




SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ EDITRICE

Work published in open access form
and licensed under Creative Commons
Attribution – NonCommercial
ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

 © Author(s)
E-ISSN 2724-2943
ISSN 2723-973X

Psychology Hub (2023)
XL, 3, 17-24

Article info

Submitted: 27 April 2023
Accepted: 18 September 2023
DOI: 10.13133/2724-2943/18069

Leadership Effectiveness of Lesbian and Heterosexual Women: The mediational role of masculinity and femininity

Tunahan Sari¹, Soraya Elizabeth Shamloo², Valerio Pellegrini³, Valeria De Cristofaro⁴,
and Marco Salvati^{5*}

¹ *Department of Human Resource Management & Organizational Behavior, University of Groningen, Netherlands*

² *Faculty of Medicine, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Reggio Emilia, Italy*

³ *Department of Psychology of Development and Socialization Processes, Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy*

⁴ *Department of Psychology, Vanvitelli University of Campania “Luigi Vanvitelli”, Caserta, Italy*

⁵ *Department of Human Sciences, University of Verona, Verona, Italy*

Abstract

Women still face social barriers when confronted with managerial positions, typically associated with the male domain. These barriers may be thought to be even more pronounced for lesbian women who are often discriminated against due to their sexual orientation. Perceptions of femininity and masculinity have recently caught the attention of scholars interested in leadership effectiveness perception associated with sexual minorities. If on the one hand being perceived as masculine may represent an advantage within the work context, some research suggests that conforming to gender roles by holding feminine traits is also important for female candidates. In the present study, we aimed at investigating the relationship between sexual orientation and leadership effectiveness perception. We specifically examined female leaders' perceived masculinity and femininity as potential mediators of this relationship. 290 heterosexual participants rated a lesbian vs. heterosexual woman by rating her leadership effectiveness as well as masculinity and femininity. Results showed that being lesbian was associated with higher levels of masculinity and lower levels of femininity. Yet, only femininity was positively associated with leadership effectiveness, thus suggesting the importance of conforming to gender roles within the work environment. This study contributes to the literature on sexual minorities and leadership perception, by specifically focusing on how lesbian women may be perceived in work-related contexts and shed light on the role played by gender role-conforming perceptions when evaluating both heterosexual as well as lesbian individual's leadership effectiveness perceptions.

Keywords: Leadership; lesbian; effectiveness; masculinity; femininity

*Corresponding author.
Marco Salvati
Department of Human Sciences,
University of Verona, Verona, Italia
Lungadige Porta Vittoria, 17,
37129, Verona, Italy
Phone: +39 045 8028090
E-mail: marco.salvati@univr.it
(M. Salvati)

Introduction

Even though there are many women in leadership positions trying to make a significant impact in their fields, it is a well-known fact that most women still find it difficult to reach those positions. For instance, Ellie Schlein, the first female leader of the Democratic party in Italy, said “*We did it, together we made a small big revolution, even this time they didn’t see us coming.*” (Giuffrida, 2023). Unfortunately, women leaders are still exposed to gender bias (Stephenson et al., 2023), lack representation (Abendroth et al., 2016), experience discrimination and harassment (James et al., 2023), and many still question women’s capabilities (Crowe & Slocum, 2022), and even have lower pay and rewards compared to their men counterparts (Joshi et al., 2015) throughout the world. Furthermore, Badura et al. (2018), in their meta-analysis, argued women were perceived as less effective leaders than men in general, but scholars also emphasized that this perception has changed over time even if the gender gap is still evident. In a similar vein, there have been studies that underline the importance of involving women leaders in top positions, yet the number of women in leadership positions is not still satisfying (Flores & Bañuelos, 2021; Marx, 2018).

Several studies address the difficulties faced by women leaders because of their gender identity (Braun et al., 2017; De Cristofaro et al., 2021; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Glass & Cook, 2016) which may add to the existing discrimination based on sexual orientation (Wang et al., 2017). In line with this reasoning, Wong et al. (2022) emphasized the intersectional invisibility of Black, Latina, and Asian women due to their gender identity and race. According to their findings, these women are less likely to hold leadership positions compared to White women. Similarly, lesbian women might suffer from intersectional invisibility concerning their gender identity and sexual orientation. Also, previous studies showed that lesbian leaders are perceived as less effective than their heterosexual female counterparts by their followers (Wang et al., 2017; 2021). In addition, these followers’ performance resulted to be low because they have less trust in their lesbian leaders and believe their leaders are not competent. This is in line with the assumption of the Leadership Categorization Theory (Lord & Maher, 2002) which testifies to the presence of a prototypical leader mismatch when the leader’s sexual orientation is lesbian. Fasoli and Hegarty (2020) investigated how vocal cues regarding sexual orientation affect heterosexual people’s evaluations of recruitment and the job suitability of potential candidates. The results showed that lesbian-sounding women were perceived as less effective potential leaders compared to heterosexual-sounding women. Even though it is not very likely to detect an individual’s actual sexual orientation concerning vocal cues, these results suggest that some potential leader candidates are discriminated against during the hiring process.

