Position and Prejudice: Exploring the Stereotypical Transformation of Female Identity at Workplace

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Abstract
Gender-based stereotypes have hampered gender equality in the workplace opportunities, and females face identity crises and labeling by their coworkers, which mitigates their chances to climb on the ladder of Leadership. This study strived to explore female coworkers' perceived identity and the transformation in that perception when those females become leaders and the role of stereotypical thinking in it. With the qualitative approach, this study used case study methods. This research collects the data through nineteen in-depth interviews from private companies, and a framework developed using thematic analysis. The results revealed that employees positively perceive their female coworkers, but they are perceived with stereotypes and negativity when they become their leaders. Organizations need to initiate grooming programs when they promote females for harmony and a productive environment.

Keywords:
women leadership, female identity, stereotypes, workplace

Introduction

Since the last decade, the discussion of identity has been a center of attention, sparked abundant interest, and become the most prevalent theme in contemporary studies of the organization. Frequently, the word "identity" develops a thought of two different types of identities, the individual's own identity and social identity. An Individual's own identity generally discusses observations and estimations of individuals about themselves, which are significant, and the social identity defines others' perception about a person (Rudman, 2002). Perceptions of the person determine how they understand incoming facts and make judgments (Wang, 2013). The definition of social identity relates in leaders' social category to a portion of the self-conception linked to its affiliation. Gender identity is based on a given feature and relates to the portion of a self-concept shared with other people of the same sex. It is essential to distinguish between gender identity and sexual identity based on one's biological features. Gender identity is, in comparison, related to cultural expectations of convictions, conduct, and sentiment connected with social classifications of men and women (Deaux & Stewart, 2001; Ely & Padavic, 2007; Karelaia & Guillén, 2014).

In the last decades, the growth of socially raised identities has acquired expanding consideration in literature and research in psychology and students' concerns (Jones & Mcewen, 2000). However, Some identities like racial identity (Cross Jr., 1995; Helms, 1995), ethnic identity (Phinney, 1990, 1992), sexual identity (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996), and gender identity (O'Neil et al., 1993) holds critical attention. Leadership and followership's identity process plays an important part in specifying 'who will lead' and 'who will be led' as well as 'how leaders and followers will influence' or 'can be influenced.' However, most of the progressive models and linked research have specified a particular element or dimension of identities such as race or sexual orientation. Gender's identity was classified based on their power and status Gender between males and females as it is pertinent to a network of relationships that are much attached to the organizations' hierarchies (Caleo & Heilman; Ely, 1995).

From an identity perception point of view, the gender aspect of Leadership is the concern, as historically, leadership traits are perceived to be masculine. However, research indicates that women leaders have a higher association with innovation and profitability, higher customer awareness, and better social responsibility documents (Dezsö & Ross, 2012; Glass et al., 2016; Glass & Cook, 2015; Webb, 2004). Women's management representation also improves chances for women of lesser levels, thereby decreasing the general segregation amongst organizations (Glass & Cook, 2015; Gorman, 2005; Ely, 1995; Stainback & Kwon, 2012).

Women are still less likely to be perceived as prospective leadership candidates and less favorable in their performance of such positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Meister et al., 2017; Ragins & Winkel, 2011). Nevertheless, recognizing these advantages can be hindered by the disadvantages that female leaders come to experience as the objective of negative stereotype-based expectations. Pakistan is struggling to diminish the gender discrimination gap in every walk of life. This research gap suggests the necessity to know

people's perceptions regarding women (Samo et al., 2018). Whether the Leadership of females or males, it is essential to concern the factors other than being a leader to figure out this phenomenon. Several theories like leader-centric to discuss leadership questions, but research regarding followers-centric theory in the leadership ground has not been done sufficiently (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014).

The Leadership of women should thoroughly and intensely explore if followers' perception consider. When followers and their opinions about Leadership are discussing, an important concept that followers raise for their leaders is stereotypes. Due to cultural influence, followers incline to develop some stereotypes about different phenomena (Samo et al., 2018; Yzerbyt et al., 1998). Researchers need to understand the barriers for women when they become bosses in their job. The stereotypes regarding female colleagues and female leaders have been explored earlier. However, it is important to understand the transformation of female identity from a colleague to the boss. This study explores how the female's identity, from an equal colleague to a leader, gets transformed because of stereotypical beliefs.

