



2008

## Can Leaders Step Outside of the Gender Box? An Examination of Leadership and Gender Role Stereotypes

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### Recommended Citation

Padgett, Margaret Y.; Caldwell, Craig B.; and Embry, Andrew, "Can Leaders Step Outside of the Gender Box? An Examination of Leadership and Gender Role Stereotypes" (2008). *Scholarship and Professional Work - Business*. 71.

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**Can leaders step outside of the gender box?  
An examination of leadership and gender role stereotypes.**

Andrew Embry, Margaret Y. Padgett, Craig B. Caldwell

Stereotyping involves assigning traits to people based on their membership in a social category. Although stereotyping is used regularly as part of the perception process to help people make sense of stimuli they encounter, it can cause problems if the stereotypes are inaccurate or if they inhibit individuals from acting in ways that are incongruent with these stereotypes. This study examined gender role stereotypes as they relate to leadership styles. Consistent with research on stereotyping in general, most research on leadership stereotypes has asked participants to associate traits and behaviors with a leader of known gender (cf. Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). Thus, the gender of the leader has been the starting point. Knowing the gender of the leader enables participants to activate stereotypes, which they then use to evaluate the leader. In contrast to these studies, this study used a reverse approach to determine if individuals also associate gender with specific traits and behaviors. The gender of the leader whom participants examined was not explicitly stated. Instead, participants were provided with gender-typical traits and behaviors and then asked to create a gender identity for the leader based on these traits and behaviors. This approach provides an alternative, and more indirect, way of assessing the existence of gender role stereotypes. If participants consistently infer a male (or female) gender identity when provided with typical male (or female) traits and behaviors, this presents additional confirmatory evidence for the continued existence of gender role stereotypes.

### Gender Stereotypes

Numerous studies have demonstrated the existence of gender stereotypes. However, some have questioned whether those stereotypes continue to exist or if they exist today as strongly as they did in the past. Research by Spence and Buckner (2000) addressed the existence of stereotypes by replicating a previously conducted study that examined stereotypes of the typical man and woman and self-perceptions of the extent to which the participant exhibits gender stereotypical traits. Using the Personal Attribute Questionnaire (PAQ) and the Bern Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) to assess gender stereotypes of personality traits, their results provide strong evidence that gender stereotypes still exist. Specifically, their results indicated that all instrumental traits (e.g., independent, competitive, decisive, aggressive, and dominant) are still significantly more likely to be associated with the typical man than with the typical woman, whereas all expressive traits (e.g., helpful, emotional, understanding, compassionate, and sensitive to others' needs) are significantly more likely to be associated with women than men. They found somewhat different results when analyzing individual self-perceptions. Although women were significantly more likely to describe themselves with all of the expressive traits than were men, there were fewer significant differences in

self-perceptions of the instrumental traits. Specifically, for about half of the instrumental traits, men and women were equally likely to associate that trait with themselves. Spence and Buckner concluded that only some of the instrumental traits can now be definitively characterized as masculine. Overall, their results suggest that although traditionally held gender stereotypes are still present, they may have diminished to some degree.

The research by Spence and Buckner (2000) examined gender-typical traits. Other researchers have focused more on gender-typical behaviors. For example, a recent meta-analysis by Eagly et al. (2003) distinguished between agentic and communal behaviors. Agentic behavior is behavior that is "independent, masterful, assertive, and instrumentally competent" (p. 572). By contrast, communal behavior is "friendly, unselfish, concerned with others, and expressive" (p. 572). Their meta-analysis demonstrated that women are perceived to behave more communally than men, whereas men are perceived to behave in more agentic ways than women (Eagly et al., 2003).

### Gender Role Stereotypes and Management Styles

The research described above focused on general gender stereotypes that are not associated with any specific role. A number of studies have suggested that there may be gender stereotypes specifically for men and women in leadership roles. Echiejile (1995), for example, categorized gender-specific leadership styles into masculine management and feminine management. Masculine management includes instrumental traits, agentic qualities, and a more autocratic and task-oriented set of leadership behaviors, whereas feminine management includes expressive traits, communal qualities, and a more interpersonally oriented and participative set of leadership behaviors.

Many studies have found significant differences between men and women in their respective leadership styles (cf. Eagly & Johnson, 1990, for a review of this research). Consistent with the characterization of these leadership styles as masculine and feminine, a meta-analysis of research conducted between 1961 and 1987 (Eagly & Johnson, 1990) concluded that men are more likely to use task-oriented and autocratic leadership styles than women, whereas women are more likely than men to use interpersonally oriented and democratic leadership styles. Research that analyzed leadership styles across various countries found a similar result (van Engen, van der Leeden, & Willemsen, 2001), as did a more recent meta-analysis completed by Eagly et al. (2003), suggesting that this finding is fairly robust.

In addition to the masculine and feminine leadership styles discussed above, some research suggests that the transactional and transformational leadership styles may be correlated with gender. Powell, Butterfield, Alves, and Bartol (2004) found that male leaders were described as more transactional than women and that female leaders were viewed as being more transformational than men. In addition, a meta-analysis of transactional and transformational leadership studies concluded that men are more

typically associated with transactional leadership than women, whereas women tend to use transformational leadership more often than men (Eagly et al., 2003).

In summary, the research reviewed above suggests that gender role stereotypes exist and that they create expectations for how men and women in leadership roles should behave. Research also shows that the actual behavior of male and female leaders is generally consistent with these expectations, raising the possibility that these gender role stereotypes may be limiting the behavioral choices available to men and women in leadership roles. Men in leadership roles are expected to have instrumental traits and use a transactional leadership style, whereas women are expected to have expressive traits and use a transformational leadership style. If these expectations of leaders are not met, it could potentially affect the leader's effectiveness as well as the way in which subordinates react to the leader.

