

Gender Role Conflict and Coping Strategies of Leadership-Oriented Women

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The present study examines whether high leadership-oriented females have more gender role conflict than low leadership-oriented females. It also addresses what coping strategies high leadership-oriented females use to cope with the conflict. Two hundred and seventy seven ($N = 277$) female Japanese undergraduate students from a women's junior college rated whether they had experienced 6 given conflict situations, the magnitude of their conflict in each situation, and what coping strategies they used for each conflict situation. Results showed that high leadership-oriented females reported greater magnitude of conflict than the other groups only when they were opposed to choosing a masculine type occupation. This conflict situation indicates not only gender role prescription as a potential source of conflict for leadership-oriented females, but also a social system barrier with the potential to inhibit leadership orientation in women. Regarding their coping strategies, high leadership-oriented females were found to prioritize "persuasion" and "third-party intervention" for coping with their conflicts.

Key words: gender role conflict, leadership orientation, coping strategies, persuasion, third-party intervention

Females in leadership positions are assumed to have gender role conflicts due to the incompatibility of leadership role and gender role expectations for females (Kruese & Wintermantel, 1986). Eagly, Makhijani & Kolinsky (1992) indicate that the dual status of female leaders (female and leader) can lead to role conflicts. Previous studies reported that females who were high in dominance avoided leadership positions (e.g., Fleischer & Chertkoff, 1986; Megargee, 1969) when they were paired with low dominant males. According to Megargee (1969), when high dominant females are paired with low dominant males, it is likely that dominance conflicts with gender roles, which, in turn, can inhibit the assumption of leadership by dominant females. Nyquist & Spence (1986) also found that highly dominant females chose leaders to be their partner, and expressed their dominance behaviorally in interaction with that partner. These findings imply that females avoid leadership positions in order to evade gender role conflicts.

Gender role conflicts can arise when personality disposition and gender role prescription are not matched. O'Leary (1974) indicated that gender role conflict can be an internal barrier attributable to the lesser motivation of females in advancing their careers. If gender role conflicts can be an internal barrier to the career advancement of females, it can also be an internal barrier to leadership orientation (i.e., the aspiration to take leadership positions) in females because career orientation and leadership orientation are closely related (Tin Tin Htun & Yamamoto, 2001). Up to now, rather than measuring the actual experience of gender role conflict of females in leadership positions, studies have speculated or predicted gender role conflict due to the incompatibility between leadership roles and gender role expectations for females. However, it is not clear whether females who have strong motivation to lead suffer more gender role conflicts than females who have less motivation to lead. Without examining whether

the differences in the degree of motivation can determine the magnitude of the conflict first, it would not be objective to claim gender role conflict as an internal barrier to the leadership motivation of females. Thus, in the present study, we explore whether high leadership-oriented females experience more gender role conflicts than low leadership-oriented females because they possess personal characteristics as well as the motivation to lead that are not in accordance with female gender role prescriptions.

However, where there is a conflict, individuals also have strategies to cope with the conflict. Terhune (1970) and Sternberg & Soriano (1984) found that conflict resolution can be predicted by certain personality characteristics. That is, depending on the personality disposition, individuals exhibit consistent coping styles across various situations. Because leadership-oriented females possess different personal attributes (Tin Tin Htun & Yamamoto, 2001), their coping styles are expected to be different from the coping styles of low leadership-oriented females. Thus, the present study also explores how the coping strategies of leadership-oriented women differ from the coping strategies of low leadership-oriented females.

Although the scope of present study is limited to exploring types of gender role conflicts and coping styles of high leadership-oriented female in comparison with low leadership-oriented females, the findings of the study are expected to yield insights into potential barriers against females taking leadership positions.

Types of gender role conflicts and coping strategies

Based on the findings of previous studies on gender role studies, six conflict situations associated with basic gender role prescriptions for females, particularly for Japanese females, were selected. The conflict situations are: (A) women should marry and have children; (B) women should have a feminine appearance and style; (C) women should do housework; (D) women are not supposed to show their ability to defer men; (E) taking leadership roles; (F) choosing typically masculine occupations. In order to confirm whether

these situations had the potential to generate gender role conflict, we interviewed 10 female university students randomly recruited at the university cafeteria.