Predominantly, Leadership is intimately connected to male sexuality in which the leading role for the male gender is considered apparent. This issue has been emphasized by feminist awakening as in some other areas, Potentially leading roles were also available for women, but even then, the path was misleading in opposing ' male leadership, ' creating ' female Leadership (Due Billing & Alvesson, 2000). Till now, almost an equal proportion of women leaders are still in paucity in the world of business, ultimately leading to more women's training and development initiatives but without significant returns (Bierema, 2017). This hampering or harnessing the efficiency of Leadership is not just about the "sexual orientation," but rather about the intersection of multiple identities (Madsen & Andrade, 2018)). On the other hand, such identities might be real or even just the general perception in followers ' minds, which is being called stereotypes about women leaders. Some of these relative annexations have been recommended by (Ford, 2010) in the Leadership qualitative studies- in what way multiple identities and situations are different fetches out mysterious realities for the phenomenon of Leadership. When individuals become leaders, they want to be seen as leaders, by themselves and by others, and can thus make efforts to demonstrate leading behavior (Lord & Brown, 2003; Schlenker, 2011).

Due to the ability to assume leadership positions and persist in leadership roles, the conflict of the Leadership of women in leaders' identity is a likely important precedent of the two components of the drive to lead (Karelaia & Guillén, 2014). Identity is a collection of meanings affixed to individuals. Some general characteristics categorize every individual as a member of a particular group among people recognized by sociologists – race, gender, education, and occupation (Carli & Eagly, 1999). Besides, people are recognized as part of diverse groups socially, and each of the perceived membership of a social group often forms an essential part of their different social identities. As the theory of social identity claims (Ashforth & Mael, 2011), such values embrace a social element relating to a persons' social characters and his/her proof of identity with a

community or social category to which he/she belongs. Social Identity is being argued as a multidimensional notion by researchers (Karelaia & Guillén, 2014). Gender Identity is grounded on attributed features and alludes to the portion of the individual's own self-concept joint with some other individual of the similar gender. Critically, gender identity is to be eminent from sex identity, which is decided by an individual's biological features. In differentiation, gender identity is connected to social desires of beliefs, conduct, and sensitive circumstances related to men and women (Deaux & Stewart, 2001; Ely & Padavic, 2007).

Although the literature and research about gender identity and Leadership are emerging, it remains constrained and has numerous holes that permit consideration. Much of the concentration on gender in our culture has been reasonably disproportionate, and when we look at Leadership and gender, we get this play out. Three keyways have been identified in which the Leadership and gender focus is lopsided. (a) For decades as well as today, gender and Leadership work are frequently engrossed on females alone or heavily, instead of individuals of all genders. (b) Traditional leadership conceptions and studies assume a mannish reference innate and unexamined; and (c) research sometimes highlights the gap between women and men, limiting the possibility of a deeper understanding of identity groups and leaving out people who are not recognized as women and men (Haber-Curran & Tillapaugh, 2017).

The perceived clash between becoming a leader and becoming a woman is especially essential since, although it has been said that the behaviors and characteristics which are typically expected from leaders and women always contrast dramatically (Eagly & Karau, 2002), however, stereotypes of gender role provide women with a more community-driven attitude: warm, caring, supportive and self – employed (Eagly et al., 2000). In contrast, effective leaders are regularly portrayed as having and requiring agentic characteristics such as confidence, heading, competitiveness, and problem-solving (Martell et al., 1998). Agentic characteristics are given more to men than women, which reveals the stereotype of a "think leader-think man '' (Heilman et al., 1989; Powell et al., 2002; Schein, 2001). Therefore, female leaders might feel pressure to oblige the clashing requests emerging from prescriptive views on how leaders and women should behave (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Hence, to the degree that a woman sees that the burdens of one character meddled with the execution of another sense of clashing meanings, custom, and demands inalienable in these identities, she may encounter identity conflict (Ashforth & Mael, 2011; Biddle, 2002; Settles, 2004). If a woman acts — or accepts that she should act in a way that contradicts the meaning of being a leader or being a woman, the conflict in the woman's identity can be a threat to either her Leadership or her gender (Petriglieri, 2011).

