Does valuing androgyny and femininity lead to a female advantage? The relationship between gender-role, transformational leadership and identification ☆

Ronit Kark [a,*], Ronit Waismel-Manor [b,2], Boas Shamir [c,1]

[a] Department of Psychology, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan 52900, Israel
[b] School of Behavioral Sciences, Netanya Academic College, Netanya, 42365, Israel
[c] Department of Anthropology and Sociology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Mount Scopus, Jerusalem 91905, Israel

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

The notion of 'think manager–think male' has been demonstrated in many studies. The current study examines whether leaders are perceived as more effective when they have 'feminine', 'masculine' or 'androgynous' characteristics, and how this relates to the leader's and followers' sex. Using carefully matched samples of 930 employees of 76 bank managers, we studied the relationship between managers' gender-role identity (perceived 'femininity', 'masculinity' and 'androgyny') and how this relates to leadership effectiveness in terms of transformational leadership and personal identification with the leader. Our findings show that among both male and female leaders, 'androgyny' was more strongly related to transformational leadership and followers' identification than 'non-androgyny', and that leaders' 'femininity' was more strongly related to leadership effectiveness than 'masculinity'. Furthermore, the results show that women paid a higher penalty for not being perceived as 'androgynous' (mixing 'femininity' and 'masculinity'), in comparison to men with regard to personal identification. When examining same- versus cross-sex relationships, we found that 'non-androgynous' male managers were rated higher by their male employees than by their female employees. Our findings suggest that women and men who are interested in being perceived as effective leaders may be well advised to blend 'feminine' and 'masculine' behaviors, and even more so when they are in situations of non-congruency (i.e., women in leadership roles and leading in cross-sex relationships). We discuss the implications of these findings for both theory and practice.

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1. Introduction

In the past and in some respects even today, the ideal manager[3] was perceived as possessing stereotypic 'masculine'[4] qualities such as self-confidence, independence, assertiveness, dominance and rationality (Schein, 1973). Research has indicated that across different organizations and countries the "good" or successful manager was described in masculine terms by both women and men (e.g., Powell & Butterfield, 1979; Schein, 2007; Schein, Mueller, Lituchy, & Liu, 1996), as echoed in Schein et al.'s (1996) phrase "think manager–think male". A recent meta analysis of 69 studies, that examined the extent to which stereotypes of leaders are culturally 'masculine', confirmed the overall 'masculinity' of leader's stereotypes (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011). Traditional stereotypic 'feminine' characteristics were considered irrelevant or even antithetical to success in the management role. These perceptions are argued to disadvantage women in management positions, forcing them to cope with the perceived incongruity between their 'leader role' and their 'gender role' (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Powell & Graves, 2003).

More recently, a growing trend in the literature asserts that management is becoming more 'feminine', in the sense that qualities which have traditionally been associated with women are now being associated with effective organizational management (e.g., Benveniste, 1993; Duehr & Bono, 2006; Fondas, 1997; McDowell, 1997). Changes in organizations' economic, demographic, technological and cultural environments have given voice to this alternative perspective suggesting that traditional management styles may be less effective. Many authors (e.g. Book, 2000; Eagly & Carli, 2003a; Fletcher, 2004; Fondas, 1997; Lipman-Bluman, 1996) have argued that in order to succeed in today's frequently changing, less hierarchical and more flexible organizations, managers have to engage in collaboration, be cooperative, demonstrate openness, interpersonal sensitivity and empathy, and invest efforts in the development of their employees.

This suggests that effective and influential leadership may not be characterized by mainly stereotypic 'masculine' characteristics, but rather may call for 'androgyny', a blending of culturally 'feminine' and 'masculine' types of behaviors that can give both female and male managers more flexibility and advantage as leaders (Hackman, Furniss, Hills, & Paterson, 1992; Hall, Workman, & Marchioro, 1998; Koenig et al., 2011). A meta-analytical study reports evidence for increasing 'androgyny' of the leader stereotype over the last four decades (Koeing et al., 2011). A shift in an 'androgynous' direction may also ease women's role incongruity problem in relation to leadership roles and enable them to better cope with the challenge of the double bind paradox: the conflicting expectations that women leaders should behave in an agentic manner (e.g., assertive, competitive) to fulfill the leader role, but at the same time in a communal manner (e.g., compassionate, caring) to fulfill the female gender role (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kark, 2004; Kark & Eagly, 2010).

One approach to study the effectiveness of female and male leaders is by examining their leadership styles (Kark & Eagly, 2010). Meta-analyses have shown that there is a positive relationship between transformational leadership style and a leader's effectiveness (e.g., Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Leadership effectiveness can also be assessed in terms of the relational logic of effectiveness (Fletcher, 2004; Kark, 2011). According to this perspective, the level of emotional and relational attachment of the followers to the leader is used as an indicator of leaders' effectiveness. In this study we focus on personal identification of the followers with the leader, which may play an important role in leaders' ability to influence followers and be effective (e.g., Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003; Yaffe & Kark, 2011).

The aim of this study is three-fold. First, we attempt to extend existing knowledge on gender and leadership by studying the ways leaders' perceived gender-role identity ('femininity', 'masculinity' or 'androgyny') relates to leadership effectiveness as evidenced in transformational leadership style and personal identification with the leader. We focus on transformational leadership, since it represents a behavioral aspect of leadership effectiveness, and on followers' identification with the leader, which reveals the emotional–relational aspects of leadership effectiveness. The focus on these two different modes of effectiveness enables a better understanding of the complex relationships between leadership, sex and gender-role.

Second, we seek to broaden the focus of previous investigations by examining not only the effects of manager's sex and gender-role identity on leadership effectiveness, but to also direct our attention to subordinates' sex and the dynamics that develop in same-sex versus cross-sex relationships. Focusing on personal identification with the leader in this context is valuable for two reasons. First, due to the importance of sex and gender for self-definition (e.g., Kohlberg, 1966; Minsky, 1996), identification with the manager is likely to be affected by manager's sex and gender-role and their interaction with followers' sex. Second, although identification with the leader has been a central premise of leadership theories and has been suggested to be an important component in the ability of leaders to influence followers, there are only a few field studies that have directly examined the concept of personal identification with leaders, and none, to our knowledge, that examine the interplay between sex, gender-role and personal identification with leaders.

Third, most of the studies on gender stereotypes and the effect of gender-role in leadership positions are conducted in settings that are far removed from the actual context in which leadership takes place (e.g., laboratories and classrooms) using imaginary people as targets. Therefore, the findings of these studies may reflect gender stereotyping that occurs primarily in the absence of specific information about an individual and in the absence of a relationship with that individual. Thus, studies using this approach inevitably omit

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[3] In this article, we use the terms *leader* and *manager* interchangeably. Although a distinction between leadership and management is useful in some contexts (e.g., Kotter, 1990), the thrust of the studies reviewed here is not based on a separation of these functions. Furthermore, we draw on leadership theory and test our hypotheses on a sample of organizational managers.

[4] We use the terms *sex* to denote the grouping of people into female and male categories. The terms *gender*, *'femininity'* and *'masculinity'* refer to the meanings that societies and individuals ascribe to these female and male categories. When using the terms *femininity*, *masculinity* and *androgyny* in the text we put them in quotes. We do this to indicate that we do not see these concepts as fixed constructs that represent the reality, but rather as socially constructed stereotypical assumptions about gender that are dynamic and can change and be re-shaped over time (see Kark & Waismel-Manor, 2005).