In the interviews, we asked whether they would experience gender role conflict if they were in the above-mentioned 6 situations. The interview results confirmed that these 6 conflict situations had the potential to elicit gender role conflict in females.

The present study followed the definition of gender role conflict given by Chusmir & Koberg (1986): A gender role conflict is defined as "the degree of conflict expressed between an individual's (1) treatment based on gender versus that person's desired treatment as an individual (intra-role or interrole incongruity), (2) private self-concept of a person's gender role versus the self-concept defined by one's society and work organization (intrapersonal incongruity)" (p. 398). Coping is defined as those behaviors and thoughts that are consciously used by an individual to handle or control a stressful situation (Greenglass, 1993). In the present study, in order to measure specific coping behaviors relevant to females as well as a potential leader population, six coping strategies were formulated based on Blake & Mouton's (1964) five coping strategies of handling interpersonal conflict. The coping strategies of Blake and Mouton have been employed for executive populations (Rahim, 1983) and for the supervisor-subordinate dyad in both sexes (Zammuto, London & Rowland, 1979). Thus, these strategies are assumed to be appropriate for leadership-oriented females.

The five strategies are: (1) withdrawal (leaving the situation by actual flight, by ignoring communication, or by responding in an incomprehensible manner), (2) smoothing (playing down differences and emphasizing common interest), (3) compromise (finding a middle ground between divergent interest), (4) forcing (elimination of conflict by authority), and (5) confrontation (bringing problems into the open and carrying them out to resolution) (Zammuto, London & Rowland, 1979, p. 227). To clarify the concept for operational purpose, withdrawal was separated into two coping strategies: ignoring and giving up. Because the concepts of smoothing and compromise are quite similar opera-

tionally, persuasion (persuading the other party to accept one's position), a skill observed in high leadership-oriented individuals (Tin Tin Htun, 1998), was replaced by smoothing.

The conflict situations employed in the present study were based on prescriptive gender roles for females. Thus, it would not be possible for an individual to eliminate them by using forcing. Individuals may need outside help and support to deal with the conflict. In fact, Hall (1972) indicated that females used role support from outside and inside the role set. Therefore, forcing is replaced by third party intervention. In sum, the present study employed, (1) ignoring, (2) confrontation, (3) persuasion, (4) compromise, (5) giving up, and (6) third-party intervention as coping strategies.

Method

Participants: Two hundred and seventy seven ($n=277$) female Japanese undergraduate students from a women's junior college participated on a voluntary basis.

Measures

Leadership Orientation: The Leadership Orientation Scale (LOS) was constructed by Tin Tin Htun (1995). This scale was based on the Directive-ness Factor Scale (Lorr & More, 1980), the Miner Sentence Completion Scale (Miner, 1974), and related findings from the literature. The scale consists of nine items which measure an individual's preference for leadership behavior and leader-like positions, as well as the desire to become a leader. The highest score for the leadership orientation scale was 45 and the lowest was 9. Factor analysis showed only one factor as having a significant inclination toward leadership positions. The alpha coefficient of the LOS is .89. The conceptual validity of the LOS has been found to be high (Tin Tin Htun & Yamamoto, 1997).

Gender Role Conflict Situations. Respondents had to answer whether they had experienced six conflict situations: (A) being pressured to marry and have children, (B) being pressured to feminize their appearance and style, (C) being forced to do housework because they are women, (D) not be-

ing able to show their ability in deference to men, (E) having difficulty in taking a leadership role due to being a woman, (F) being opposed to choosing a masculine type occupation; and the degree of conflict they would feel for each conflict situation (1 = Do not feel conflict at all, 5 = Very much feel the conflict). Even if they had not experienced the conflict situations, they were instructed to answer by imagining the extent of conflict they would feel in each situation.