### Subordinate Perceptions of, and Responses to, Leaders Using Gender-Consistent and Gender-Inconsistent Leadership Styles

The research described above demonstrated that people have stereotypes about the appropriate behavior of male and female leaders. However, leaders do not always use a leadership style consistent with gender role stereotypes. Although one might predict that male and female leaders would be viewed less favorably if they do not act in congruence with gender stereotypes, the limited research examining this issue has produced mixed results. For example, Petty and Miles (1976) found that subordinates were more satisfied with female leaders who exhibited consideration and a feminine leadership style than with a male leader who used a feminine leadership style. Similarly, subordinates were more satisfied with a male leader who used a masculine leadership style than a female leader who used a masculine leadership style. This suggests that leaders who use a gender-inconsistent style may be viewed less favorably by followers (i.e., followers are less satisfied with the leader) than leaders who use a gender-consistent style. However, more recent research by Powell et al. (2004) yielded somewhat different results. Powell et al. compared male and female leaders who used either a transactional style or a transformational style in terms of both their perceived effectiveness and how subordinates responded to the leader (i.e., subordinates' willingness to exert extra effort and subordinates' satisfaction with the leader). They found that when using transformational leadership, characterized as a feminine style, male leaders were perceived to have more positive subordinate responses than women using a transformational style. However, when transactional leadership, considered a masculine style, was used, women were not perceived any more positively than men. These findings suggest that men and women are not penalized for using a gender-inconsistent style, as the authors hypothesized. In fact, these results suggest that men may actually be rewarded for using a gender-inconsistent (feminine) style. However, it is interesting that a woman using a more masculine leadership style was not similarly rewarded.

There is further reason for uncertainty concerning the effect on leaders of using a gender-inconsistent leadership style. Schein and Mueller (1992) found that there was

incongruity between women and the stereotypes associated with leadership. Their study found that successful middle managers were perceived to possess characteristics that are considered masculine. Eagly and Karau (2002) confirmed these findings. They found that leadership was more associated with agentic qualities, which led to women being viewed less favorably as leaders either because the women did not possess these qualities or because the qualities were seen as less desirable in women. To the extent that this occurs, it suggests that behaving in a gender-inconsistent way would be viewed negatively for both male and female leaders. It would be viewed negatively for men because a feminine style is not consistent with the characteristics typically associated with successful managers, and it would be viewed negatively for women because it would mean that they are stepping out of the role typically prescribed for their gender.

Other findings from Powell et al. (2004) suggest a different possibility with respect to the effect of using a gender-inconsistent leadership style. Contrary to the idea of effective leadership being primarily agentic, Powell et al. found that transactional leadership was viewed more negatively than transformational leadership. In a meta-analysis, Lowe and Galen (1996) actually found that transformational leadership was viewed as being more effective than transactional leadership in virtually every setting. This suggests that whether or not the style is consistent with gender stereotypes may be less critical than the actual style used (i.e., whether it is a transactional or transformational style). Thus, it is possible that Powell et al.'s finding that female leaders received lower evaluations when using a gender-inconsistent (transactional) style whereas male leaders received higher evaluations when using a gender-inconsistent (transformational) style occurred simply because the transformational style was viewed more positively than the transactional style. Thus, based on prior research, it is not clear what effect using a gender-inconsistent style will have on perceptions of male and female leaders.

### The Role of This Study and Hypotheses

This study sought to complement the work of other researchers by observing stereotypes from a different angle. Previous studies used surveys and vignettes in which the gender of the target was explicitly stated. As discussed above, knowing the gender of the target is the first step in the stereotype process. Once the gender of the target is known, likely or expected traits and behaviors are then inferred. This study examined this chain of events in the reverse order. Specifically, participants were given gender-typical leadership behaviors through a vignette and then were asked to identify the gender of the leader in the vignette. Thus, this study assessed whether gender role stereotypes are strong enough to enable the gender of the leader to be inferred from information about gender-typical traits and behaviors. Based on the research cited above that suggests that male leaders are expected to possess instrumental traits and to use a transactional leadership style (masculine leadership) whereas female leaders are expected to possess expressive traits and to use a transformational leadership style (feminine leadership), the following hypotheses were tested:

Hypothesis 1a: Participants will be more likely to indicate that a leader exhibiting a masculine leadership style is a man rather than a woman.

Hypothesis 1b: Participants will be more likely to indicate that a leader exhibiting a feminine leadership style is a woman rather than a man.

A second purpose for this research was to examine subordinate perceptions of, and responses to, a leader who is perceived to use either a gender-consistent or gender-inconsistent leadership style. We chose to examine subordinate perceptions of, and responses to, a leader because this is an important component of overall leader effectiveness. When evaluating a leader's performance in a 360-degree performance evaluation system, the leader's performance is always assessed from the perspective of his or her subordinates, indicating that the subordinates' perspective is considered to provide valuable information about the leader's performance. Furthermore, there is substantial literature in the area of leadership, which suggests that a leader's style influences how subordinates perceive and respond to a leader. For example, the path-goal theory of leadership (House, 1971, 1996; House & Dessler, 1974) is based on the proposition that a leader's style affects subordinate satisfaction and motivation. Other research documents a relationship between a leader's behavior and trust in the leader (e.g., Burke, Sims, Lazzara, & Salas, 2007; Caldwell & Hayes, 2007; Lapidot, Kark, & Shamir, 2007).