Importantly, according to the Social Role Theory, societal norms and expectations dictate traditional gender roles on women by asserting how they should act (Eagly & Wood, 2012). In their study, Kachel et al. (2016) declared that lesbians hold more masculine traits and less feminine traits when compared to heterosexual women. Furthermore, while several studies stress the core requirement for women to be

seen as effective leaders is “having masculine traits” (Koenig et al., 2011; Liberman & Golom, 2015), other studies argue that women are perceived as more effective leaders when they hold feminine traits (Chen & Shao, 2022; Gartzia & van Knippenberg, 2016). Finally, several studies argue that women are also expected to hold both traits not only to be congruent with their femininity but also masculinity to be perceived as effective leaders (Niedlich & Steffens, 2015; Shamloo et al., 2022; Sumra, 2019).

As regards measures of masculinity and femininity, the current literature has used many different approaches (Kachel et al., 2016). While several studies have used adjectives or traits stereotypically associated with masculinity and femininity (Liberman & Golom, 2015; Shamloo et al., 2022), other studies have investigated perceptions of masculinity and femininity with single adjectives (see De Cristofaro et al., 2020) or with scales such as Kachel’s (2016) Traditional Masculinity and Femininity (see Salvati et al., 2023) which does not refer to specific gender characteristics, but to the general construct of traditional masculinity-femininity. Therefore, when studying masculinity and femininity, these different operationalizations should be taken into consideration since they may be responsible for such discordance in the literature.

Not only do people suffer gender stereotypes but also occupations might be categorized as female-typed or male-typed (Hancock et al., 2020). For instance, Heilman and Wallen (2010) found that both heterosexual men and women are perceived as more ineffective and get less respect from others when they work as leaders in gender-inconsistent jobs. In another study, Pellegrini et al. (2020) showed that heterosexual people perceived heterosexual leaders as more effective than gay leaders in male-typed jobs and gay leaders as more effective in female-type jobs compared to male-type jobs. However, the current literature lacks a comparison between the perceived effectiveness of heterosexual women and lesbian leaders. According to Eagly (1987), lesbians are more likely to be taught to work in masculine-type jobs whereas heterosexual women work in female-type jobs, but recent studies suggest that lesbians are now seen as androgynous (both having masculine and feminine traits) in workplaces (Clarke & Arnold, 2018; Hancock et al., 2020). Thus, further studies are necessary to better understand whether and how heterosexual and lesbian women differ in the stereotypical female-typed or male-typed jobs. This research might contribute to the literature by filling this gap.

Current Research and Hypotheses

In the current study, we aimed to investigate the mediational role of perceived masculinity and femininity of a female leader by heterosexual individuals in the relationship between her sexual orientation (Heterosexual leader vs. Lesbian leader) and the perception of her effectiveness as a leader. Considering the discordant results in the literature, our research hypotheses aimed at verifying which of the various alternative hypotheses presented in the literature was mostly corroborated by our data. On the one hand, based on previous literature (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Kachel et al., 2016), we expected that

participants would perceive a lesbian leader as more masculine and less feminine compared to a heterosexual female leader. As regards the expectations about the associations of perceived masculinity and femininity with leadership effectiveness, the hypothesis might be an alternative. Indeed, based on the Leadership Categorization Theory (Lord & Maher, 2002) and some results of previous studies (Koenig et al., 2011; Liberman & Golom, 2015; Shamloo et al., 2022) we might expect that a female leader would be perceived as more effective when she has high masculinity and low femininity. However, other studies showed that female leaders are perceived as more effective when they are congruent with their gender identity, that is when they have high femininity and low masculinity (Chen & Shao, 2022; Gartzia & Knippenberg, 2016), or when they hold both traits not only to be congruent with their femininity but also masculinity (Niedlich & Steffens, 2015; Shamloo et al., 2022; Sumra, 2019). Our study contributes to the previous literature, by exploring these relationships and by using a separate single item for masculinity and femininity, without stereotypical traits traditionally and culturally associated with masculinity and femininity, which might have played a role in the different results that emerged in previous literature.