Coping Strategies. The respondents had to rate whether they would use six coping strategies — (1) ignoring (I ignore the problem/situation), (2) confrontation (I do what I want to do without minding so much about what the other party wants me to do), (3) persuasion (I make the other party understand my point of view), (4) compromise (I do both what I want to do and what the other party wants me to do), (5) giving up (I agree with the other party and do what she/he wants me to do), and (6) third-party intervention (I get help from someone who understands me to persuade the other party) — for each conflict situation on a 5-point scale (1 = Definitely would not use it, 5 = Definitely would use it).

Results and Discussion

In order to form high, medium, and low leadership orientation groups, the scores that fell 25% of either end of the distribution of leadership orientation score were used as cut-off points. The participants who scored below 20 or 20 formed the low leadership orientation group, whereas those who scored higher than 20 and less than 28 or 28 were placed in the medium leadership orientation group, and those who scored above 28 were assigned to the high leadership orientation group.

Gender role Conflict & Leadership Orientation

Table 1 shows the percentage of having conflict in given situations. Regardless of their leadership orientation, the majority of the participants reported having conflict in situation C (being forced to do housework because they are women). More than 50% of the three groups reported having conflict in situation A (being pressured to marry and have children) and situation D (not be-

ing able to show their ability in deference to men). The results indicate that young Japanese females have difficulty in accepting traditional gender role prescription.s.

One way ANOVA of the leadership orientation groups and magnitude of conflict for each situation was performed to examine differences between the leadership orientation groups in each conflict situation. A significant difference among the three groups was observed only in situation F (being opposed to choosing a masculine type occupation) (see Table 2). LSD showed a significant difference between the high group and the medium group ($MSe = 1.32, p < .05$). This indicates that among all the potential conflict situations, only situation F is related to leadership orientation. Since high leadership-oriented women were reported to be more career-oriented and have greater aspiration

to managerial jobs compared to the low leadership-oriented group (Tin Tin Hun & Yamamoto, 2001), it is not surprising to find that situation F elicits higher magnitude of conflict in high leadership-oriented females. However, situation F does not only portray prescribed gender role for women, but is also an example of external barriers systematically imbedded in the Japanese work context which Japanese females have to face if they aim to achieve leadership positions mainly designated for males. Thus, compared to other conflict situations, situation F constitutes a gender ideological based social system barrier that has the potential to inhibit leadership orientation in women.

Coping Strategies of Leadership-Oriented Females

One way analyses of variance were performed to examine (1) differences among leadership orien-

Table 1 Having conflict in given situations

Conflict Situations	HLO	MLO	LLO	Total
A. Being pressured to marry and have children	51.52 %	52.10 %	58.89 %	54.18 %
B. Being pressured to femininze appearance and style	38.46 %	31.67 %	43.33 %	37.09 %
C. Being forced to do housework because you are a woman	80.00 %	72.03 %	73.33 %	74.36 %
D. Not being able to show your ability in order to show deference to men	54.55 %	53.33 %	54.95 %	54.15 %
E. Having difficulty in taking leadership role due to being a woman	40.91 %	35.83 %	38.46 %	37.91 %
F. Being opposed to choosing masculine type vocation	39.39 %	18.49 %	25.56 %	25.82 %

**p < .01

Table 2 Means and ANOVA for magnitude of conflict in each situation

Conflict Situations	HLO	MLO	LLO	F (df = 2)
A. Being pressured to marry and have children	3.21 (1.31)	3.34 (1.17)	3.43 (1.26)	0.61
B. Being pressured to femininze appearance and style	2.82 (1.17)	2.76 (1.09)	3.00 (1.21)	1.18
C. Being forced to do housework because you are a woman	4.06 (1.12)	3.94 (1.10)	3.83 (1.25)	0.74
D. Not being able to show your ability in order to show deference to men	3.42 (1.41)	3.34 (1.22)	3.46 (1.22)	0.25
E. Having difficulty in taking leadership role due to being a woman	2.94 (1.40)	2.84 (1.18)	3.00 (1.17)	0.44
F. Being opposed to choosing masculine type vocation	2.98 (1.35)	2.55 (1.06)	2.69 (1.12)	2.96*

Note. Standard deviations are presented in parentheses.

