The Perceptions of Race and Gender and its Effect on a Leader's Favorability

Sasha Pierre- Louis
Psychology Department
George Mason University
Fairfax Virginia

Faculty Advisors: Eden King and Ashley Membere

Abstract

This study aimed to find out how race and gender (Black, White, male, female) could affect perceptions of leadership favorability. Previous research shows that White male leaders are considered more favorable in leadership positions than White female and Black leaders. The stereotypical characteristics of White female and Black male leaders are perceived to be inconsistent with those of the prototypical leader (White male). Although Black female leaders do not fit into the prototype of being White or male, it is hypothesized that White male and Black female leaders would receive comparably higher evaluations in comparison to White female and Black male leaders in post evaluations. Past research also shows how negative stereotypes and perceptions may affect minorities' ability to gain positions of leadership. In this study the influence of legitimate power is also considered through leader assignment. This study anticipated that the effect of a leader's gender and race on ratings of leader performance and interpersonal ratings would be buffered when their position was legitimized. Participants completed the Lost at Sea Survival Task and Moon Survival Task. They also completed the Modern Sexism, Modern Racism/Social Dominance, and Leader Evaluations measures that inquired about participants' thoughts of race, gender and the leadership ability of a leader. This study did not reveal any significant results that support the hypotheses; some possible explanations and limitations of the study are offered.

Keywords: Race, Gender and Leaders

1. Introduction

The leadership of an organization is one aspect that drives it towards success. How a leader interacts with the staff, sets goals and standards, and delegates tasks in the office can influence subordinates' perceptions of a leader's credibility. The tasks within a leader's control, such as making decisions and negotiation, influence how the leader is perceived by others (Bergeron, Block, & Echtenkamp, 2006). But are there other factors that influence a leader's favorability?

According to Carli (1999), race and gender may influence how people perceive a leader's favorability. These characteristics are an important part of one's identity, but may overshadow a minority leader's ability to attain leadership positions. Even though the 1964 Civil Right Act prohibits formal discrimination based on race, sex, national origin, and religion, identity characteristics such as gender and race can influence perceptions of leadership favorability (Avery, 2011). The lack of leadership opportunities for minorities may be due to negative perceptions and subtle discrimination and or prejudice in the workplace (Laer & Janssen, 2011). This study is aimed to discover whether the perceptions of race and gender affect a leader's favorability.

1.1 Perceptions Of Black Leaders

Racial identity does not influence perceptions of White male leaders in the same way as Black leaders. White males have played a major role in the history of the United States by holding major leadership positions and people are constantly exposed to them as leader figures (Rosette, Leonardelli, & Phillips, 2008). Minority leaders (e.g., White female, Black female, Black male), then, do not fit the leader prototype of being White and male (Foti, Fraiser, & Lord, 1982; Hains, Hogg, & Duck, 1997; Runkle & Ayman, 1997).

Black leaders especially face negative stereotypes that may lead to challenges in moving up in the organization as a leader (Knight, Hebl, Foster, & Mannix, 2003). Stereotypes and or perceptions, like not putting in effort or lack of ability, potentially hinder the success of Black employees gaining leadership positions. Knight and colleagues (2003) researched whether subtle forms of prejudice emerged when people justified negative attitudes toward Black leaders on something other than race, such as performance in the workplace. This study revealed that when the leader was Black and subordinates were White, Black leaders had negative leadership ratings. It also showed that when the leader was White and subordinates were Black, White leaders had positive leadership ratings. Overall, this study was consistent with previous research stating that when people violate their stereotypical societal role, they may be viewed negatively (Knight & Guiliano, 2001; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Grounded in the findings of the previous studies Black leaders may not be viewed as favorable in leadership positions. Therefore, for the present study it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 1: Compared to White leaders, Black leaders will be rated as less favorable in post evaluations for the leader evaluation.

