The Struggle is Real: A Meta-Analysis of Leadership Characteristics Among Men and Women

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ABSTRACT

Although, it has long been accepted that men tend to emerge as leaders more frequently than women, the causes of these gender differences in leadership emergence remain relatively unknown. To address this research gap, the current project proposes that traits and behaviors work in concert to explain why gender disparities exist in emergent leadership. The results indicate that gender differences in leadership emergence are largely explained by agentic traits and participation in leaderless group discussions. We anticipate that these findings will advance gender and leadership theory across multiple disciplines, including management, psychology, sociology, and political science.

INTRODUCTION

The goals of our research are to:

- Further understand why women have difficulty making it into top management positions.
- Examine the traits and behaviors that drive the gender difference in leadership emergence. Hopefully, better understanding this gender difference can help reduce its influence.
- Create an open dialogue that promotes positive change and understanding of gender differences in leadership emergence.

Definitions:

<u>Leadership Emergence</u>: The extent to which an individual is perceived as leader-like (Lanaj & Hollenbeck, 2015).

<u>Communal characteristics:</u> a concern with the welfare of other people (e.g., affectionate, helpful, and nurturing; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Communal characteristics are typically associated with women.

<u>Agentic characteristics:</u> an assertive, controlling, and confident tendency (e.g., aggressive, ambitious, and independent; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Agentic characteristics are typically associated with both men and leaders.

<u>Participation:</u> The extent to which an individual speaks in leaderless group discussions.

Theoretical Development:

Previous research has shown that women are caught in a double bind: Not only are leadership roles more aligned with agentic traits, but women are also penalized if they stray from traditional gender roles and display these traits.

Hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: There is a gender difference in leadership emergence such that, men emerge more frequently in leadership roles than women.

Hypothesis 2: The gender-leadership emergence relationship is mediated first by the traits of (a) agency and (b) communion and, subsequently, participation.

RESULTS

Table 1. Meta-Analytic Results for Gender and Leadership Emergence

	k	N	d	95% Confidence Interval-Lower	95% Confidence Interval-Upper
Gender-Leadership Emergence	128	17,797	0.21	0.12	0.30

k represents the number of independent samples, N represents the total number of participants; d represents the standardized mean difference between men and women on leadership emergence

Table 2. Correlation matrix for meta-analytic effect size estimates

	Gender	Agency	Communion	Participation	Leadership Emergence
Gender					
Agency (Masculinity)	.17 k = 231; N = 51,605				
Communion (Femininity)	-.27 k = 232; N = 52,218	.06 k = 350; N = 70,594			
Participation	.07 k = 70; N = 4,385	.31 k = 7; N = 830	-.002 k = 7; N = 911		
Leadership Emergence	.09 k = 131, N = 17,905	.34 k = 8, N = 1,068	-.08 k = 8, N = 1,068	.55 k = 25, N = 3,611	

Figure 1. Path model exploring the causes of gender differences in leadership emergence.
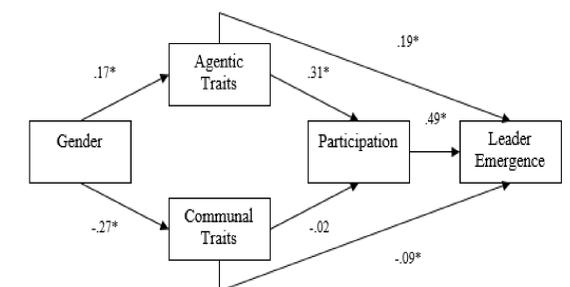
* denotes a significant value of $p < .05$ for a given path
Model has excellent fit: X^2 (2) = .391, $p > .05$; RMSEA= 0.0; CFI= 1.0; NFI= 1.0

METHOD

Finding Articles

We searched the UB Library Database to identify journal articles that were relevant to the topics we were studying.

Coding Articles

We looked for means and standard deviations or correlation coefficients in each of the papers we searched from the databases.

Inclusion criteria

Enough information must be present in the paper to code relevant information (e.g., means, standard deviations)

Calculating Effect Size

We created an average effect size by first multiplying the total number of participants and the effect size for each article. We then added together the weighted effect sizes from each study and divided by the total number of participants across all studies. Thus, our results represent a sample-weighted effect size.

DISCUSSION

Explanation of Results

Hypothesis 1 (Supported): There is a significant relationship between gender and leadership emergence. More specifically, men tend to emerge in leadership positions more often than women.

Hypothesis 2 (Partially Supported): The results of the path model show that gender differences exist in leadership emergence because men are more likely to have agentic traits, which means they are more likely to participate in group activities and, subsequently, are more likely to emerge as a leader.

Also, there is a positive correlation between agentic traits and leader emergence and a negative correlation between communal traits and leader emergence. This means that agentic traits might aid one's ability in becoming a leader while communal traits might hinder leadership opportunities.

Practical Applications

For Organizations:

Create awareness and establish a strong organizational culture that strives for gender equality.

For Managers:

Base decisions on performance measures and be aware of unconscious gender stereotypes.

References

Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological review, 109*, 573-598

Lanaj, K., & Hollenbeck, J. R. (2015). Leadership over-emergence in self-managing teams: The role of gender and countervailing biases. *Academy of Management Journal, 58*, 1476-1494.