Also, we explored the moderating role of gender-typed organizations (Automotive Manager at ABC Auto Garage vs. Spa Manager at ABC Spa and Salon) on the relationship between the sexual orientation of a female leader and her leadership effectiveness perception. However, considering the lack of previous literature on this topic, we moved to an exploratory perspective even though according to the Leadership Categorization Theory (Lord & Maher, 2002) and previous studies on gay men (Clarke & Arnold, 2018; Pellegrini et al., 2020), we might expect that lesbian leaders would be perceived as more effective in a male-type rather than a female-type job, compared to a heterosexual leader.

Method

Procedure and Participants

Originally, 312 heterosexual and cisgender male and female participants from the UK were recruited through Prolific. Inclusion criteria were the following: a) being heterosexual and cisgender; b) being 18 years old at least; c) UK nationality (this was done only to have uniformity among the sample on a national basis and because of the relative majority of British people on Prolific). The participants received compensation for participating in the experiment.

Participants responded to an online questionnaire presented as a survey about the recruitment process for leadership positions. After reading and signing the informed consent, participants responded to the demographic questions. Participants were then asked to imagine working in a recruitment agency for highly qualified positions and having to examine the application of one applicant. Thus, they were presented with one of four possible scenarios presenting a woman (heterosexual vs. lesbian) who applied for a leadership position (male-typed job vs. female-typed job). Participants

read the job description for the position to be filled and the background summary for the applicant, and finally, they were asked to respond to the questions about manipulation and attentional checks, perceived masculinity and femininity, and leadership effectiveness of the applicant.

After removing participants who failed the attentional ($N = 13$), and the manipulation checks ($N = 9$), the final sample consisted of 290 heterosexual participants ($N_{\text{Males}} = 92$; 31.7%; $N_{\text{Females}} = 198$; 68.3%), ranging between 18 and 73 years old ($M = 34.27$, $SD = 11.37$). 2.8% of the sample had at most a middle school diploma, 37.2% had a high school diploma, 40.7% had a Bachelor's degree, 16.2% had a Master's degree, and 3.1% had a higher level of education.

All procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Human Sciences, University of Verona.

Materials and Measures

Demographic Information: Participants were asked to indicate their gender, age, nationality, level of education, sexual orientation (1 = Heterosexual; 2 = Gay or Lesbian; 3 = Other), and political orientation through a single item from 1 = *extremely liberal* to 7 = *extremely conservative* ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 1.23$).

Leader Application: Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. They had to evaluate the application of Mary, who could have been: a) a heterosexual woman applying for the position of Automotive Manager at ABC Auto Garage ($N = 73$); b) a heterosexual woman applying for the position of Spa Manager at ABC Spa and Salon ($N = 75$); c) a lesbian woman applying for the position of Automotive Manager at ABC Auto Garage ($N = 72$); d) a lesbian woman applying for the position of Spa Manager at ABC Spa and Salon ($N = 70$). Participants read the primary job responsibilities and the candidate's background summary. For the female-typed condition, the job responsibilities were to supervise and assist estheticians with a full range of services including facial, nail art, and design, aromatherapy, pedicures, make-up application, hair removal, and body wraps and treatments; provide staff development and training with the latest makeup trends and esthetic techniques; organize all advertisement for the esthetic services, ensuring that promotions are optimized. For the male-typed condition, the job responsibilities were to supervise and assist auto mechanics with a full range of services including work on engine system, drive lines, electrical, steering, braking systems, and body components; provide staff development and training with the latest automotive technology and advances; organize all advertisement for the maintenance and repair services, ensuring that promotions are optimized.

Mary's sexual orientation was manipulated through her background summary. Participants read the following description: Mary was born in a town about an hour away from *ABC Auto Garage/ABC Spa and Salon*. She graduated from the *Automotive Service Technician Program at ABC Community*

College/Esthetics Program at ABC Community College. She then returned to her hometown with her boyfriend, Gary/girlfriend, Sarah, to work as an auto mechanic/esthetician. Five years ago, Mary and Gary/Sarah relocated to this area and Mary took a job at a local garage/spa. Since then, she has been working full-time as a mechanic/an esthetician and is now seeking a manager position. Mary is an experienced mechanic/esthetician and regularly attends training to stay current in her field.

Manipulation Check: One item asked to indicate Mary's sexual orientation: 1 = Heterosexual; 2 = Lesbian/Bisexual; 3 = Other. One item on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 = only men to 7 = only women, asked: "The job is a job most commonly held by..."

Attentional Check: Three items were disseminated through the survey which asked participants to select a specific number on a Likert scale. Example: "If you are reading with attention, please select '3' for this question".