*p < .05

tation groups regarding the use of a particular coping strategy and (2) whether different coping strategies are used for different conflict situations. To examine differences in the use of a particular coping strategy, a total mean score for each coping strategy was computed by combining the mean score of a particular coping strategy in each situation, and then performing one-way ANOVA. As a result, a significant difference was observed in the

third-party intervention (Table 3).

Significant differences were found among leadership orientation groups regarding coping strategies across situations. The LSD was used to compare the groups. Table 4 presents mean scores of each coping strategy in each situation. In situation A, B, and D, high leadership-oriented females employed persuasion and third-party intervention to cope with conflicts more than low leadership-ori-

Table 3 Total Mean Scores of Coping Strategies

	HLO	MLO	LLO	F (df = 2)
1. Ignoring	19.69 (4.69)	19.17 (4.13)	20.03 (4.31)	1.01
2. Confrontation	19.52 (4.49)	18.77 (3.45)	19.36 (4.56)	1.25
3. Persuasion	20.13 (3.64)	19.84 (3.60)	18.84 (3.49)	2.98 ⁺
4. Giving up	12.23 (4.31)	12.25 (4.07)	11.73 (3.98)	0.35
5. Compromise	20.33 (4.85)	19.81 (3.84)	19.44 (4.29)	0.89
6. Third-Party Intervention	18.94 (5.64)	18.50 (4.68)	17.13 (5.22)	3.44 [*]

⁺p < .10, ^{*}p < .05

Table 4 Mean scores of coping Strategies for each conflict situation

	Ignoring	Confrontation	Persuasion	Giving up	Compromise	Third-Party Intervention
A. Being pressured to marry and have children						
HLO	3.62 (1.24)	3.71 (1.06)	4.02 (1.10)	1.77 (0.90)	3.44 (1.04)	3.25 (1.17)
MLO	3.57 (1.11)	3.88 (1.00)	3.94 (0.98)	1.80 (0.82)	3.20 (0.96)	3.20 (1.06)
LLO	3.70 (1.11)	3.79 (1.02)	3.57 (1.13)	1.63 (0.78)	3.09 (1.05)	2.74 (1.13)
B. Being pressured to feminize appearance and style						
HLO	3.43 (1.18)	3.69 (1.04)	3.22 (1.24)	2.11 (1.11)	3.22 (1.15)	2.66 (1.20)
MLO	3.24 (1.38)	3.52 (1.06)	3.28 (1.00)	2.03 (0.99)	3.34 (0.92)	2.69 (1.02)
LLO	3.29 (1.20)	3.37 (1.10)	2.86 (1.13)	1.93 (0.98)	3.00 (1.13)	2.23 (1.07)
C. Being forced to do housework because you are a woman						
HLO	2.69 (1.27)	3.40 (1.17)	3.89 (0.91)	2.11 (1.20)	3.49 (1.08)	3.12 (1.18)
MLO	2.66 (1.21)	3.21 (1.00)	3.89 (0.84)	2.02 (0.95)	3.31 (0.81)	3.04 (1.01)
LLO	2.88 (1.31)	3.02 (1.13)	3.71 (1.07)	2.03 (1.02)	3.20 (1.02)	2.89 (1.19)
D. Not being able to show one's your ability in order to show deference to men						
HLO	2.95 (1.41)	3.45 (1.31)	3.91 (1.04)	2.28 (1.18)	3.48 (1.17)	3.28 (1.1)
MLO	2.84 (1.23)	3.27 (1.03)	3.53 (1.05)	2.10 (0.96)	3.42 (0.90)	3.00 (0.97)
LLO	3.06 (1.22)	3.26 (1.13)	3.44 (1.08)	2.05 (0.96)	3.27 (1.02)	2.78 (1.09)
E. Having difficulty in taking leadership role due to being a woman						
HLO	3.43 (1.37)	3.40 (1.21)	3.91 (1.00)	2.24 (0.98)	3.48 (1.05)	3.38 (1.56)
MLO	3.37 (1.25)	3.22 (1.17)	3.58 (0.92)	2.12 (0.93)	3.34 (0.89)	3.31 (1.01)
LLO	3.48 (1.12)	3.16 (1.18)	3.52 (1.11)	2.05 (0.90)	3.47 (0.85)	3.2 (1.10)
F. Being opposed to choosing masculine type vocation						
HLO	3.45 (1.31)	3.66 (1.23)	3.80 (1.06)	1.98 (0.98)	3.40 (1.12)	3.37 (1.21)
MLO	3.38 (1.13)	3.49 (1.02)	3.48 (0.94)	2.13 (0.95)	3.26 (0.88)	3.32 (1.06)
LLO	3.64 (1.01)	3.61 (1.12)	3.60 (0.99)	2.02 (0.82)	3.28 (0.99)	3.19 (1.11)

