The Impact of Leader Gender on the Perceived Leader Effectiveness in Campus Organization Setting

Andrea Wolfe

UAFS Undergraduate Research Student

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Abstract
Studies have shown the representation of women in the workplace has increased over the last fifty years yet women remain underrepresented in the highest organization levels. One explanation for women’s underrepresentation in these leadership positions is the undervaluation of women’s effectiveness as leaders. The nature of this paper is to examine whether women still experience bias in the leadership setting. The purpose of this study was to determine if gender affects the perception of effectiveness among a leader’s members in a campus organization setting. Students and advisors at a Central-US, open enrollment public university involved in student run organizations were surveyed. Included in the survey was the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (SPLI) which is a standardized test measuring leadership ability. Student organization presidents completed the Student LPI “Self” test while other participants completed the “Observer” test in an attempt to provide a 360° feedback response. Results are expected to provide more information on the relationship between the gender of a leader in an organizational setting and that leaders perceived effectiveness from his/her organizations members.

Keywords: gender, leadership, leader effectiveness, gender roles, student organizations
The Impact of Leader Gender on the Perceived Leader Effectiveness in a Campus Organization Setting?

There are numerous studies on women in leadership. For more than two decades, women have been earning roughly one-third of the MBA’s awarded in the United States, yet they only make up about two percent of the Fortune 500 CEOs and eight percent of the top leadership positions (Wilson, 2006). Numerous other statistics further back up the point that barriers still exist for women in gaining leadership roles. One theory for this barrier is Virginia Schein’s bias labeled “think manager- think male,’’ which means that when we think of leaders we naturally picture males or male traits such as strength and assertiveness while women are associated with helpfulness, nurturing, and gentleness. These self-confident and entrepreneurial behaviors in men are perceived as pushy and unfeminine in women. This theory also suggests that when either gender behaves outside of his or her gender role they will be evaluated negatively. A similar theory (Eagly, 1987) suggests that just as we have beliefs about how men and women should behave, there are expectations for leaders and for a leader to be perceived as effective they must match these leadership expectations. This idea of conflicts between female gender roles and leadership roles is explained in role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Role congruity theory suggests there are two types of biases that can result from this conflict: descriptive and prescriptive. Descriptive bias is the result of a feminine role and the leader role, not fitting which creates the perception that a woman does not possess the characteristics required to fill the role. Prescriptive bias occurs when a female leader takes on a masculine leadership style which in turn violates her sex role expectations. Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky (1992) found this prescriptive bias first hand when their meta-analysis found that male leaders were evaluated somewhat more favorably than female leaders but this devaluation was exaggerated when female leaders were described as taking on a masculine leadership style.
Both bias types lead to a negative evaluation for the female leader without consideration of that leader’s actual performance.

There is currently little to no research that looks at the effect of gender on a leader’s perceived effectiveness in a student run organization. This study seeks to determine if this bias about leadership roles influences member perceptions of leader effectiveness in student-run campus organizations. The purpose of this study is to determine if the gender of the leader affects the perception of leadership effectiveness among followers.

A meta-analysis on gender and the effectiveness of leaders found that men were rated higher than women when they were measured on their leader ability or performance. Women were favored when subordinates rated the leader as opposed to the leader evaluating themselves, or being evaluated by supervisors or peers. The study also found female leaders slightly more effective than male leaders; out of 82 studies, 57% found females more effective than male leaders. That percentage, however, was not statistically significant enough to suggest that women and men differ in effectiveness as leaders (Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995). Another meta-analysis, comparing gender and evaluation, found a slight overall tendency for females to be devalued. However, they found that devaluation was exaggerated in certain circumstances such as business and education settings, when the dependent variable was the leader’s competence or subject’s satisfaction, when female leaders take on a masculine leadership style, or when the member sex distribution was mainly men (Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1992).

A study on leadership practices and effectiveness in Greek organizations gave insight to how students respond to their leaders. This study found that women followers found their presidents to be more effective than the male followers. However, men presidents believed they were doing better than their followers thought they were (Adams & Keim, 2000). Based on this,
this scored Student LPI’s were expected to show that female leaders devalue their leadership ability and score themselves lower than their members score them while male leaders will overvalue their leadership ability and score themselves higher than their members score their leaders.