Leadership Effectiveness: Participants responded to the 10-item scale developed by Hais et al. (1997), adapted and already used in previous studies on gay and lesbian leaders (De Cristofaro et al., 2020; Pellegrini et al., 2020; Salvati et al., 2021; 2023; Shamloo et al., 2022). Participants were asked to rate the perceived effectiveness of Mary as a leader on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree, and higher scores corresponded to higher leadership effectiveness. An example of items is: "Mary would be an effective leader". McDonald's ω for the current study was .96.

Homophobia: In order to test our hypotheses, net of potential influences of the participants' different levels of homophobia, we added a homophobia measure to the questionnaire, specifically the 12-item Modern Homophobia Scale (Lesbian-Version) by Morrison and Morrison (2003). Participants responded on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree, and higher scores corresponded to higher homophobia. An example item is: "Many lesbians use their sexual orientation so that they can obtain special privileges". McDonald's ω for the current study was .91.

Data Analysis

After removing the participants who failed one or more attentional check items ($N = 13$), we verified that the manipulation of the leader's sexual orientation resulted effective considering that only 3.01% of the sample ($N = 9$) failed to indicate the correct sexual orientation of Mary. We removed these participants from the sample and then we tested the effectiveness of the manipulation related to the gender-type job. We ran a 2 (Leader's Sexual Orientation) x 2 (Gender-typed Job) ANOVA on the manipulation check item, expecting only a significant main effect of the gender-type job.

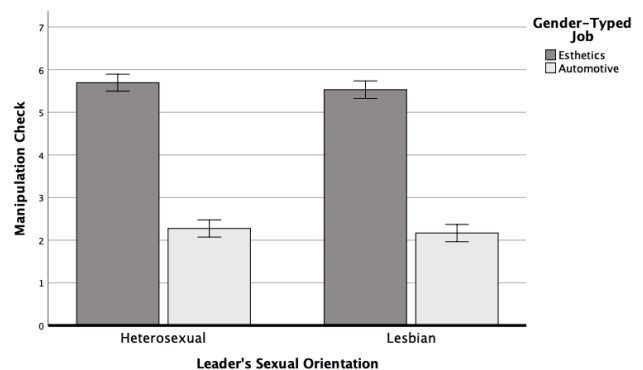
To test our hypotheses, we first run a moderated multiple mediational model where X was Mary's sexual orientation, the two mediators were the two single items of perceived masculinity (M1) and femininity (M2), Y was the leadership effectiveness, and the moderator was the gender-typed job (W). We tested the model 15 by PROCESS which allows us to test the moderating effect of the gender-typed job on the direct effect of Mary's sexual orientation on leadership effectiveness, as well as on the relationships between the mediators and

the dependent variable. All the demographic information (participants' gender, age, education, political orientation) and homophobia were added as covariates. However, because the results showed that none of the three interactions were statistically significant, we removed the moderator variable and added it as a covariate. Thus, the model tested through Process was a multiple mediational model (Model 4).

Results

The results of 2 x 2 ANOVA about the manipulation check confirmed our expectations, showing that participants retained the Automotive Manager position as a job less commonly held by women ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 0.85$), compared to the Spa Manager Position ($M = 5.61$, $SD = 0.89$), $F(1,286) = 1093.25$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .79$, independent of Mary's sexual orientation (Fig. 1). Indeed, neither the main effect of Mary's sexual orientation nor the interaction resulted statistically significant.

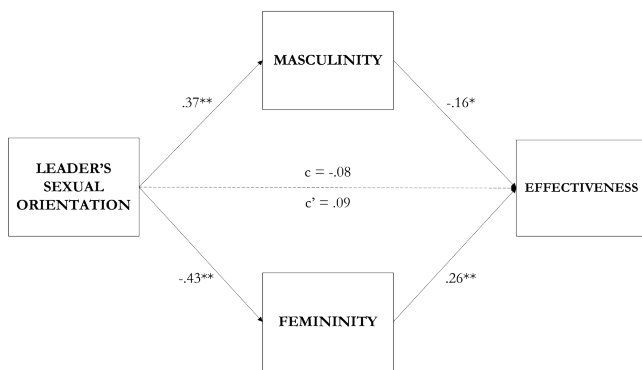
Fig. 1. ANOVA on the manipulation check item.



Note. The item asked: "The job is a job most commonly held by..." and the 7-point Likert scale ranged from 1 = only men to 7 = only women. Heterosexual/Esthetics group: $M = 6.69$, $SD = 0.92$; Heterosexual/Automotive group: $M = 2.27$, $SD = 0.93$; Lesbian/Esthetics group: $M = 5.53$, $SD = 0.86$; Lesbian/Automotive group: $M = 2.17$, $SD = 0.77$.