It is not clear what effect using a gender-inconsistent style will have on subordinate perceptions of, and responses to, a leader. As noted above, some research suggests that gender stereotypes and stereotypes about leadership have a significant effect on how the leader is perceived, whereas other research suggests that the leadership style used by the leader is more important than the stereotypes. By using a different methodology to investigate gender stereotypes than has been used in prior research, this study sought to better understand how using either a gender-consistent or gender-inconsistent leadership style influences subordinate perceptions of leaders. We examined the effect of using a gender-consistent and gender-inconsistent style on four outcomes, all of which assessed the leader from the perspective of his or her subordinates: (a) subordinate perceptions of leader effectiveness; (b) subordinate trust in the leader; (c) subordinate satisfaction with the leader; and (d) subordinate motivation. These specific dependent variables were chosen because they are considered to be important outcomes in leadership research (cf. Brower, Schoorman, & Tan, 2000; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Lowe & Galen, 1996) and because they have been used in previous research focusing specifically on the effect on leaders of using a gender-consistent or gender-inconsistent leadership style (e.g., Petty & Miles, 1976; Powell et al., 2004). The following additional hypotheses were tested:

Hypothesis 2a: A leader using a perceived gender-consistent style (i.e., a man using a masculine management style or a woman using a feminine management style) will be viewed as more effective than a leader who is using a perceived gender-inconsistent style.

Hypothesis 2b: The subordinates of a leader who uses a perceived gender-consistent style will be viewed as more motivated than the followers of a leader who uses a perceived gender-inconsistent style.

Hypothesis 2c: The subordinates of a leader who uses a perceived gender-consistent style will be viewed as having more trust in the leader than the followers of a leader who uses a perceived gender-inconsistent style.

Hypothesis 2d: The subordinates of a leader who uses a perceived gender-consistent style will be viewed as more satisfied with the leader than the followers of a leader who uses a perceived gender-inconsistent style.

## Method

### Participants

One hundred eighty participants gave their voluntary consent to participate in the study. Participants were undergraduate business students at a small private university in the Midwest. They ranged in age from 17 to 26 with the average age being 20.5 years. Out of the 180 total, 99 of the participants were men and 81 of the participants were women. Eighty-two percent indicated that they had work experience. In addition, 49% of the participants indicated that they had supervised other people in one of their positions.

### Procedures

Surveys were distributed at the beginning or at the end of specified business classes. Business classes were chosen that would provide a cross-section of the undergraduate business student population at this university. Each student was handed a vignette to read and a questionnaire to complete. Participants were told that the purpose of the study was to examine perceptions of leaders. The participants were also told that their participation was entirely voluntary. The questionnaire assessed their perceptions of the leader and gathered demographic and relevant background information about the participants.

### Stimulus Materials

One independent variable, leadership style, was manipulated in the written vignette that participants read. Two vignettes were created and included a leader, "Pat," using either a masculine or feminine leadership style while leading a sales team for a fictional company. In the vignette, Pat and his or her sales team discussed the declining sales of their products and how they would deal with this problem. The case was written to analyze an objective situation, meeting the sales target for an unknown product, to avoid the possibility that participants might respond emotionally to the issue in the case and, as a consequence, have a biased response to the leader. At the conclusion of the vignette, a decision was made by Pat and the group members. The reactions of the

group members to the decision were presented neutrally, again to avoid biasing participant responses to the leader.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two experimental conditions based on the vignette they received. The cases were identical except for the manipulation of the leadership style used by the leader. One vignette included the leader using a masculine leadership style, whereas the other vignette included the leader using a feminine leadership style. The gender of the leader was never explicitly stated. The name "Pat" was chosen for the leader based on prior research that found Pat to be the most androgynous name in the set of gender-neutral names tested (Padgett, 2000).

The masculine leadership style was manipulated by describing Pat as both having instrumental traits and exhibiting transactional leadership behaviors. Four instrumental traits were incorporated into the vignette: willingness to take risks, aggressiveness, assertiveness, and task focused. These traits were chosen because they are commonly used to describe the masculine leadership style (e.g., Deaux & LaFrance, 1998; Gibson, 1995). They have also been found to be significantly more likely to be associated with men than with women (Spence & Buckner, 2000). Three transactional leadership behaviors were incorporated into the vignette: contingent reward, management by exception active, and management by exception passive. These transactional leadership behaviors were derived from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire Form 5 (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999). These behaviors were chosen because they were identified by Avolio et al. (1999) as the three core components of transactional leadership. Below are examples of how the instrumental traits and transactional leadership behaviors were incorporated into the vignette.

#### Instrumental Trait Example

Pat is described by others as being assertive and task focused, both of which contributed to the promotion to sales manager. As a sales manager, Pat's aggressiveness and willingness to take risks have led to success as a sales manager.

#### Transactional Leadership Example (contingent reward)

My \$5,000 will be given as a bonus to the person who exceeds their quota by the greatest amount of money. Anyone who does not meet his or her quota will be ineligible to receive the yearly bonus for the sales staff.

The feminine leadership style was manipulated by describing Pat as both having expressive traits and exhibiting transformational leadership behaviors. Four expressive traits were incorporated into the vignette: helpful, compassionate, ability to empathize, and interpersonal skills. These traits were chosen because they are commonly used to describe a feminine leadership style (e.g., Deaux & LaFrance, 1998; Gibson, 1995). In addition, they have been found to be significantly more likely to be associated with women than with men (Spence & Buckner, 2000). Three transformational leadership behaviors were incorporated into the vignette: inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These behaviors were derived from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire Form 5 (Avolio et al., 1999). These behaviors were chosen because they were identified by Avolio et al. (1999) as the three core components of transformational leadership. Specific examples of how the expressive traits and transformational leadership behaviors were incorporated into the vignette are provided below.

#### Expressive Trait Example

Pat is described by others as being helpful and as having the ability to empathize with employees, both of which contributed to the promotion to sales manager. As a sales manager, Pat's strong interpersonal skills and compassion for others have led to success as a sales manager.

#### Transformational Leadership Example (individualized consideration)

Pat responded, "I think you've each made a good choice. John and Mary, because your customers are extremely price sensitive, option A seems the best for you while Mike and Brittany, I agree that option B will be better for you--your creative skills will enable you to utilize the \$5,000 in a new and exciting way."