This study was expected to find that certain genders will score higher on the various practices. It was expected to find that female leaders will score significantly higher on their observer’s ratings in the practice Encourage the Heart because of the female sex role associated with traits found in this practice such as praising, encouraging, and supporting. Challenge the Process and Model the Way, however, tend to have a male sex role association and because of this this study was expected to find men were rated higher from their observers in these areas compared to female leaders. Overall, however, the results were expected to be weak in their findings that women leaders are perceived as less effective in their leadership role.

Based on previously discussed research, the following hypotheses were tested.

Hypothesis 1: Females will be perceived as less effective than males when evaluated by organization members

Hypothesis 2: When comparing leader gender on individual leadership practices:

a) Females will be perceived as more effective than males when evaluated on the practice Encourage the Heart.

b) Females will be perceived as less effective than males when evaluated on the practice Challenge the Process.

c) Females will be perceived as less effective than males when evaluated on the practice Model the Way.

Method

Participants of this study were any consenting UAFS student organization members and advisors. Participants were contacted via email and asked to participate in this survey. Stephanie London, Director of Student Affairs and an unbiased middle man, coded each UAFS
organization and distributed surveys to each participating organization. Participants were asked to complete a 31-question survey which asked them to state their gender and to answer the 30 questions included the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (SLPI).

The Student Leadership Practices Inventory (SLPI) is a standardized test used for assessing leadership ability and effectiveness, developed by Kouzes and Posner, (2013) based on the five practices of exemplary leadership named in their book The Leadership Challenge: The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership (2011). The five practices of exemplary leaders are: Modeling the Way, Inspiring a Shared Vision, Challenging the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart. Modeling the Way involves the leader’s ability to clarify values and affirming shared values as well as set the example by aligning actions with shared values. An example of a question that measures Modeling the Way is “Sets a personal example of what he or she expects from other people.” The ability to inspire a shared vision entails the leaders’ ability to envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities and enlist others in a common vision. An example of a question that measures Inspiring a Shared Vision is “Looks ahead and communicates about what he or she believes will affect us in the future.” Challenging the Process involves the leader’s ability to take initiative and look for innovative ways to improve situations; it also involves the leader’s willingness to experiment, take risks and learn from their experiences. An example of a question that measures Challenging the Process is “Looks for ways to develop and challenge people’s skills and abilities.” Enabling Others to Act requires leaders to foster collaboration through the building of relationships and trust, it also requires leaders to be able to strengthen others by developing competence and self-determination. An example of a question that measures Enabling Others to Act is “Foster cooperative rather than competitive relationships among people he or she works with.” The final
practice is the ability to Encourage the Heart, which measures the leader’s ability to recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence as well as celebrating the values and victories through a sense of community. An example of a question that measures Encourage the Heart is “Praises people for a job well done.”

The version of the Student LPI (Self of Observer) that the participant received depended on the role in the organization the participant stated they fill. Presidents completed the “Self” test while all others completed the “Observer” test. The main difference between the two tests is the wording of the questions based on if the respondent is evaluating themselves or their leader. By collecting responses from the leader, his/her peers (other key leaders), his/her subordinates (general members), and his/her supervisor (advisor) a 360° Feedback evaluation was created that allowed for a better form of leader evaluation.

Results
A total of 130 surveys were returned, of which 111 were member responses and 19 were president responses. Of the 111 member responses, 46 were responding about a male leader and 65 were responding about a female leader. Of the 19 president surveys, 7 were from female presidents and 12 were from male presidents. A comparison of the gender of the leader and member was also looked at. Of the 46 members responding about a male leader 16 were male members, 22 were female members, and 8 preferred not to answer. Of the 65 members responding about a female leader, 11 were female, 35 were male, and 19 preferred not to answer.

The following information was coded for easier data computations: leader gender (0=male, 1=female), gender consistency (i.e. is the member the same gender as the leader; 0=no, 1=yes), and gender composition (i.e. president gender/ member gender; male/male= 0, female/female=1, male/female=2, female/ male= 3)
Scores for the individual practices were calculated by taking the average of all questions relevant to that particular practice. Table 1 and Figure 1 contain means and Table 2 contains the standard deviations calculated based on survey type, leader gender, and gender composition for each leadership practice as well as the overall average score. Table 3 contains the correlation matrix for leader gender, consistency, composition, total score average, and each leadership practice for member responses.