The motivation to lead someone and power may be the main steps to reach and sustain Leadership. At this stage, women lag behind men (Schuh et al., 2014). Women in certain cultures appear less motivated for Leadership because women in these cultures are not allowed independently to pursue their careers (Cheryan et al., 2015). Leadership may come into being because of the impact that some power base

can inspire. In this context, women are perceived to be stereotypically based on indirect power, in which men are even more aggressive and thus are guardians of direct power (Samo et al., 2018). If negative, this will be a stereotypical threat that leads to people who are treated poorly and misjudged (Steele, 2002). Even in modern societies like the United States, men seem to think that their ability to work is better than women (Kiser, 2015). Stereotype presents women as women but not as leaders, which always makes them more difficult to demonstrate (Glass & Cook, 2016). Thus, women's Leadership must be studied from the perspective of followers, taking into account the cultural limitations and possible stereotypes in Pakistan. Underrepresentation within the organization is likely to extend the identity of women leaders struggle since organizations with relatively fewer women are more likely to enact stereotypes of gender and to have an agentic culture of the organization with a leadership definition (gender-wise) values stereotypically men behaviors more than behaviors socially anticipated from women (Kulik & Olekalns, 2012). In a general sense, the patriarchal society set up work parts based on sexual orientation, coming about within the advancement of "work planned by men and for men," which contributed to gender separation and stereotyping (Seo et al., 2017).

Gender wise discrimination can raise gender biases toward women's capacities to lead, which regularly gives a negative assessment of women leaders and potential leaders (Weyer, 2007). As revealed in existing literature, the production of barriers for women's advancement in work contributes to stereotypical perceptions of women's attributes and leadership roles instead of their actual abilities (Wood, 2008). Managerial positions are traditionally perceived as roles for men, especially in senior management, since men are associated with a high organizational status, power and authority, and responsibility rather than women who are attributes of such positions (Lyness & Heilman, 2006). The gender-based social position also improves the categorization of men and women as different social groups that contribute to a glass ceiling's tenacity, which prevents women from moving to top leadership positions in organizations (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014). However, in the female arena, this is not the case. This finding shows that men can perceive changes in gender-based social status in organizations, articulated by women's success as a threat to their top position (Netchaeva et al., 2015). Therefore, this study deemed it pertinent to explore the perceived identity of female coworkers and the transformation in the perception of that identity when they become leaders and the role of gender-based stereotypes in it.

Method

We used the case study method to explore the similarities and differences by studying multiple cases and extract the themes to understand the stereotypical beliefs and the changes in it regarding women coworkers and women leaders (Dooley, 2002; Yin, 2009). The case study method of qualitative research helped in understanding the cases and commonality between them. Since the research question revolves around how female colleagues' perceived identity gets changed once they become leaders, the case

study approach of qualitative research suits this exploration. Besides that, multiple case strategy used within the case study approach.

Since, in qualitative studies, there is no fixed sample size or a commonly accepted formula to calculate the sample size. Therefore, it generally depends upon the saturation point. Therefore, we kept collecting data from the selected cases until we reached saturation point (Elo et al., 2014), as we got the repetitive answers when we are doing the eighteenth interview. However, we conducted one more interview to validate the saturation point, and thus the sample size of this study is nineteen case base interviews. We followed a purposeful sampling strategy (Creswell, 2014) as we needed those employees who are currently working under female leaders, and those females leaders were once their coworkers. To ensure credibility in sampling (Thyer et al., 2019), we tried to select the samples in a way that mitigates the bias. Since the study aimed to explore the stereotypes and transformation of female coworkers' identity to female leaders, the data has to be taken from the followers of female leaders. Therefore, when we selected a case, we made sure by taking opinion from the female leaders and other coworkers if there is any personal grudges or issues between that follower and leader, and if there was any, as it was revealed in a couple of cases, we dropped that sample from interviewing.

In the initial stage, informant–centric words or terms and phrases were used to identify the concepts and generate the codes for our data (Meister et al., 2017; O'Reilly et al., 2012). Two of the authors were conducting interviews, the first author was listening to the voice recordings of interviews, and the other was observing every respondent's reaction to get a clear idea about how women employees' identity is being perceived. Later on, we analyzed each transcript by making their codes and possible themes from the data we collected. In this early stage of analysis, we explored and identified employees' perceptions (male/female) about their female leaders regarding the time when they were coworkers and then about the current time when they are the leaders.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents a brief profile of the participants, as their confidentiality was ensured to them as per research ethics. Therefore, their names and company names are kept in confidentiality. Figure 1 presents the framework of our findings. These findings are presented in two separate stages; one represents female coworkers' perceived identity, and the other represents the later stage when the same female coworkers become leaders. This study has strived to identify the transformation in that identity and the gender-based stereotypical interjections in that transformation.

Perceived Identity of Female Coworkers

Generous and Supportive

Generous or supportive is one of the perceived identities of female coworkers that find. Even though there are multiple forms of social support, as (Bélanger, 2001) talks about coworkers relation because when you work in an organization, you need

your colleagues' support. Moreover, having supportive and helpful colleagues feel close to their work and their coworkers, they start trusting each other and make promises that they would listen to them or their problems if they ever needed it. The data gathered in this research also comply with this concept. As one of the male colleagues said:

When she was my colleague, she always supports me in every way. In 2015 I got an opportunity to present my paper for a conference and I was not getting permission from my Boss but then Dr. Rakshanda, who was my colleague, she was the person who asks the boss and encourages her to allow me to move ahead and to present my paper in the conference.