## Dependent Variables

Leader's gender. The gender of the leader was measured by a single item in which participants were asked to indicate whether Pat was a man or woman.

Leader effectiveness, trust, motivation, and satisfaction were all measured with 7-point Likert-type scales, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 7 representing strongly agree. Leader effectiveness was a direct evaluation of the leader. Trust, motivation, and satisfaction measured participants' perceptions of how they thought the subordinates in the vignette would feel about their leader (Pat).

Leader effectiveness. Leader effectiveness assessed how well Pat was perceived to have handled the situation. The leader effectiveness scale had five items. A sample item from this scale was "Pat handled the situation in an effective manner." The coefficient alpha reliability for the scale was .84.

Table 1  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between Dependent Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Leader's gender <sup>a</sup>	0.28	0.452					
2. Motivation	5.0844	0.96508	.157*				
3. Trust	4.8361	1.05855	.229**	.610**			
4. Satisfaction	4.6456	1.18017	.226**	.614**	.823**		
5. Effectiveness	4.7	1.20994	.198**	.657**	.698**	.766**	

a. 0 = male, 1 = female.

\*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (two-tailed). \*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed).

Trust. This dependent variable assessed the degree to which participants perceived Pat to have the faith and confidence of his or her sales team. Trust in the leader was measured with a five-item scale. A sample item from the trust scale was "The employees questioned Pat's decision" (reverse scored). The coefficient alpha reliability for this scale was .78.

Motivation. Motivation assessed the degree to which participants perceived Pat as inspiring his or her subordinates to achieve the sales goal. Motivation was measured with a six-item scale. A sample item from the motivation scale was "The employees will do their best to achieve the sales quota." The coefficient alpha reliability of this scale was .75.

Satisfaction. This scale assessed the extent to which participants believed that Pat's subordinates had a positive attitude toward Pat and how he or she managed the group. Satisfaction was measured with a six-item scale. A sample item from the satisfaction scale was "The employees are pleased with Pat as their manager." The coefficient alpha reliability for the scale was .89.

In addition to the dependent variables described above, the effectiveness of the independent variable manipulation was assessed by measuring the extent to which the leader was perceived to possess both instrumental and expressive traits and the extent

to which he or she was perceived to have exhibited transactional and transformational leadership behaviors. These scales are described below.

Instrumental and expressive traits. Participants rated the extent to which 10 instrumental traits (e.g., dominant, assertive, independent) and 10 expressive traits (e.g., kind, sensitive to others' needs, and emotional) were perceived to be "like Pat," with 1 representing not like Pat and 7 representing very much like Pat. The coefficient alpha reliabilities for these scales were .89 (instrumental traits) and .95 (expressive traits).

Transactional leadership. Transactional leadership was measured with 7-point Likert-type scales, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 7 representing strongly agree. There were six items in the transactional leadership scale. A sample item was "Pat offered specific rewards to the sales team." The coefficient alpha for the scale was .55.

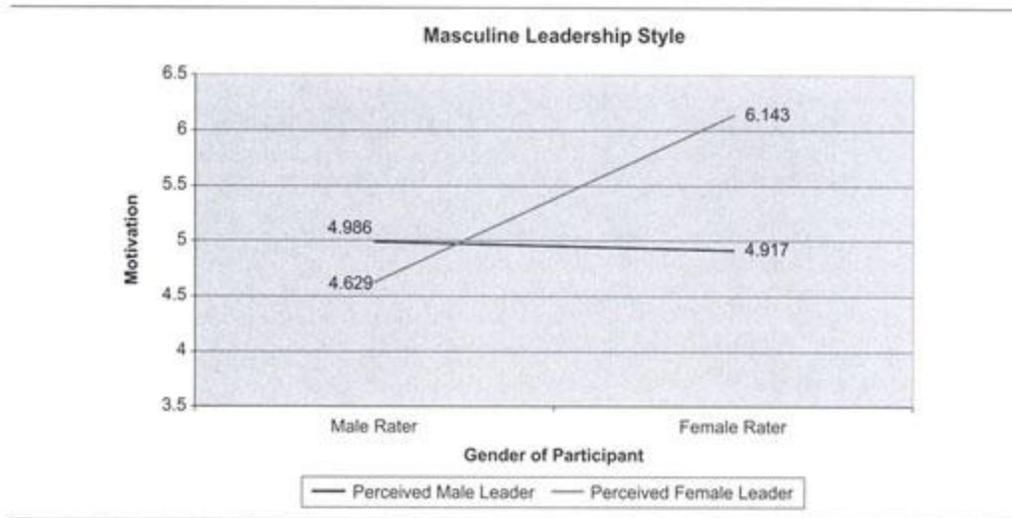
Transformational leadership. Transformational leadership was measured with 7-point Likert-type scales, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 7 representing strongly agree. The transformational leadership scale included eight items. A sample item from this scale was "Pat emphasized the group's ability to succeed." The coefficient alpha reliability for the scale was .85.

## Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations for the dependent variables in the study. Hypothesis 1 was tested using a chi-square statistic, whereas Hypothesis 2 was tested using 2 x 2 x 2 analyses of variance (ANOVAs), with leadership style (masculine or feminine), perceived gender of the leader (male or female), and gender of the participant serving as the independent variables. The results are as follows.