1.2 Perceptions of Female Leaders

Stereotypical gender characteristics can be influential to leadership style. Female gender characteristics are traditionally seen as unfavorable and are not qualities that male leaders typically display in their leadership. Female gender roles and the characteristics of a leader can be perceived as incongruent for female leaders because their gender norms are not reflected in the prototypical leader (male) (Rosette & Tost, 2010). Males are characterized as "aggressive, independent, competent, decisive, and forceful" and these agentic qualities are seen as characteristics that make a strong leader for an organization (Rosette & Tost, 2010, p. 222). Female leaders are expected to follow a communal style of leadership, which focuses on people rather than organizational outcomes. Some examples of communal characteristics are being "kind, helpful, concerned and sympathetic towards others' feelings" (Eagly & Karau, 2003, p.574). These characteristics are more likely to be seen as stereotypical female leadership styles and gender roles (Abele, 2003; Fiske & Stevens, 1993). The communal style of leadership is under evaluated and unfavorable in leadership positions because it does not fit the characteristics of a leader (Heilman, 2001).

With males setting the standard of what is deemed acceptable behavior as a leader, it may be challenging for female leaders to be seen as credible or equal to their counterparts. Schein (1973) found that males were more likely to be linked with being successful managers than females because they displayed confidence, force and ambition. This implies that female leaders are not considered successful managers because they do not have the same leadership style as males. In a replicated study by Heilman, Block, Simon, and Martell (1989), they investigated whether females were unlikely to be considered successful managers in comparison to males. Similar to the finding by Schein, they found that females were less likely, sixteen years later, to be considered successful managers. I hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 2: Compared to male leaders, female leaders will be rated as less favorable in the post evaluation for the leader evaluation.

1.3 Perceptions of Black Female Leaders

The literature about Black females in leadership roles is limited in comparison to that of prototypical leaders. Black females are deemed non-prototypical leaders and doubly disadvantaged because of their subordinate race and or gender identity (Avery, 2011; Purdie-Vaughn & Eibach, 2008). This double disadvantage may lead to Black females being perceived as inadequate leaders due to negative stereotypes (Beale, 1979). But for Black females, the two identities are not mutually exclusive and both can potentially influence how they are viewed as leaders (Sesko & Biernat, 2010).

Although Black females can be doubly disadvantaged because of their race and gender in positions of leadership, it can also work to be beneficial as well (Purdie-Vaughn & Eibach, 2008). Some examples are less likely being the target of discrimination, or the ability to display agentic characteristics in their leadership style because "neither their gender nor their race overlap with leader expectations" (Livingston, Rosette, & Washington, 2012; Rosette & Livingston, 2012, p.1163; Sesko & Biernat, 2010). These advantages allow for Black female leaders to be more autonomous in their leadership style without worrying about harsh critic or discrimination.

Based on the previously stated research, Black females should have the most opposition in leadership positions in comparison to Black males and White females. However, Black females have the same leverage in leadership positions as White males (Livingston, Rosette & Washington, 2012). In Rosette and Livingston's (2012) study, it was found that Black female leaders were as favorable as White male leaders when organizational outcomes were met or surpassed, sometimes being considered more favorable (Forchi, 2000). Similar to Rosette's study, this current study intends to reveal whether Black female leaders are perceived as more favorable. Rosette and Livingston's study is being furthered by focusing on perceptions of race and gender, and their effect on leadership favorability. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 3: White male and Black female leaders will receive higher ratings in the post evaluation for the leader evaluation when compared to White female and Black male leaders.

1.4 Role of Perceived Legitimacy of Leaders

Along with investigating whether race and gender can influence perceptions of leadership favorability, this study aims to disclose if being a legitimate leader lessens the effect of gender and racial biases in leadership favorability. In Carli's (1999) paper, she discusses how males and females differ in their legitimate power. For this study, Carli's ideas are being furthered by investigating if legitimate power can reduce race and gender perceptions.

French and Raven define legitimate power as someone being granted power because of their "age, intelligence, caste, physical appearance… and [even] designation" and other external factors (Carli, 1999; French & Raven, 1959, p.265). The way in which people perceive how leaders gain their power may influences how subordinates interact with them. When a leader gains power legitimately, subordinates are more likely to respect their decisions because it reflects competency and leadership ability (Raven, 2008). Legitimate power may reduce bias because the structure in which the power was given; subordinates may perceive the leader's actions as "fair and deserved" (Haines & Jost, 2000, p.222).

