independent $t(130) = -3.329$, $p = .001$, conscientious $t(129) = -2.785$, $p = .006$, risky $t(130) = -3.193$, $p = .002$, adaptable ($t(130) = -2.761$, $p = .007$) bold ($t(129) = -3.655$, $p = .000$), challenging ($t(129) = -2.590$, $p = .011$), decisive ($t(125) = -2.495$, $p = .014$), fearless ($t(129) = -3.623$, $p = .000$. Furthermore, helpful ($t(130) = -1.751$ $p = .082$) and inefficient ($t(127) = 1.92$, $p = .057$) were close to being statistically significant as well. Since multiple *t*-tests can inflate a type 1 error, I conducted a multivariate test. The multivariate results showed that there was no significant main effect on sex. However, this could be due to an unequal sex representation in the study.

A series of chi-square analyses were conducted in order to determine whether men and women perceive participation of women in the workplace differently. The results showed that 94.6% of men and 88.8% of women said they agree that women are active leaders in the workforce, and 97.4% of men and 100% of women said they agree that women's participation is important. These findings were not statistically significant. However, whereas 65.6% of men

believe that women are equally represented in the workplace, only 23.5% of women believe the same. This difference was statistically significant, $X^2_{(1)} = 16.799$, $p < .001$.

Variables that were analyzed include the sex, age, whether or not the participant reports to a female leader, traits that define a female leader, whether or not the participant agrees or disagrees with three statements, sex preference in terms of occupations, what enables women's participation in the workforce, and what benefits there are to women's participation in the workforce.

Of the 142 participants, 87 of them reported to a female leader while 49 did not. Therefore, approximately 61.3% of participants reported to a female leader. When asked whether or not women are active leaders in the workforce, 85.9% (n=122) agreed. All but one person stated that women's participation in the workforce is important. Of the 136 participants, 96 people (67.6%) disagreed that women are equally represented in the workforce today. Therefore, it is important to examine why women are perceived to be equally represented in the workforce when in fact, they are not.

Participants were then asked to identify which sex they feel would be more suited for the following occupations: doctor, nurse, teacher, principal, lawyer, business owner, chef, first responder, architect, engineer, artist, coach, construction, business owner, maintenance, farming, and transportation. The participants were given the option of choosing male, female, or either.

Table 2 shows the results of gender stereotypes in relation to occupations. These particular results show, out of the given occupations that women were perceived to be right for caring, emotional jobs such as nursing. On the other hand, according to the responses, men are more suitable for physically demanding jobs such as construction, maintenance, farming, and first responding. Therefore, although descriptive statistics cannot support evidence of prejudice

in the workforce, it can simply show that men and women are perceived as having different qualities and characteristics that better suit them for certain occupations.

As a whole, most people chose either gender for the occupations. However, some occupations demonstrated that gender stereotypes still exist. For example, 42.3% of respondents stated that nurses are primarily female. Another one that stood out is the first responder. Of the 142 participants, 41 of them stated that they feel men are more suited for this occupation. Similarly, participants (62%) stated that men are better suited to work in construction. Finally, descriptive statistics also showed that about 50% of participants believe that men are better suited for maintenance and farming.

Descriptively, when asked what enables women's leadership in the workforce, the most frequent responses were higher level of education, variety of opinion, diversity, support, and equal opportunity. Finally, the participants were asked open-endedly to define the benefits to women's participation in the workforce. The results included various responses. However, the responses that were most frequent include various approaches and perspectives to handling situations, variety, diversity, and balance.

Discussion

The results of the independent *t*-test conclude that my hypothesis was supported and in fact, men and women perceive female leaders differently. The results show that there is still gender bias and stereotypes today. However, research shows that women are increasingly holding higher-level positions in the workforce. Even though men still typically earn higher salaries, gender equality in the workforce is increasing.

In fact, recently the NFL has hired the first female full-time official (Orr, 2015). This shows that society is more accepting of businesswomen today. However, it is telling that in the

20th century it is breaking news that a woman has been hired at such a level. Part of the reason this is considered important news is because stereotypically, NFL referees should be men. This relates back to the occupational gender preference because people still hold gender stereotypes for certain occupations and this is one of them. For example, physical, more demanding tasks should be male-dominant while the more intellectual, supportive tasks should be female-dominant. As a whole, we can see that these sorts of stereotypes and assumptions are decreasing.

Another current topic is the idea of putting a women's face on a 20- dollar bill (One of these women could be on the $20 bill, 2015). If this idea will in fact be presented by 2020, it will represent a symbolic change that could increase the initiative to promote gender equality both in and out of the workforce.

While analyzing the findings, statistically significant results were not necessarily surprising. I hypothesized at the beginning of the research that men still perceive female leaders differently than women. Due to the results, I can infer that gender equality; especially in the workforce will be a significant aspect to my future career as an Industrial Organizational (I/O) Psychologist. I believe that since paternity leave has been implemented in the workforce, that gender equality is increasing in the workforce. As an Industrial Organizational psychologist, it will be important to tie in this research, as I will most likely be one of the females in this position. It will also be important to understand this topic to better understand how others will perceive me as a female leader to be efficient and effective for the company. This research could lead to educating both men and women on gender equality and it's importance to the workforce.