## Manipulation Check

Figure 1  
Motivation as a Function of Participant Gender and Perceived  
Leader Gender for Masculine Leadership Style



The masculine leadership style included instrumental traits and transactional leadership behaviors, whereas the feminine leadership style included expressive traits and transformational leadership behaviors. To test the effectiveness of the manipulation of leadership style, participants rated the leader on the extent to which he or she possessed instrumental and expressive traits and the extent to which he or she exhibited a transactional or transformational leadership style. One-way ANOVAs were done using leadership style as the independent variable and instrumental traits, expressive traits, transactional leadership, and transformational leadership as the dependent variables. Results showed that the leader in the masculine leadership condition was rated significantly higher on instrumental traits,  $F(1, 161) = 111.887, p = .000$ , and transactional leadership behaviors,  $F(1, 161) = 66.195, p = .000$ , than the leader in the feminine leadership condition. Similarly, the leader in the feminine leadership condition was rated significantly higher on expressive traits,  $F(1, 161) = 130.707, p = .000$ , and transformational leadership,  $F(1, 161) = 168.398, p = .000$ , than the leader in the masculine leadership condition. These results indicate that the manipulation of leadership style was successful.

### Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1a was that participants would be more likely to indicate that a leader exhibiting a masculine leadership style is a man rather than a woman. Hypothesis 1b was that participants would be more likely to indicate that a leader exhibiting a feminine leadership style is a woman rather than a man. These hypotheses were tested using the chi-square statistic, and they were supported as shown by the significant chi-square,  $[\chi^2(1) = 11.97, p = .001]$ . Examining the actual cell counts reveals that, as hypothesized, participants in the masculine leadership style condition were more likely than expected to indicate that Pat was a man (71 observed vs. 61 expected) and less

likely than expected to indicate that Pat was a woman (14 observed vs. 24 expected). Similarly, those in the feminine leadership style condition were more likely than expected to indicate that Pat was a woman (34 observed vs. 24 expected) and less likely than expected to indicate that Pat was a man (50 observed vs. 60 expected).

## Hypothesis 2

The second set of hypotheses focused on perceptions of the leader when he or she was perceived to be using either a gender-consistent or gender-inconsistent leadership style. A gender-consistent style was defined as a situation where the leader was perceived to be a man and was using a masculine style or the leader was perceived to be a woman and was using a feminine style. A gender-inconsistent style was defined as a situation where the leader was perceived to be a man and was using a feminine style or perceived to be a woman and was using a masculine style. Overall, these hypotheses predicted that a leader using a gender-consistent style would be perceived more positively than a leader using a gender-inconsistent style. These hypotheses were tested using 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVAs. Support for these hypotheses would be shown by a significant interaction between leadership style and perceived gender of the leader.

Hypothesis 2a was that a leader using a gender-consistent style would be perceived as more effective than a leader using a gender-inconsistent style. This hypothesis was not supported,  $F(1, 161) = 0.079$ ,  $p = .780$ . The remaining three hypotheses were that a leader using a gender-consistent style would be perceived as having followers who are more motivated and satisfied and who have a greater degree of trust in the leader than a leader using a gender-inconsistent style. The hypothesis was not supported for motivation,  $F(1, 161) = 0.253$ ,  $p = .616$ , or trust,  $F(1, 161) = 0.779$ ,  $p = .379$ , but was partially supported for satisfaction. Although the two-way interaction was significant for satisfaction,  $F(1, 161) = 3.563$ ,  $p = .061$ , the pattern of results was only partially consistent with the hypothesis. Specifically, examining the cell means reveals that, consistent with the hypothesis, a perceived female leader using a feminine (gender-consistent) style was rated higher ( $M = 5.3$ ) (i.e., perceived to have more satisfied followers) than a perceived female leader using a masculine (gender-inconsistent) style ( $M = 4.6$ ). However, contrary to the hypothesis, a perceived male leader using a feminine (gender-inconsistent) style was perceived to have more satisfied followers ( $M = 5.3$ ) than a perceived male leader using a masculine (gender-consistent) style ( $M = 3.9$ ).

These findings must be qualified because there was also a significant three-way interaction between leadership style, perceived gender of the leader, and participant gender for motivation,  $F(1, 161) = 9.881$ ,  $p = .002$ , satisfaction,  $F(1, 161) = 6.359$ ,  $p = .013$ , and effectiveness,  $F(1, 161) = 8.929$ ,  $p = .003$ , and a marginally significant interaction for trust,  $F(1, 161) = 2.776$ ,  $p = .098$  (see Figures 1-8). Examining the cell means reveals that across all measures, female participants rated a perceived female leader using a masculine style much more favorably than male participants did. In contrast, the differences between male and female participants in ratings of a perceived male leader who used a masculine style were very small. Figure 5 illustrates these

findings for satisfaction. The mean for male participants rating a perceived male leader using the masculine style was 3.94, whereas the mean for male participants rating a perceived female leader using the same masculine style was 3.71. Thus, there was very little difference in how male participants rated a perceived male and a perceived female leader using a masculine style. However, there was a larger difference in how female participants rated a perceived male and female leader using a masculine style. The mean for female participants rating a perceived male leader using the masculine style was 3.88, whereas the mean for female participants rating a perceived female leader using the same masculine style was 5.46. The female participants' rating of a perceived male leader using a masculine style is similar to the male participants' rating of both a perceived male leader and a perceived female leader who used the same masculine style. As can be seen in Figures 1, 3, and 7, a similar pattern occurred for the dependent variables of motivation, trust, and effectiveness.

### Other Findings

In addition to the results reported above, there were several other significant results that were not hypothesized. There was a significant main effect for leadership style on effectiveness,  $F(1,161) = 12.40$ ,  $p = .001$ , trust,  $F(1,161) = 13.6$ ,  $p = .000$ , and satisfaction,  $F(1,161) = 30.7$ ,  $p = .000$ . Overall, the leader was rated significantly more positively when using the feminine management style than when using the masculine management style.