Note. Standard deviations are presented in parentheses.

ented females. In situation A, a main effect of leadership orientation was observed in persuasion ($F(2, 272) = 4.43, p < .05; MSe = 1.2, p < .05$) and third-party intervention ($F(2, 271) = 5.55, p < .01; MSe = 1.23, p < .05$). In situation B, a main effect of leadership orientation was observed in persuasion ($F(2, 272) = 4.06, p < .05; MSe = 1.21, p < .05$) and third-party intervention is ($F(2, 269) = 3.83, p < .05; MSe = 1.17, p < .05$). In situation D, a main effect of leadership orientation was observed in persuasion ($F(2, 273) = 4.07, p < .05; MSe = 1.12, p < .05$) and third-party intervention ($F(2, 273) = 4.31; p < .05; MSe = 1.09, p < .05$). In situation E, only a main effect of leadership orientation was found in persuasion ($F(2, 276) = 3.24, p < .05; MSe = 1.201, p < .05$).

As expected, high leadership-oriented females tend to use particular coping strategies (i.e., persuasion and third-party intervention) consistently across situations. This is consistent with the findings that showed that coping styles can be predicted from personality characteristics (Sternberg & Soriano, 1984; Terhune, 1970). The use of persuasion indicates that leadership-oriented females possess the confidence and skill to persuade others to settle such conflicts. However, they are also willing to get outside help when it is needed. It is likely that the use of these coping strategies helps them handle their conflicts effectively and keep their motivation to lead intact.

Limitations of the study

The scope of present study is limited to exploring whether highly leadership-oriented females experience more gender role conflict than low leadership-oriented females. Therefore, further research is required to investigate whether gender role conflict can inhibit leadership orientation in women and how such conflict may inhibit leadership orientation. Such research would help understand the effect of gender role conflict on the leadership orientation in women. Without exploring the effect of conflict, the findings of present study can only provide limited understanding of the relationship between leadership orientation and gender role conflict. In-depth interviews are also required to have a better understanding of the effect of con-

flict situations on leadership orientation.

Summary and Conclusion

The present study indicates that young Japanese females seem to feel discontent with traditional gender role division and prescriptions. This is particularly evident in high leadership-oriented females who experienced conflict when they are not able to choose traditionally male occupations. However, this conflict situation highlights not only gender role prescription as a potential source of conflict, but also the social system barrier as having the potential to inhibit leadership orientation in women. The coping strategies of high leadership oriented females, i.e., persuasion and third-party intervention, indicate that leadership-oriented females possess the confidence and skill to persuade others, as well as a willingness to get outside help when it is needed. It is likely that these coping strategies can reduce conflict and keep their motivation to lead intact. On the whole, the present study indicates social system related conflict as a potential barrier for females who want to achieve leadership positions.

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