Legitimate power provides stability in organizations and trust within a leader (Spears, 2001). By providing reasons for legitimacy, (experience and expertise) people should feel better about being dependent upon another person (Haines & Jost, 2000). In this study the participants were assigned to an experimental group of power difference and legitimacy of power. Then they positively or negatively rated their affect. This study revealed that there was more positive affect when an explanation was given for power and legitimacy differences. In support of past literature, race and gender would be expected less likely to be a factor in leadership favorability when gained legitimately because subordinates would be more focused on the credibility of the leader. Thus it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 4: The leader's legitimacy will moderate the ratings of race and gender in the post evaluation of the leader evaluation when the leader's position is legitimatized.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

The participants were college students from a large public university in the Mid-Atlantic. After running the manipulation checks on race and gender there were 72 eligible subjects who participated in this study, 22 men and 50 women. There were six participants who had incomplete surveys that were not used for this study and two participants were omitted for failing the race manipulation check. To be eligible for this study, participants had to be enrolled in an introductory psychology course, 18 years of age, and fluent in the English language. The participants had to pass the race and gender manipulation check in order to be included in the study. Participants in the final sample had a mean age of 19.58 years, and the ethnic composition was 45.8% Caucasian, 19.4% Asian, 16.7% African American, 12.5% mixed, 4.2% Latino/Hispanic, 1.4% Native American, and 6.9% other.

2.2 Procedure

This study was a 2 (leader gender: male, female) x 2 (leader race: White, Black) x 2 (appointment: legitimate, not legitimate) between subject design. There were eight confederates (2 Black men, 2 Black women, 2 White men, 2 White women) used to portray the leaders. The confederates were trained to interact with the participants in the same manor by being friendly and asking the participants' name. In confederate training, they also learned some of the answers to guide the participant as the leader. The confederates were also instructed to help with the task by giving some leading answers but without taking control of the task; participant and confederate had to work together through discussing each answer choice. All confederates sat to the right of the participant so that the recording could clearly see the participant's reactions.

A research assistant guided the participant through the study by reading a script and informing them of their rights as a study participant. Prior to being introduced to the confederate, the participant completed the leader evaluation about expectations he/she had of a leader during a task or in a group setting. Next, the participant completed the Lost at Sea Survival Task independently. The participant had to rank a list of items in order of importance. The items that were ranked were items that would be most important if someone were lost at sea.

The legitimacy condition was manipulated by informing participants that the confederate was assigned to the leader role because (a) he/she scored higher (legitimate) or (b) through a coin toss (illegitimate) because they scored about the same.

Once the participant and confederate introduced themselves, they had 15 minutes to work together to complete the Moon Survival Task. During the completion of this task the participant and confederate were unobtrusively recorded to provide an opportunity to assess subtle interpersonal dynamics. Next, the participant completed the leader evaluation again to gather responses specifically about their leader's behavior during the task. The participants also completed measures asking about perceptions specific to gender and race. After the study was complete the participant was debriefed about the study, its purpose and how to gain more information upon request.

2.3 Materials

Prior to meeting the confederate, the participant filled out information about what expectations he/she had of a leader during completing a task or in a group setting. Next, the participant completed the Lost at Sea Survival Task independently. In the Lost at Sea Survival Task, the participant had to rank a list of item in order of importance. The items that were ranked were items that would be most important if someone were lost at sea.

The legitimacy condition was manipulated by informing participants that the confederate was assigned to the leader role either because (a) his/her score on the task was higher or (b) through a random coin toss.

Once the participant and confederate introduced themselves, they had 15 minutes to work together to complete the Moon Survival Task. During the completion of the Moon Survival Task the participant and confederate were unobtrusively recorded to provide an opportunity to assess subtle interpersonal dynamics. After completion of the task the participant answered questions about their perceptions of the leader and their thoughts and feelings towards gender and race.