Another finding was that participants rated a perceived female leader more positively than a perceived male leader as shown by the significant main effect for perceived gender of the leader for motivation,  $F(1, 161) = 4.1$ ,  $p = .045$ , trust,  $F(1, 161) = 3.68$ ,  $p = .057$ , and satisfaction,  $F(1, 161) = 3.45$ ,  $p = .065$ . Finally, a significant main effect for participant gender for motivation,  $F(1, 161) = 3.83$ ,  $p = .052$ , trust,  $F(1, 161) = 8.84$ ,  $p = .003$ , satisfaction,  $F(1, 161) = 6.2$ ,  $p = .014$ , and effectiveness,  $F(1, 161) = 3.34$ ,  $p = .07$ , reveals that female participants gave higher ratings to the leader than did male participants.

### Discussion

The purpose of this research was to examine gender role stereotypes for leaders. This study addressed two different issues with respect to leadership stereotypes. First, we wanted to see the extent to which undergraduate business students have differential stereotypes for male and female leaders. However, in contrast to most stereotype research that has participants infer behaviors and traits about a leader of known gender, this study assessed stereotypes more indirectly by having participants infer the gender of the leader from the gender-typical traits and behaviors provided. The second purpose of this study was to examine how the consistency of a leader's style with gender stereotypes affected evaluations of the leader.

The first hypothesis was that when presented with a vignette depicting a leader of unknown gender who exhibited a masculine leadership style, participants would be

more likely to infer that the leader is male rather than female. Similarly, if the leader exhibited a feminine leadership style, they would be more likely to infer that the leader is female rather than male. Consistent with the hypotheses, results indicated that there was a strong relationship between the leadership style used by the leader and the gender attributed to the leader. When exhibiting a masculine leadership style, the leader was identified as a man more often than would be expected by chance. Likewise, when exhibiting a feminine leadership style, the leader was identified as a woman more often than would be expected by chance. The fact that findings consistent with Spence and Buckner (2000) were found when using a different methodology provides additional confirmatory evidence that gender role stereotypes for leaders are still strong.

It is interesting that this study also found that participants were more likely to perceive the leader to be male rather than female regardless of whether a masculine or feminine leadership style was used. Slightly more than 70% of the participants perceived the leader to be male. This finding is consistent with previous studies reviewed by Eagly et al. (2003), where it was found that the stereotype of a leader included masculine and task-oriented agentic behaviors. The overall tendency was to associate the managerial role with men. This finding is also congruent with the research of Schein and others on requisite management characteristics (e.g., Heilman, Block, Martell, & Simon, 1989; Schein, 1975, 2001; Schein & Mueller, 1992). This research has consistently found that the characteristics of successful middle managers are more often associated with men rather than with women.

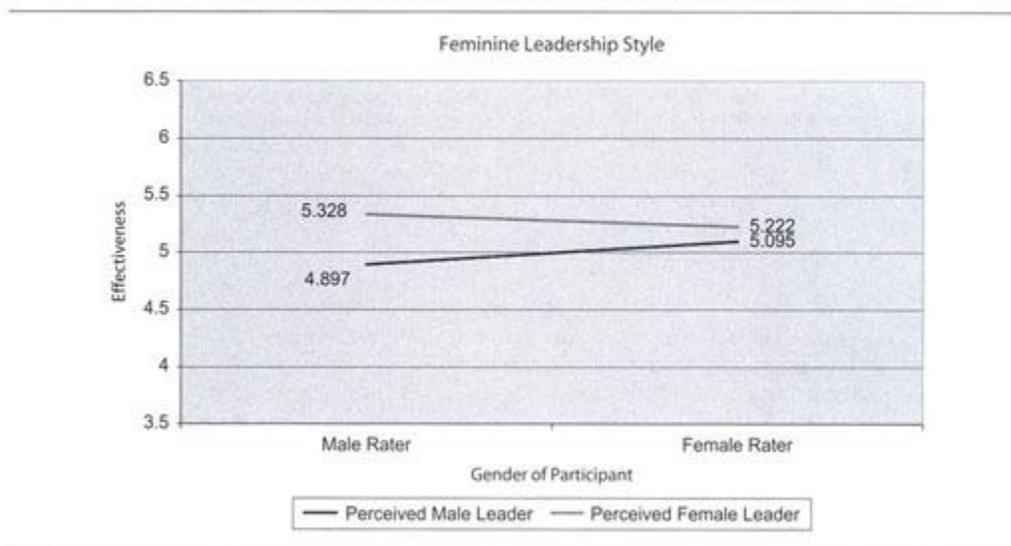
The second purpose of this study was to examine perceptions of leaders using gender-consistent and gender-inconsistent leadership styles. We hypothesized that gender consistency (i.e., a male leader using a masculine style or a female leader using a feminine style) would lead to more positive evaluations of the leader than gender inconsistency (a male using a feminine style or a female using a masculine style). Specifically, we expected that the leader would be perceived as more effective and that subordinates of the leader would be seen as more motivated and more satisfied and as having more trust in the leader. There was limited support for this hypothesis. Although we found that a perceived female leader using a gender-inconsistent (masculine) style had subordinates who were perceived to be less satisfied than a female leader using a gender-consistent style, the opposite was true for the male leader. A perceived male leader using a gender-inconsistent (feminine) style was actually perceived to have more satisfied subordinates than a perceived male leader using a gender-consistent (masculine) style. This finding is consistent with Powell et al. (2004), who also found that gender inconsistency resulted in more positive evaluations for male leaders but not for female leaders. Although a male leader receiving higher evaluations for using a gender-inconsistent (feminine) style could suggest a disparity between men and women in terms of the rigidity of their gender roles (men are permitted to "step out" of their gender role whereas women are not), this effect is more likely to be rooted in the fact that, overall, the feminine style was perceived more positively than the masculine style. Because the gender-inconsistent style for men is the feminine style whereas the gender-inconsistent style for women is the masculine style, this could account for the higher evaluations that men using a gender-inconsistent style received.