Table 1: Response Means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Leader Type</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total Avg.</th>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Inspire</th>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Enable</th>
<th>Encourage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President:</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>4.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>3.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>4.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member:</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>3.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M/M</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>3.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M/F</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>3.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>4.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F/F</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>4.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F/M</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The member response data was analyzed using Independent Samples T-Tests. Table 4 contains the t-test results. Total average score and the five SPLI leadership practices were used as the test variables, while coded leader gender was used as the grouping variable. The t-test revealed highly significant
findings ($\alpha < .01$) for the total average score. Findings were highly significant ($\alpha < .01$) for the individual leadership practices of Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, and Encourage the Heart. Findings were significant ($\alpha < .05$) for the individual practices of Challenge the Process and Enable Others to Act.

Hypotheses 1 suggested that female leaders would be perceived as less effective than male leaders when evaluated by organization members. Hypothesis 1 was rejected since the female leader ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 0.52$) was found to be perceived significantly more effective than the male leader ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.86$, $t(68.02) = -3.22$, $\alpha = 0.002$) when evaluated by organization members.

Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c, suggested that when compared on the individual leadership practices, females would be perceived as more effective than males when evaluated on the practice Encourage the Heart and as less effective than males when evaluated on the practices Challenge the Process and Model the Way. Hypothesis 2a was supported by the t-test which showed that the mean for women on Encourage the Heart ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 0.48$) was significantly greater than the mean for male leaders on the same practice ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.89$, $t (63.42) = -3.99$, $\alpha = 0.000$). Hypotheses 2b and 2c were not supported such that the mean for women on Challenge the Process ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.69$,) and Model the Way ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 0.63,$) was significantly higher than the mean for male leaders on the same practices of Challenge the Process ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.08$, $t(70.57) = -2.51$, $\alpha =0.014$ ) and Model the Way ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.92$, $t(73.87) = -3.29$, $\alpha =0.002$). In sum, female leaders were perceived to be more effective overall and on all dimensions of the leadership practices when evaluated by organization members.
Next the member-leader response data was analyzed by leader gender using Independent Samples T-Tests. *Tables 5* the t-test results for female leaders and their members and *Table 6* contains the t-test results for male leaders and their members. Total average score and the five SPLI leadership practices were again used as the test variables, while coded leader gender was used as the grouping variable. Neither test revealed significant finds ($\alpha < .01$) but this is believed to be due to the low response rate of organization presidents. If additional data could be collected from organization presidents it is expected that these results would be found statistically significant.

While neither of the results could be classified as statistically significant findings, they both yielded expected results based on Adams & Keims’ study in Greek organizations which stated that female leaders tend to devalue themselves while male leaders tend to overvalue themselves.

In this particular case, female leaders devalued themselves an average of .07 points but this devaluation was exaggerated when evaluated on female associated practices such as Enable.
others to act and Encourage the Heart. The male leaders tended to overvalue themselves; rating themselves higher than their member counterparts by an average of 0.19 points. This overvaluation was also exaggerated when evaluated on male associated practices such as Model the Way, Inspire Others to Act, and Challenge the process. On Encourage the Heart, male leaders evaluated themselves 0.002 points less than members and this is again to be believed to be because of the female associated traits related to that practice.

**Discussion**

This study examined the effects of leader gender on the perceived effectiveness of that leader among his or her followers in a student run campus organization setting. Female leaders were perceived as being more effective than male leaders when rated by their organizations members. This higher perceived effectiveness evaluation was not only seen at the overall level but within each of the five leadership practices each leader was measured on as well.

Findings from this study are inconsistent with Virginia Schein’s Bias “Think Manager-Think Male” and Role Congruity Theory. One explanation for the findings is the potential that the majority of the respondents could have been subordinates to the leader and there was very little peer and supervisor representation. A meta-analysis on the gender and evaluation of leaders found that women are favored when rated by subordinates as opposed to a mixture of peer, subordinate, and supervisor ratings. This study did not look at the respondents’ relationship to the leader and therefore it is possible that this may have influenced the data.