The multiple mediational model that tested our hypotheses explained a significant proportion of variance, $R^2 = .14$, $F(9,280) = 4.98$, $p < .001$, (Fig. 2). Table 1 shows results concerning direct and indirect effects. The results showed that when Mary was presented as lesbian, compared to when she was presented as heterosexual, she was perceived as more masculine, $\beta = .37$, $p < .001$, and less feminine $\beta = -.43$, $p < .001$. Leadership effectiveness resulted related to lower perceived masculinity, $\beta = -.16$, $p = .029$, and higher perceived femininity, $\beta = .26$, $p = .001$. Neither the total effect of Mary's sexual orientation (before adding mediators to the model) on leadership effectiveness, nor the direct effect resulted statistically significant. However, both the indirect effect via perceived masculinity, $\beta = -.06$, $CI[-.144, -.005]$, and femininity, $\beta = -.11$, $CI[-.211, -.028]$, resulted statistically significant as well as the total mediating effect, $\beta = -.17$, $CI[-.276, -.086]$.

Fig. 2. Mediation Model (N = 290)



Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; Covariates: Gender-typed Job, Gender, Age, Education, Political Orientation, Homophobia

Tab. 1. Direct and Indirect effects of the mediational model

	B	se	t	p	CI _{95%} LLCI	CI _{95%} ULCI
X→M ¹	.37	.13	3.54	<.001	.209	.732
X→M ²	-.43	.12	-4.48	<.001	-.759	-.296
X→Y (Total effect)	-.08	.11	1.19	.237	-.093	.376
X→Y (Direct effect)	.09	.11	-2.18	.029	-.225	-.012
Indirect Effects						
X→M ¹ →Y	-.06	.04	-	-	-.144	-.005
X→M ² →Y	-.11	.05	-	-	-.212	-.028
Total Indirect Effect	-.17	.05	-	-	-.276	-.086

Note. X = Leader's Sexual Orientation (Heterosexual = 1; Lesbian = 2); Y = Leadership Effectiveness; M1 = Masculinity; M2 = Femininity;

Discussion

The findings of this study aimed to relate the sexual orientation of female leaders to leadership effectiveness perception. Specifically, the mediating role of female leaders' perceived masculinity and femininity on the relationship between their sexual orientation (heterosexual vs. lesbian) and perceived effectiveness was examined. Our model showed that heterosexual individuals perceived lesbian leaders as more masculine and less feminine compared to heterosexual leaders. This result is in line with the Gender Inversion Theory (Kite & Deaux, 1987), which states that lesbians are more likely to exhibit similar characteristics to heterosexual men in society. This result is also consistent with previous empirical findings (Kachel et al., 2016; Lehavot & Lambert, 2007).

Our participants considered lesbians to be more masculine than their heterosexual counterparts, which in turn was associated with reduced leadership effectiveness. By contrast, our participants rated lesbian leaders as less feminine which in turn was associated with enhanced leadership effectiveness. In other words, women are perceived as more effective when they are congruent with gender-conforming roles. Unlike our findings, much of the current leadership literature assumes that masculine traits are a prerequisite for being perceived as a successful leader, consistent with the Social Role Theory and the Leadership Categorization Theory (Castaño et al., 2019;

Salvati et al., 2023). Some studies even suggest that it is not enough for women to have only masculine characteristics, but that they should not lose the connection to their feminine side to be perceived as effective leaders (Niedlich & Steffens, 2015; Shamloo et al., 2022).

In our study, there could be several explanations for why femininity was associated with being an effective leader. First, advances in leadership stereotypes have begun to change the position of women leaders (Eagly et al., 2020). For instance, educational interventions aimed at gender equality have been found to both improve female leaders' self-efficacy and change others' attitudes toward them (Isaac et al., 2017). Increased awareness of the gender identity and competencies of female leaders could therefore lead to the assumption that the presence and display of female characteristics incline greater leadership effectiveness. In their qualitative study with female leaders, Lewis and Benschop (2022) asserted that "being true to self"-as they put it-is very pivotal to some female leaders. In their study, one female leader said "I try to be open and honest and not have a persona for work and a persona for home. I try to humanize everything I do, I try to be caring, approachable, and understanding" (p. 176). Based on this quote, we can see how a female leader is consistent with her true self by exhibiting feminine characteristics (i.e., humanizing, caring, approachable, and understanding).

The second possible explanation could be that we used single adjectives to measure perceptions of femininity and masculinity to exclude preconceived attributions about femininity and masculinity. The single item does not capture a detailed account of female or male description (i.e., traits) and thus, in this case, it is up to the person to decide what is meant by masculine and feminine which does not happen when we specifically ask to rate some stereotypically masculine and feminine traits. In other words, the fact that these results do not replicate the results found in previous studies (e.g., Shamloo et al., 2022) may suggest that single items may include characteristics associated with women that stereotypical traits do not include. Thus, the word "feminine" may nowadays also include traits that recall more stereotypically masculine traits (i.e., not only caring and sensitive, but also strong and determined). For this reason, it may be possible that femininity was associated with higher leadership efficacy.