Additional information about the effect of using a gender-consistent or gender-inconsistent leadership style emerged when the gender of the participant was included in the analyses. Results showed a strong difference in how male and female participants perceived a female leader who used a gender-inconsistent (masculine) style for all of the dependent variables. Specifically, male participants did not differ in their evaluations of a perceived male and female leader using the masculine style whereas female participants rated the perceived female leader using the masculine style much higher than they rated the perceived male leader using the masculine style. Our results also showed that the female participants rated a perceived female leader using a masculine style more positively than male participants rated a perceived female leader using a masculine style. This same pattern of results occurred for all of the dependent variables. The pattern of results we found suggests that the difference in the evaluation of the perceived female leader using a masculine style from male and female participants occurred not because male participants were penalizing the perceived female leader for using a masculine style but because the female participants were rewarding a perceived female leader for doing so. Unlike the results discussed above for the two-way interaction, which appear to have occurred primarily because the feminine leadership style is viewed more positively than the masculine style, the findings for the three-way interaction suggest that the gender consistency of the leader's style is affecting perceptions of the leader. This is because female participants give the perceived female leader more positive evaluations for using the masculine (gender-inconsistent) style, which in all other masculine-style conditions (man rating a perceived male leader, man rating a perceived female leader, woman rating a perceived male leader) was found to be rated similarly and lower. Essentially, female participants are rewarding perceived female leaders for stepping outside of the gender role and adopting a masculine style. Overall, contrary to the hypothesis, behaving in a gender-inconsistent manner does not necessarily result in more negative evaluations of a leader.

Our findings are consistent with the research of Spence and Buckner (2000), who found that women described themselves as possessing both expressive and instrumental traits, whereas men described themselves as possessing primarily instrumental traits. Both findings suggest that, although gender stereotypes continue to exist, what is considered truly masculine is becoming less clearly defined and that it is potentially more acceptable to behave in a gender-inconsistent manner. However, based on the results of these studies, this change seems to be occurring primarily among women who are less apt than men to accept the rigidity of what is considered masculine. This finding could have occurred because the female participants empathized with the perceived female leader and the struggles she likely faced in becoming a manager. The sample was made up of undergraduate business students, many of whom likely hope to be in a management position at some point in their career. The more positive evaluations that the women gave the perceived female leader using a masculine style compared with the perceived male leader using the same style could reflect their support, encouragement, and empathy, in particular in light of the fact that they can envision themselves being in a similar situation in the future.

## Implications for Practice and Further Research

Figure 8  
Effectiveness as a Function of Participant Gender and Perceived  
Leader Gender for Feminine Leadership Style Condition



Our results suggest several implications for practice. Overall, this study found that a feminine leadership style was viewed more favorably by both male and female participants. Not only was a leader using a feminine style viewed as more effective, but a leader using a feminine style was viewed as having a more positive effect on subordinates. The finding that the feminine style was viewed more positively than the masculine style suggests that both male and female leaders may benefit from adopting a more feminine leadership style on the job. Organizational training focused on teaching managers how to use a feminine style would be beneficial, in particular for men, who might be less knowledgeable about, and comfortable with, a feminine style. Our results also suggest that, in some circumstances, it may also be acceptable for women to adopt a masculine (gender-inconsistent) leadership style. Finally, although not one of our primary hypotheses, we found that, for three of the four dependent variables, the perceived female leader was viewed more positively than the perceived male leader, regardless of the leadership style used. This may be indicative of greater openness on the part of future employees (both male and female) toward having female managers and, from a practical point of view, suggests that companies continue to prepare women for advancement into management positions.

This study suggests a number of avenues for further research. In this study, the leaders in the vignettes used either a masculine style or a feminine style. Yet, it is likely that many actual leaders do not use a purely masculine or a purely feminine style but rather use some elements of both. Consistent with the idea that managers use aspects from both leadership styles, the meta-analysis by Eagly et al. (2003) found that although women were most likely to be described as using transformational leadership, they were

also described as using the contingent reward subscale of transactional leadership more often than did men. Thus, it would be interesting to create a vignette in which the leader did not use a strictly feminine or masculine management style to determine how this affected perceptions of leaders and, in particular, which combination of masculine and feminine management would create the most positive evaluations of a leader. It is not clear whether this cross-gender leadership style would result in more positive or more negative perceptions of the leader. It could result in more positive evaluations if the combination of the two styles was seen as compensating for what each style lacked on its own. Alternatively, the leader could be perceived as confusing, inconsistent, or even disingenuous and, thus, be viewed more negatively. Research portraying the leader as using a cross-gender style would provide results that are more accurate with regard to real leaders because even if leaders have a predominant style, they probably use some aspects of both the masculine and feminine styles.

An additional area for future research would be to further examine another interesting difference between male and female raters observed in this study for two of the dependent variables (motivation and effectiveness). Specifically, there was a tendency for male participants to give a lower rating to a perceived male leader using a feminine style than they gave to a perceived female leader using a feminine style. In a similar vein, there was a tendency for male participants to give higher ratings to a perceived male leader using a masculine style than they gave to a perceived female leader using a masculine style. Both of these findings suggest that men may view a leader who uses a gender-consistent leadership style more positively than they view a leader who uses a gender-inconsistent style. In contrast, women seem to be more comfortable with a leader who uses a gender-inconsistent style (e.g., they viewed a perceived male leader using a feminine style just as positively as they viewed a perceived female leader using a feminine style and, as described above, they actually gave higher ratings to a perceived female leader using a masculine style than they gave to a perceived male leader using a masculine style). It is not clear why men might be less comfortable with leaders who use a gender-inconsistent style than women are or if these tendencies would be found in subsequent research. Future research should further examine responses of men and women to leaders who use a gender-inconsistent style to see if similar results are found and, if so, to better understand why this difference occurs.