An alternative explanation for why women leaders where perceived as more effective than male leaders could stem from how these leaders came to office. Because most student run organizations gain presidents based on member elections, it is likely that the presidents are already liked and perceived to be the most effective leader in their organization by the majority
of its members. Appointed leaders or leaders that were not voted on by an entire organization may not be perceived as the most effective leader in the organization by all members because they were unable to voice their leader choice. Perhaps, Role Congruity Theory and Virginia Schein’s bias only reflect the perceived effectiveness of leaders to which the members only know about that leader what they have seen while that leader was in charge.

A third explanation has to do with the types of organizations that submitted responses and the gender of that leader. A female leader would be expected to be evaluated higher than a male leader in certain settings where the leadership role has a typically female gender role association such as a nursing environment. In that situation, the female leadership style would be expected with that leadership role. This variable was not included in this study so it is possible that there was an excess of strong female leaders in organizations with a female gender role-leadership style. It is also possible that there were multiple organizations with male leaders in these female gender role-leadership style environments whose gender role alone was pulling their perceived effectiveness scores down.

Overall, the results from this study do not support the idea that male leaders are perceived as more effective than female leaders and this does not help to explain why fewer women are reaching top leadership positions. Further research is necessary to fully understand why women are not equally represented in the highest organizational levels and why the men in this study were perceived as less effective in a student run organization setting.
REFERENCES


Appendix A
Gender Leader Perceived Effectiveness Survey (Member Version) with Leadership Practices Notated

1. Sets a personal example of what he or she expects from other people. (MODEL THE WAY)
2. Looks ahead and communicate about what he or she believes will affect us in the future. (INSPIRING A SHARED VISION)
3. Looks for ways to develop and challenge people's skills and abilities. (CHALLENGE THE PROCESS)
4. Fosters cooperative rather than competitive relationships among people he or she works with. (ENABLE OTHERS TO ACT)
5. Praises people for a job well done. (ENCOURAGE THE HEART)
6. Spends time making sure that people behave consistently with the principles and standards that have been agreed upon. (MODEL THE WAY)
7. Describes to others in the organization what we should be capable of accomplishing. (INSPIRING A SHARED VISION)
8. Looks for ways that others can try out new ideas and methods. (CHALLENGE THE PROCESS)
9. Actively listens to diverse points of view. (ENABLE OTHERS TO ACT)
10. Encourages others as they work on activities and programs. (ENCOURAGE THE HEART)
11. Follows through on the promises and commitments he or she makes. (MODEL THE WAY)
12. Talks with others about a vision of how things could be even better in the future. (INSPIRING A SHARED VISION)
13. Searches for innovative ways to improve what is being done. (CHALLENGE THE PROCESS)
14. Treats others with dignity and respect. (ENABLE OTHERS TO ACT)
15. Expresses appreciation for the contributions that people make. (ENCOURAGE THE HEART)
16. Seeks to understand how his or her actions affect other people's performance. (MODEL THE WAY)
17. Talks with others about how their own interests can be met by working toward a common goal. (INSPIRING A SHARED VISION)
18. When things do not go as he or she expected, asks, "What can we learn from this experience?" (CHALLENGE THE PROCESS)
19. Supports the decisions that other people make on their own. (ENABLE OTHERS TO ACT)
20. Makes it a point to publicly recognize people who show commitment to shared values. (ENCOURAGE THE HEART)
21. Makes sure that people support the values that have agreed upon. (MODEL THE WAY)
22. Is upbeat and positive when talking about what could be accomplished. (INSPIRING A SHARED VISION)
23. Makes sure that big projects undertaken are broken down into smaller and doable parts. (CHALLENGE THE PROCESS)
24. Gives others a great deal of freedom and choice in deciding how to do their work. (ENABLE OTHERS TO ACT)
25. Finds ways for people to celebrate accomplishments. (ENCOURAGE THE HEART)
26. Talks about his or her values and the principles that guide his or her actions. (MODEL THE WAY)
27. Speaks with passion about the higher purpose and meaning of what is being done. (INSPIRING A SHARED VISION)
28. Takes initiative in experimenting with the way things can be done. (CHALLENGE THE PROCESS)
29. Provides opportunities for others to take on leadership responsibilities. (ENABLE OTHERS TO ACT)
30. Makes sure that people are creatively recognized for their contributions. (ENCOURAGE THE HEART)