2.4 Measures

2.4.1 lost at sea survival task and moon survival task

(Griffith, 1998). In these tasks the subject must list 15 items that one would need to survive from most to least important. During this study the Lost at Sea Survival Task and the Moon Survival Task were used to carry out the study. The participant became familiar with the task by practicing with the Lost at Sea Survival Task. Then the participant and confederate worked together to complete the Moon Survival Task. The accuracy of the order of these tasks did not play a role in this study, but rather facilitated the interpersonal communication between the participant and confederate.

2.4.2 leader evaluations

(Rosette & Tost, 2010). This measure was used to identify what behaviors he/she expected in a leader. It was also modified to be used pre and post task completion by the participants. This measure had 16 items and was measured

on a scale anchored, 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). The participants completed these items again, post task, to assess post-interaction perceptions. The pre-evaluation leader evaluation had a Cronbach alpha of .914 and the post evaluation leader evaluation had a stronger Cronbach's alpha of .940.

2.4.3 modern sexism

(Ekehammar, B. et Al. 2000; Swim, J. et Al. 1995)**.** This measure was used to understand participants' attitude towards gender roles in the workplace. The Modern Sexism scale had 12 items measured on a Likert Scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) and had a Cronbach's alpha of .802.

2.4.4 modern racism scale/social views

(McConahay, 1986; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). This measured the participants' attitude towards different social issues. The 14 items on this scale was measured on a Likert Scale of 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*). The two scales had better reliability when analyzed separately; Modern racism had a Cronbach's alpha of .773 and Social Dominance Orientation had a Cronbach alpha of .771. The two scales combined had a reliability of .741.

2.5 Manipulation Check

The manipulation checks were used in this study to assure that each participant understood the condition in which they were placed. The manipulation checks identified the gender and race of the confederate by asking the participants to check the race of the confederate (Black or White) and the gender of the confederate (Male or Female). It made sure that the participants' response reflected the condition of the legitimacy.

3. Results

This study strives to understand if there were differences in how people perceived one as a favorable leader, and if their gender or race played a role in these perceptions. ANOVAs were used to evaluate perceptions, and race and gender served as the predictors; they were used to assess differences in outcomes based on condition.

This study did not present any significant findings. Hypothesis 1 was not supported. As seen in Figure 1 there were no significant differences between evaluations for Black and White leaders, $F(1,72)=.229$, $p=.634$. Hypothesis 2 was also not supported. Figure 2 shows there were no significant differences between male and female leader ratings in post evaluations, $F(1,72)=.248$, $p=.620$. Hypothesis 3 was also not supported. In Figure 3 it demonstrates that there were no significant differences in White male and Black female leaders' leader evaluation ratings when compared to White female and Black male leaders in post evaluations, $F(3, 72) =.229$, $p=.876$. Hypothesis 4 was not supported. Figure 4 shows that there were no significant differences in that the leader's gender and race buffered their legitimatized leadership position, $F(3, 72)=.234$, $p=.873$.

4. Discussion

In this case race and gender do not influence how people perceive leadership favorability. There could be a few immediate reasons for this result, one being the demographic location of the university. The study sample came from one of the most diverse institutions of higher learning which included international students. With the sample being more exposed to people of different backgrounds, participants were less likely to make judgements based on characteristics such as race and gender. Zajonc (1968) states that the mere exposure to stimuli can affect one's preference through unconscious thinking. By having a descriptive norm, what is practiced, known and valued in a specific situation, of a diverse campus and daily exposure to people of different backgrounds, participants were able to take those interpersonal implications and make more sound judgements of others when completing the Moon Survival Task (Galdini, 2007; Kwan, Yap & Chiu, 2015).

Another reason there may have not been significant results, could be the influence of President Obama. In the past seven years of his presidency the nation has been exposed to President Barack Obama and his family, which counters the negative stereotypes of Black Americans and challenges the notion of White male leader protypicality (Runkle &

Ayman, 1997). Plant and colleagues (2009) found that racial prejudices against Blacks were lowered after Obama's campaign because it defied the schema of Black Americans in leadership positions and stereotypes about the race. According to Meirick and Dunn (2015), Obama has provided Americans with a prime exemplar that defies "pre-existing attitudes about [the Black] race" such as being "lazy, ignorant, and incompetent" or not being considered qualified for leadership positions (Rosette et al., 2008 p.760; Rosko-Ewoldsen & Fazio, 1992).