Finally, a possible explanation could be that the majority of our sample includes female participants. According to the Similarity-Attraction Effect Hypothesis (Byrne, 1971), people are more likely to be attracted to others who have characteristics similar to their own. For this reason, women might perceive female leaders with stronger feminine characteristics as more efficient compared to those with masculine characteristics. Stoker et al. (2012) results also support this finding by showing that female employees tend to prefer more female leadership characteristics compared to their male colleagues.

Limitations and Further Directions

The present study has several limitations to consider. The first limitation concerns the generalizability of our results, as our participants were entirely from the United Kingdom. Future

studies could reach more generalizable results by conducting cross-cultural studies. Similarly, our participants were also exclusively heterosexual. In their study, Salvati et al. (2023) investigated gay, lesbian, and bisexual (LGB) individuals' self-effectiveness perception in leadership. The scholars found that if LGB individuals have a positive LGB identity perception and lower internalized sexual stigma based on their sexual orientation, they will perceive themselves as more effective leaders.

Moreover, Fassinger et al. (2010), in their LGBT Leadership Model, stressed that LGBT people, regardless of whether they are leaders or followers, should be aware of the multiple identities they have. In other words, lesbian employees may arise as role models by embracing their multiple identities: women, lesbians, and employees. Thus, future studies could include all sexual orientations to also look at their perceptions from a broader perspective (Salvati & Koc, 2022). Moreover, we preferred to use a quantitative method to understand participants' perceptions in our study. Future studies could use the qualitative method or combine quantitative and qualitative methods to go deeper into this topic. Another limitation could be that most of our participants were women, thus future studies might better balance the sample with respect to participants' gender.

Conclusion

The current study has brought a different discourse to the literature by showing that female leaders should be perceived as more feminine than masculine in order to be considered more effective leaders. For this reason, organizations need to understand that there may be female leaders who feel that they need to hold onto their femininity in order to be effective. Even though attitudes and behaviors toward female leaders are more optimistic today than in the past, it is a well-known fact that women still face glass ceilings in their career advancement. Lesbians, in particular, can be considered doubly invisible, as they are stigmatized for both their gender identity and sexual orientation, the latter contributing to reduced well-being as testified by several studies also conducted in Italy so far (e.g., Baiocco et al., 2023; Salvati et al., 2018).

Therefore, organizations should create a safe organizational environment where all women with their intersectional identities might feel adequate, efficient, and present. In addition, organizations could develop educational interventions and diversity training based on gender equality and mentoring programs to help female employees discover their self-worth and capabilities. In such a context, women could be heard, seen, and cared for however and whomever they want to be.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization and methodology: MS, VP, and VDC. Formal analysis: VP. Investigation and supervision and project administration: MS and VDC. Resources and data curation: MS. Writing—original draft: TS, SES, and MS. Writing—

review and editing: TS, MS, and SES. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Funding

The research was funded by a 'Seedcorn Grant' of the European Association of Social Psychology (EASP), won by Marco Salvati on December 3rd 2020.

Ethical approval

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. This article does not contain any studies with animals performed by any of the authors.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

References

- Abendroth, A., Melzer, S., Kalev, A., & Tomaskovic-Devey, D. (2016). Women at work. *ILR Review*, 70(1), 190-222. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019793916668530>
- Badura, K. L., Grijalva, E., Newman, D. A., Yan, T. T., & Jeon, G. (2018). Gender and leadership emergence: A meta-analysis and explanatory model. *Personnel Psychology*, 71(3), 335-367. <https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12266>
- Baiocco, R., Scandurra, C., Rosati, F., Pistella, J., Ioverno, S., Bochicchio, V., ... & Chang, T. S. (2023). Minority stress, resilience, and health in Italian and Taiwanese LGB+ people: A cross-cultural comparison. *Current Psychology*, 42(1), 104-115. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-01387-2>
- Braun, S., Stegmann, S., Hernandez Bark, A. S., Junker, N. M., & Van Dick, R. (2017). Think manager-think male, think follower-think female: Gender bias in implicit followership theories. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 47(7), 377-388. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12445>
- Byrne, D. (1971). *The Attraction Paradigm*. Academic Press.
- Castaño, A., Fontanil, Y., & García-Izquierdo, A. (2019). "Why can't I become a manager?"—a systematic review of gender stereotypes and organizational discrimination. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(10), 1813. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16101813>
- Chen, S., & Shao, J. (2022). Feminine traits improve transformational leadership advantage: Investigation of leaders' gender traits, sex and their joint impacts on employee contextual performance. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 37(5), 569-586. <https://doi.org/10.1108/gm-06-2020-0167>
- Clarke, H. M., & Arnold, K. A. (2018). The influence of sexual orientation on the perceived fit of male applicants for both