Table 1. Profile of Participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Company
Participant 1	Male	26	Advertising Agency
Participant 2	Male	27	Advertising Agency
Participant 3	Female	24	Advertising Agency
Participant 4	Male	36	Interior Designer
Participant 5	Female	39	Interior Designer
Participant 6	Male	46	Interior Designer
Participant 7	Male	48	FMCG
Participant 8	Male	41	FMCG
Participant 9	Male	34	FMCG
Participant 10	Female	34	FMCG
Participant 11	Female	28	Telecommunication
Participant 12	Female	32	Telecommunication
Participant 13	Male	33	Telecommunication
Participant 14	Female	43	Telecommunication
Participant 15	Male	41	Telecommunication
Participant 16	Male	39	Retail Chain
Participant 17	Male	37	Retail Chain
Participant 18	Female	37	Retail Chain
Participant 19	Female	34	Retail Chain

Competitive

Furthermore, their identity as a coworker was also perceived as competitive. The participants viewed their then female coworkers as competitive at that time. In professional people or usually in this male-dominated surroundings, some research also indicates that women can be competitive just like men (Ahmed, 2011; Johnson & Powell, 1994; Nekby et al., 2008). One of the female respondents said

> *Moreover, she always works hard to achieve their goals. I must say females are no less than males*

And male respondent also said;

> *My all-female colleagues were like, "we want to get work done and our work should be the best" Because in the end we all have to report to some boss and also have to meet the deadlines so why not now.*

Although females as coworkers are perceived to be competitive, generous, and supportive, they are also perceived as less conformist and bossy colleagues.

Less Conformist

Women as coworkers are not easily agreed to what they are asked to do; this identity is engulfed with the female coworkers, as they are believed that they do not follow traditional set rules and conducts. One respondent said about a then female colleague that:

> *Females also every time start arguing with their colleagues and not agreeing with other employees, which ends up having difficulties in job work and their relationship with coworkers.*

This particular perception about women colleagues was also being discussed in the studies (Pugh, 2014). However, respondents were observed to be oversimplifying their female coworkers as non-conformists.

Figure 1. The Findings Framework
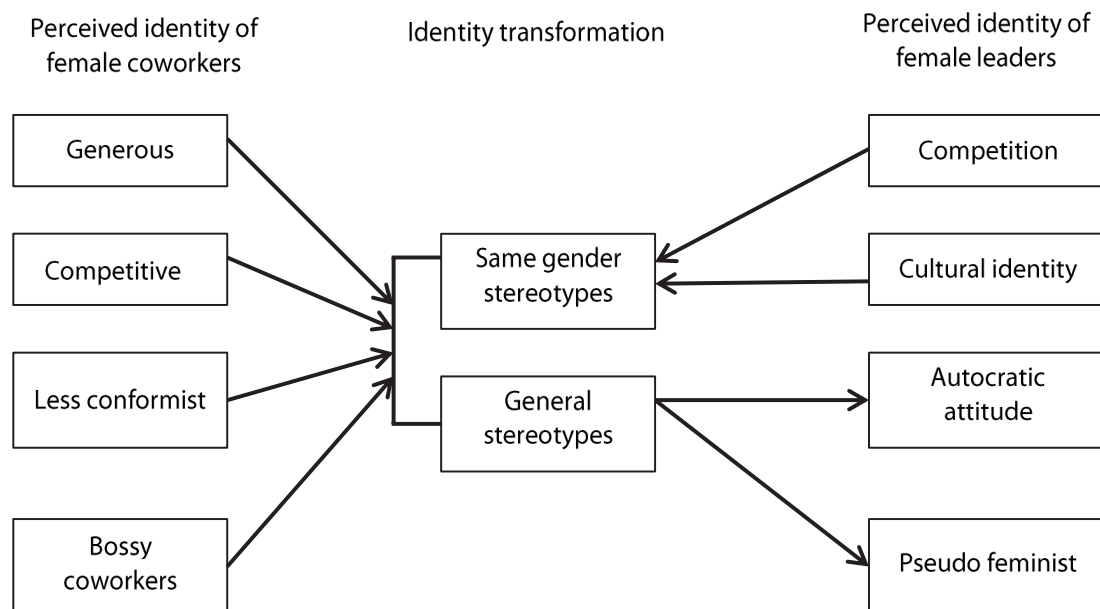
Bossy coworkers