Even though there is not a great deal of literature that looks at race, gender and leadership favorability, some of the results reflected what previous research has stated: minorities are not as favorable as White male leaders. And although the results were not significant to make claims about the influence of race and gender, it can be a reflection of the millennial generation displaying that progress is being made to achieve a society where race and gender do not play an influential role in perceived leadership favorability (Plant, Devine, Cox, Columbia, Miller, Goplen, Petruche, 2009).

5. Limitations

Possible limitations could have also influenced the outcome of this research, like ensuring that confederates strictly perform the same within each condition by interacting with the participant and setting expectations as the leader. The variability in the confederates' behavior may have influenced how participants reacted to the confederates' leadership behavior.

Another possible limitation was the coin toss. It was not the most effective way to make the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate leader because it may have appeared that the confederate earned the leadership position after the coin toss. For future study replications, it is suggested to assign the leadership position to the confederate after revealing the results of the Survival Task in the illegitimate leader condition. This would ensure that the confederate did not do anything to deserve the position.

Additionally, the number of participants in each condition (N=10) may have played a role in the study results. After completing a power analysis at a .05 significance level on the current study (d=.078), an n of 40 would be needed to reach a significant statistical power of .200.

6. Conclusion

While there were no significant results to support the hypotheses, it appears hopeful for people's ideologies of gender and race, and the capacity to effect leadership favorability. As a follow up to this study, the next topic of interest would be to try to understand the relationship between social dominance, racism, and sexism and how the concluding age of Obama will affect future stereotypes against race, gender and one's perceived leadership favorability.

7. References

1. Abele, A. (2003). The dynamics of masculine-agentic and feminine communal traits: Findings from a prospective study. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 85,* 768–776.
2. Alderfer, C. P. and Sims, A. D. (2003). Diversity in Organizations. *Handbook of Psychology.* Three: 23:595–614.
3. Avery, D. (2011). Why the Playing Field Remains Uneven: Impediments to Promotions in Organizations. In *APA handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 577-601.
4. Beale, F. (1979). Double jeopardy: To be black and female. In T. Cade (Ed.), The Black Woman (pp. 90–100). New York: New American Library.
5. Bergeron, D., Block, C., & Echtenkamp, A. (2006). Disabling the Able: Stereotype Threat and Women's Work Performance. *Human Performance,* 133-158
6. Carli, L. Gender Interpersonal Power, and Social Influence. Journal of Social Issues, Vol 55 (1), Spr.1999, 81-99
7. Clarke, D. (2013, September 3). Why So Few Women and Minorities At The Top? Here's The Real Reason. *Forbes*, 1-2.
8. Deitch EA, Barsky A, Butz RM, Chan S, Brief AP & Bradley JC (2003) Subtle yet significant: The existence and impact of everyday racial discrimination in the workplace. *Human Relations* 56(11): 1299–1324.
9. Dixon, J., & Rosenbaum, M. (2004). Nice to know you? Testing contact, cultural, and group threat theories of anti-Black and anti-Hispanic stereotypes. *Social Science Quarterly, 85*(2), 2004.

10. Eagly, A., & Karau, S. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review,* 573-598.

12. Fiske, S. T., & Stevens, L. E. (1993). What's so special about sex? Gender stereotyping and discrimination. In S. Oskamp & M. Costanzo (Eds.), *Gender issues in contemporary society: Applied social psychology annual* (pp. 173–196). Newbury, CA: Sage.

13. Foschi, M. (2000). Double standards for competence: Theory and research. *Annual Review of Sociology, 26,* 21–42.

14. Foti, R., Fraser, S., & Lord, R. (1982). Effects of leadership labels and prototypes on perceptions of political leaders. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 326-333.