- male- and female-typed jobs. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 656. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00656>
- Crowe, T., & Slocum, S. (2022). How to stop imposter syndrome from sabotaging your career. In: Bailey, M., Shackelford, L. (eds) *Women in Mechanical Engineering: Women in Energy and the Environment* (pp. 91-107). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-91546-9_6
- De Cristofaro, V., Pellegrini, V., Giacomantonio, M., Livi, S., & van Zomeren, M. (2021). Can moral convictions against gender inequality overpower system justification effects? Examining the interaction between moral conviction and system justification. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 60(4), 1279-1302. doi: 10.1111/bjso.12451
- De Cristofaro, V., Pellegrini, V., Giacomantonio, M., and Salvati, M. (2020). Perceived leadership effectiveness among heterosexual and gay men: do leaders' sexual orientation and gender typicality make a difference? *Psicologia Sociale*. 15, 53-66. <https://doi.org/10.1482/96294>
- Diehl, A. B., & Dzubinski, L. M. (2016). Making the invisible visible: A cross-sector analysis of gender-based leadership barriers. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 27(2), 181-206. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.21248>
- Eagly, A. H. (1987). *Sex Differences in Social Behavior: A Social-Role Interpretation*. London: Psychology Press.
- Eagly, A. H., & Wood, W. (2012). Social role theory. *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology*, 2, 458-476. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446249222.n49>
- Eagly, A. H., Nater, C., Miller, D. I., Kaufmann, M., & Sczesny, S. (2020). Gender stereotypes have changed: A cross-temporal meta-analysis of U.S. public opinion polls from 1946 to 2018. *American Psychologist*, 75(3), 301-315. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000494>
- Fasoli, F., & Hegarty, P. (2020). A Leader Doesn't Sound Lesbian!: The Impact of Sexual Orientation Vocal Cues on Heterosexual Persons' First Impression and Hiring Decision. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 44(2), 234-255. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684319891168>
- Fassinger, R. E., Shullman, S. L., & Stevenson, M. R. (2010). Toward an affirmative lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender leadership paradigm. *American Psychologist*, 65(3), 201-215. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018597>
- Flores, G. M., & Bañuelos, M. (2021). Gendered deference: Perceptions of authority and competence among Latina/o physicians in medical institutions. *Gender & Society*, 35(1), 110-135. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243220979655>
- Gartzia, L., & van Knippenberg, D. (2016). Too Masculine, Too Bad: Effects of Communion on Leaders' Promotion of Cooperation. *Group & Organization Management*, 41(4), 458-490. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601115583580>
- Giuffrida, A. (2023, February 27). Elly Schlein voted leader of Italy's most important leftwing party in surprise win. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/27/elly-schlein-voted-leader-of-italy-democratic-party-surprise-win>
- Glass, C., & Cook, A. (2016). Leading at the top: Understanding women's challenges above the glass ceiling. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 27(1), 51-63. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2015.09.003>
- Hais, 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. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672972310009>
- Hancock, A. J., Clarke, H. M., & Arnold, K. A. (2020). Sexual orientation occupational stereotypes. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 119, 103427. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103427>
- Heilman, M. E., & Wallen, A. S. (2010). Wimpy and undeserving of respect: Penalties for men's gender-inconsistent success. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 46(4), 664-667. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2010.01.008>
- Isaac, C., Kaatz, A., Lee, B., & Carnes, M. (2017). An educational intervention designed to increase women's leadership self-efficacy. *CBE—Life Sciences Education*, 11(3), 307-322. <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.12-02-0022>
- James, R., Fisher, J. R., Carlos-Grotjahn, C., Boylan, M. S., Dembereldash, B., Demissie, M. Z., Diaz De Villegas, C., Gibbs, B., Konia, R., Lyons, K., Possingham, H., Robinson, C. J., Tang, T., & Butt, N. (2023). Gender bias and inequity hold women back in their conservation careers. *Frontiers in Environmental Science*, 10, 2644. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fenvs.2022.1056751>
- Joshi, A., Son, J., & Roh, H. (2015). When can women close the gap? A meta-analytic test of sex differences in performance and rewards. *Academy of Management Journal*, 58(5), 1516-1545. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2013.0721>
- Kachel, S., Steffens, M. C., & Niedlich, C. (2016). Traditional masculinity and femininity: Validation of a new scale assessing gender roles. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7, 956. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00956>
- Kite, M. E., & Deaux, K. (1987). Gender belief systems: Homosexuality and the implicit inversion theory. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 11(1), 83-96. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1987.tb00776.x>
- Koenig, A. M., Eagly, A. H., Mitchell, A. A., & Ristikari, T. (2011). Are leader stereotypes masculine? A meta-analysis of three research paradigms. *Psychological Bulletin*, 137(4), 616-642. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023557>
- Lehavot, K., & Lambert, A. J. (2007). Toward a greater understanding of antigay prejudice: On the role of sexual orientation and gender role violation. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 29(3), 279-292. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973530701503390>
- Lewis, P., & Benschop, Y. (2022). Gendered hybridity in leadership identities: A postfeminist analysis. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 38(2), 166-182. <https://doi.org/10.1108/gm-07-2022-0238>
- Lieberman, B. E., & Golom, F. D. (2015). Think manager, think male? heterosexuals' stereotypes of gay and lesbian managers. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 34, 566-578. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-01-2015-0005>
- Lord, R. G., & Maher, K. J. (2002). *Leadership and information processing: Linking perceptions and performance*. Routledge.
- Morrison, M. A., & Morrison, T. G. (2003). Development and validation of a scale measuring modern prejudice toward gay