Additionally, it is also finding out that women coworkers are perceived not to feel comfortable with everyone in their workplace as they shy in nature. They do not want to listen to others or talk to others; they are a competent and hard worker and are difficult to negotiate in any terms that are negative behavior one could have. One of the participants put this as:

> *When she was my colleague, I felt that she was a bit, bossy person, but that is understandable as female co-workers are like that.*

The bug didn't stop there, as another respondent viewed it like;

> *As a colleague, she was tricky territory to negotiate, but making one your sworn enemy, could hamper your productivity, especially, with the opposite sex and have worked together closely for some time.*

These four identity parts reflected how the current female leaders were perceived when they were just equal coworkers. It is revealed that participants have positive and negative aspects of the perceived identity of female coworkers. Then we tried to dig out if there was any transformation in the identities and whether this positivity and negativity traveled on equal footings when they started to perceive the same coworkers as their leaders. It was interesting to know that the participants develop stereotypes about those female leaders who were once their coworkers, and therefore, their positive perception of female identity start to be eclipsed or maybe vanished. When those females are their leaders, they respond in oversimplification about their current status, or instead, their perception crosses stereotypical beliefs. We identified two types of stereotypes that people develop: those primarily related to 'female vs. female' or same-gendered stereotypes. We observed that this stereotyped is developed because of two reasons; competition and cultural identity. The other type is a general stereotype that is nothing to do with the same gender, as it was there in both genders regarding female leaders. These stereotypes were; that female leader is believed to have an autocratic attitude, and they become pseudo-feminist when they get a leadership position.

When Female Coworkers Become Female Leaders

Same-gender stereotype

We found that competition is one of the significant factors behind this paradox. This whole scenario is being discussed in Queen Bee syndrome too. Queen Bee Syndrome (Seo et al., 2017) is an adverse connection between women leaders and their subordinates. Women in senior leadership roles tend to reject other women's participation to stop other females from advancing their careers (Derks et al., 2011; Seo et al., 2017).

Different studies used this syndrome to define women leaders' adverse assessments for their woman followers that arise tensions between them. It is more likely that women followers with woman leaders report distress and indicate negative health than women

followers with man leaders who support this area of our study. Additionally, cultural identity is also being identified as one factor for developing this identity regarding those women who get promoted to the leadership position.

General Stereotypes

When becoming leaders, women are perceived to be autocratic, and the literature supports it (Holtz & Harold, 2008). However, this is not always the case in previous research. This identities perception transformation in employees' minds regards those females who were once their coworkers and now their leaders. One of the participants said:

> *It is very different now, she used to be supportive, but now since she is my boss so she never asks to do anything but gives orders; perhaps this happens with that chair she has or maybe it happens when a female is on that chair.*

In countries like Pakistan, where the struggle of feminism or its philosophy is already controversial, people start attaching every 'female-support' gesture with feminist ideology. We another transformation in the perception of females' identity, as people employees tend to believe that when females are coworkers, they are fine with many things, but when they become leaders, they start challenging everything based on 'man vs. women' type of notions. Therefore, they are labeled as pseudo feminists. One of the participants said:

> *I think women are darlings when they are coworkers, but when the climb the ladder of leadership, their complexes are revealed, they think everything with the perspective of patriarchal society or male chauvinism, they become pseudo feminists.*

Conclusion

Although the literature on women's Leadership and their perceived identity is quite extensive, this study deepens such understanding by exploring women employees' perceived identity before and after promotion. Such a study has never been taken into account. The study finds out that due to gender stereotypes, people transform their positive perception of a female coworker to a negative perception of that same female coworker when she becomes their boss.

This study deepens the understanding that how the transformation in women's perceived identity occurs from colleagues to the leader. Second, these study conducts in Pakistan, where women and their perceived identity are differ from western countries. In practice, this study provides significant implications for women, as they would know what causes people to perceive their identity in both stages, when they are colleagues and when they are promoted, and should take measures to avoid negative consequences if the perceived identity is valid. Pakistan is one of those countries that is lagging in gender equality, having females as almost half of its population, its indispensable for the economy that females of this country participate equally in everything. This study was conducted with a qualitative approach to explore females'

perceived identity as coworkers and the transformation in that perception when those females become leaders. It finds out that the same employees who perceive female coworkers fairly well start thinking stereotypically when they become their leaders. This condition hampers employees and female leaders; this study will help the policymakers in organizations initiate grooming sessions of the employees before making females their leaders.

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