Future directions in this research would be to implement compensation, in form of an annual salary, for both men and women. This is an important aspect to the topic as the small percentage of females holding higher-level positions are getting paid less than male leaders for

performing the same tasks and having the equal requirements. There were minimal limitations to the study. The first limitation is the available resources. While finding academic articles, I found that most of the sources were dated over 10 years. This is disturbing because even though gender equality is increasing, it is a topic that is still not receiving much attention for how important it is. Therefore, it was hard to relate my results to other research that has recently been completed. Although I had 136 participants, it may not have been a representable portion of the population in this area. Maybe the particular people that had participated in my study had very strong opinions on the subject. Also, it could be that participants knew what type of results I was looking for. Therefore, they may have responded differently.

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Table 1

Traits of female leaders

Variable	*t*	*p*
Independent	(130) = -3.329	.001
Conscientious	(129) = -2.785	.006
Risky	(130) = -3.193	.002
Adaptable	(130) = -2.761	.007
Bold	(129) = -3.655	.000
Challenging	(129) = -2.590	.011
Decisive	(125) = -2.495	.014
Fearless	(129) = -3.623	.000

Table 1
Traits of female leaders

Trait	Men	Women	*p*-value
Independent	M=3.86 (SD=.944) n=35	M=4.40 (SD=.786) n=97	.001
Conscientious	M=3.62 (SD = .922) n=34	M=4.15 (SD=.983) n-97	.006
Risky			.002
Adaptable			.007
Bold			.012
Challenging			.039
Decisive			
Fearless			.014
			.000

Table 2

Gender stereotypes

Occupation	Male	Either	Female	Participants
Nurse	0	76	60	136
Construction	88	48	0	136
Maintenance	63	72	1	136
Farming	71	65	0	136
Engineer	42	93	1	136
First responder	41	95	0	136
Psychologist	2	100	34	136

Appendix A

Informed Consent

Perception of Female Leaders among Men and Women
This survey about the perception of female leaders was created by Caitlin Ward as part of a class research project in the department of Psychology at Lindenwood University. It will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. Although your participation will not result in direct benefits to you, information from this study may help provide additional insight on the perception of female leaders Please read the information below before deciding whether or not to participate.
Your participation is completely voluntary.
- You may discontinue taking the survey at any time.
- If you choose not to participate or stop participating before the end of the survey, you will not be penalized in any way; LPP participants will still receive extra credit.
- You may also choose to skip any questions you wish without penalty or judgment.

Your responses will be anonymous.
- No information that identifies you personally will be collected, not even your IP address.
- The primary investigator will not be able to identify your answers as belonging to you; data will be examined at the group level only.

The results of this survey will be used for scholarly purposes only. If you have any questions about the survey itself, please contact the primary investigator, Caitlin Ward, at cmw396@lionmail.lindenwood.edu or by calling (636) 236-6960.
ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.
Clicking on the "agree" button below indicates that:

• you have read the above information
• you voluntarily agree to participate
• you are at least 18 years of age or have a parental consent form filed with the LPP Office.

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, or are not at least 18 years old, please decline participation by clicking on the "I choose not to participate" button.

   ○   I choose to participate in this survey.

   ○   I choose not to participate.

Appendix B

Survey

1. Informed Consent
2. Are you:
>   Male
>   Female
>   Prefer not to answer

3. Age:
>   Open-ended

4. Do you report to a female leader? (i.e. manager, coach, teacher, boss etc.)
>   Yes
>   No

5. Using the following 5 star scale, please indicate how much each of the following traits describe your perception of a female leader in general.
(1 star is not at all and 5 stars are definite). For each trait, there will be a five star rating scale.

Independent	Risky	Candid	Ethical	Sympathetic	Adaptable
Accommodating	Fearless	Assertive	Helpful	Challenging	Honest
Reliable	Inefficient	Communicative	Knowledgeable	Understanding	Soft-Spoken
Decisive	Passionate	Forceful	Approachable	Dedicated	Responsible
Conscientious	Bold	Empowering	Trustworthy	Truthful	Careful
Encouraging					

6. Please state whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. (Each

statement will have a choice to either agree or disagree.)

- Women are active leaders/managers in the workforce.

- Women's participation in the workforce is important.

- Women are equally represented in the business decision-making positions.

7. Using male, either, or female, please choose one that you feel would be more suitable for the following occupations.

Nurse	Psychologist	Artist	Farming
Lawyer	Chef	Coach	Transportation Services
Teacher	First responder	Construction	
School Principal	Architect	Business Owner	
Doctor	Engineer	Maintenance	

8. In your opinion, what enables women's participation in the workforce?

Open-ended

9. In your opinion, what benefits are there to women's participation in the workforce?

Open-ended

10. Feedback letter

Appendix C

Feedback Letter

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey for my class project at Lindenwood University. By taking this survey, you have helped me learn about people's perceptions of female leaders and how they are perceived by both men and women. The results of this survey will be beneficial to both society and individuals by addressing whether or not prejudice still exists.

If you would like to see the results of my survey after May 13, 2015, please feel free to contact me using the contact information below. Please also feel free to contact me if you have any questions about this study. Again, thank you very much for your time and effort!

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