### Limitations

Our findings should be accepted with some caution due to several limitations that resulted from the methodology employed in this study. Because this study used a simulated situation in which the leader and subordinates were fictional characters, participants had a fairly limited amount of information on which to base their perceptions of the leader. In a real situation, participants would have more information to use in evaluating the leader and, therefore, might have been less likely to rely on their prior biases and stereotypes. This reduces the external validity of our results. In a similar vein, because our study used undergraduate students as participants, their responses may not generalize to how a sample of working people in an actual business setting

would respond in this situation. Further research using employees in a business setting is recommended as a complement to this research.

Another limitation of this study relates to how the dependent variables were measured. For three of the dependent variables (trust, motivation, and satisfaction), participants were asked to reach a judgment about how the subordinates in the vignette would react to the leader. For example, they were asked to judge how much trust they thought the subordinates in the vignette would have had in their leader. The rationale behind this method for measuring the dependent variables was that, given an ambiguous stimulus (i.e., a vignette that did not provide information about the degree of trust subordinates had in the leader), the participants would project their own beliefs and feelings onto the subordinates. However, it may have been difficult for some participants to imagine how subordinates would feel in that situation given the brevity of the vignette and because they were not actually in that situation. Thus, their responses might not be representative of how they would respond in a real situation, reducing the external validity of these results. However, this concern is lessened to some degree because 80% of the sample had prior work experience. This increases the likelihood that they would be able to put themselves into the situation of the subordinates, imagine how they might feel, and respond realistically.

Another limitation of this study was that with our methodology, we had no control over how many individuals perceived the leader to be male or female. As a result, some of the significant effects, specifically the three-way interaction of participant sex, perceived gender of leader, and leadership style, were based on a very small sample size. Given the small sample size, this finding should be interpreted with some caution. However, the mean differences observed were large, highly significant, and consistent across all of the dependent variables, which suggests that they may be indicative of a real effect rather than an artifact. This study should be replicated with a larger sample size. If similar results are found, it will provide evidence for the validity of our findings.

Finally, it is also important to note that the methodology we used in our study did not allow us to assess the existence of stereotypes directly. The process of stereotyping begins with the group or category into which the person is placed (in our case, gender); the stereotype then involves the inference of traits and behaviors based on that categorization. Our study began with traits and behaviors and then asked participants to infer gender. Thus, technically speaking, it was not actually a study of stereotypes. However, we believe our study complements research on gender stereotypes. Even though we examined gender stereotypes using a different, and more indirect, methodology, our results can only be explained by the existence of stereotypes and, therefore, are consistent with results of traditional stereotype research (e.g., Spence & Buckner, 2000). Specifically, if participants did not have the stereotype that men (women) use a more masculine (feminine) leadership style, they would not have been more likely to infer that the leader using the masculine (feminine) style was male (female). Thus, examining gender stereotypes using a different methodology allows us to have greater confidence that the results of traditional stereotyping research are not due strictly to the methodology used to assess the existence of stereotypes.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations  
Between Dependent Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2
1. Leader's gender	0.28	0.452		
2. Motivation	5.0844	0.96508	.157 *	
3. Trust	4.8361	1.05855	.229 **	.610 **
4. Satisfaction	4.6456	1.18017	.226 **	.614 **
5. Effectiveness	4.7	1.20994	.198 **	.657 **

Variable	3	4	5
1. Leader's gender			
2. Motivation			
3. Trust			
4. Satisfaction	.823 **		
5. Effectiveness	.698 **	.766 **	

(a.) 0 = male, 1 = female.

\* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (two-tailed).

\*\* Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed).

Figure 1  
Motivation as a Function of Participant Gender and Perceived Leader Gender for Masculine Leadership Style Condition

Masculine Leadership Style

	Perceived Male Leader	Perceived Female Leader
Male rater	4.986	4.629
Female rater	4.917	6.143

Note: Table made from line graph.

Figure 2  
Motivation as a Function of Participant Gender and Perceived Leader Gender for Masculine Leadership Style Condition

Feminine Leadership Style

	Perceived Male Leader	Perceived Female Leader
Male rater	4.91	5.152
Female rater	5.463	5.122

Note: Table made from line graph.

Figure 3  
Trust as a Function of Participant Gender and Perceived Leader Gender for Masculine Leadership Style Condition

Masculine Leadership Style

	Perceived Male Leader	Perceived Female Leader
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Male rater	4.271	4.462
Female rater	4.157	5.571

Note: Table made from line graph.

Figure 4  
Trust as a Function of Participant Gender and Perceived  
Leader Gender for Masculine Leadership Style Condition

Feminine Leadership Style

	Perceived Male Leader	Perceived Female Leader
Male rater	5.062	5.295
Female rater	5.225	5.5

Note: Table made from line graph.

Figure 5  
Satisfaction as a Function of Participant Gender and Perceived  
Leader Gender for Masculine Leadership Style Condition

Masculine Leadership Style

	Perceived Male Leader	Perceived Female Leader
Male rater	3.936	3.883
Female rater	3.714	5.457

Note: Table made from line graph.

Figure 6  
Satisfaction as a Function of Participant Gender and Perceived  
Leader Gender for Masculine Leadership Style Condition

Feminine Leadership Style

	Perceived Male Leader	Perceived Female Leader
Male rater	5.217	5.286
Female rater	5.225	5.267

Note: Table made from line graph.

Figure 7  
Effectiveness as a Function of Participant Gender and Perceived  
Leader Gender for Masculine Leadership Style Condition

Masculine Leadership Style

	Perceived Male Leader	Perceived Female Leader
Male rater	4.399	4.026
Female rater	3.714	5.5

Note: Table made from line graph.

Figure 8  
Effectiveness as a Function of Participant Gender and Perceived  
Leader Gender for Masculine Leadership Style Condition

Feminine Leadership Style

	Perceived Male Leader	Perceived Female Leader
Male rater	4.897	5.095
Female rater	5.328	5.222

Note: Table made from line graph.