15. French, John R. P., Jr.; Raven, Bertram, Cartwright, Dorwin (Ed), (1959). The Bases of Social Power. *Studies in Social Power,* (pp. 150-167). Oxford, England: University of Michigan, ix, 225 pp.

16. Haines, Elizabeth L.; Jost, John T. (2000). Placating the powerless: effects of legitimate and Illegitimate explanation on affect, memory, and stereotyping. *Social Justice Research*, Vol 13(3), Sep 2000, 219-236.

17. Hains, S. C., Hogg, M. A., & Duck, J. M. (1997). Self-categorization and leadership: Effects of group prototypicality and leader stereotypicality. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 23*(10), 1087–1099.

18. Heilman, M. E. (2001). Description and prescription: How gender stereotypes prevent women's ascent up the organizational ladder. *Journal of Social Issues, 57,* 657–674.

19. Heilman, M., Block, C., Martell, R., & Simon, M. (1989). Has anything changed? Current characterizations of men, women, and managers. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 935 942.

20. Ho, Arnold K.; Sidanius, Jim; Kteily, Nour; Sheehy-Skeffington, Jennifer; Pratto, Felicia; Henkel, Kristin E.; Foels, Rob; Stewart, Andrew L. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Vol 109(6), Dec 2015, 1003-1028.

21. Knight, J., Hebl, M., Foster, J., & Mannix, L. (2003). Out of Role? Out of Luck: The Influence of Race and Leadership Status on Performance Appraisals. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies,* 85-93.

22. "Labor Force Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity 2014." Bureau of Labor Statistics. November 1, 2015. Accessed November 6, 2015.

23. Laer, K., & Janssens, M. (2011). Ethnic minority professionals' experiences with subtle discrimination in the workplace. *Human Relations,* 1203-1227.

24. Livingston, R., Rosette, A., & Washington, E. (2012). Can an Agentic Black Woman Get Ahead? The Impact of Race and Interpersonal Dominance on Perceptions of Female Leaders. *Psychological Science,* 354-358.

25. Paustian-Underdahl, S., Walker, L., & Woehr, D. (2014). Gender and perceptions of leadership effectiveness: A meta-analysis of contextual moderators. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 1129-1145.

26. Plant, E. A., Devine, P. G., Cox, W. T. L., Columb, C., Miller, S. L., Goplen, J., & Petruche, B. M. (2009). The Obama effect: Decreasing implicit prejudice and stereotyping. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *45*, 961–964.

29. Purdie-Vaughns, V., & Eibach, R. (2008). Intersectional Invisibility: The Distinctive Advantages and Disadvantages of Multiple Subordinate-Group Identities. *Sex Roles,* 377-391.

28. Rosette, A., & Livingston, R. (2012). Failure is Not an Option for Black Women: Effects of Organizational Performance on Leaders with Single Versus Dual-Subordinate Roles. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology,* 1162-1167

29. Rosette, A., & Tost, L. (2010). Agentic Women and Communal Leadership: How Role Prescriptions Confer Advantage to Top Women Leaders. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 221-235.

30. Rosette, A., Leonardelli, G., & Phillips, K. (2008). The White Standard: Racial Bias In Leader Categorization. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 758-777.

31. Rowe, M.P (1990) Barriers to equality: The power of subtle discrimination to maintain unequal opportunity. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal* 3(2): 153–163

32. Runkle, J., & Ayman, R. (1997, April). Relationships between ethnic stereotypes and requisite management characteristics: The role of respondents' ethnicity. Paper presented at the Society for Industrial and 33. Organizational Psychology. St. Louis, MO.

34. Sesko, A., & Biernat, M. (2010). Prototypes of race and gender: The invisibility of Black women. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology,* 356-360.

35. Spears, Russell The (il)legitimacy of in-group bias: From social reality to social resistance. *The psychology of legitimacy: Emerging perspectives on ideology, justice, and intergroup relations.* [2001].

36. Women in the Labor Force 2010. (2010). Retrieved November 6, 2015, from http://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/Qf-laborforce-10.htm