- men and lesbian women. *Journal of homosexuality*, 43(2), 15-37. https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v43n02_02
- Niedlich, C., & Steffens, M. C. (2015). On the interplay of (positive) stereotypes and prejudice: Impressions of Lesbian and gay applicants for Leadership Positions. *Sensoria: A Journal of Mind, Brain & Culture*, 11(1), 70–80. <https://doi.org/10.7790/sa.v11i1.408>
- Marx, U. (2018). Accounting for equality: Gender budgeting and moderate feminism. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 26(8), 1176-1190. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12307>
- Pellegrini, V., De Cristofaro, V., Giacomantonio, M., & Salvati, M. (2020). Why are gay leaders perceived as ineffective? the role of the type of organization, sexual prejudice and gender stereotypes. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 157, 109817. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2020.109817>
- Salvati, M., & Koc, Y. (2022). Advancing research into the social psychology of sexual orientations and gender identities: Current research and future directions. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 52(2), 225-232. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2875>
- Salvati, M., Pellegrini, V., Giacomantonio, M., & De Cristofaro, V. (2021). Embrace the leadership challenge: The role of Gay men's internalized sexual stigma on the evaluation of others' leadership and one's own. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 60(2), 700-719. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12424>
- Salvati, M., Pistella, J., Giacomantonio, M., & Baiocco, R. (2018). Lesbians' negative affect toward sexual minority people with stereotypical masculine and feminine characteristics. *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 30(2), 162-176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2018.1472705>
- Salvati, M., Sari, T., Pellegrini, V., & De Cristofaro, V. (2023). Gay, lesbian, and bisexual (LGB) peoples' leadership self-effectiveness: The roles of internalized sexual stigma, LGB positive identity, and traditional masculinity. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2023.1108085>
- Shamloo, S. E., De Cristofaro, V., Pellegrini, V., & Salvati, M. (2022). Masculinity and leadership effectiveness (self-) perceptions: The case of lesbian leaders. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(24), 17026. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192417026>
- Stephenson, A., Diehl, A., & Dzubinski, L. (2023). A cross-industry comparison of how women leaders experience gender bias. *Personnel Review*, 52(1), 145-165. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-02-2021-0091>
- Stoker, J. I., Van der Velde, M., & Lammers, J. (2011). Factors relating to managerial stereotypes: The role of gender of the employee and the manager and management gender ratio. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 27(1), 31-42. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-011-9210-0>
- Sumra, M. K. (2019) "Masculinity, femininity, and leadership: Taking a closer look at the alpha female," *Plos One*, 14(4). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0215181>
- Wang, G., Steffensen, D., & Perrewé, P. (2017). Leader sexual orientation and leadership Effectiveness: A two-study model-testing investigation. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, 2017(1), 11096. <https://doi.org/10.5465/ambpp.2017.11096abstract>
- Wang, G., Steffensen, D. S., Perrewé, P. L., Ferris, G. R., & Jordan, S. L. (2021). Does leader same-sex sexual orientation matter to leadership effectiveness? A four-study model-testing investigation. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 37(3), 557-580. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-021-09759-y>
- Wong, C. Y., Kirby, T. A., Rink, F., & Ryan, M. K. (2022). Intersectional invisibility in women's diversity interventions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 791572. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.791572>