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Difference in People's Evaluations of Narcissistic Female and Male Leaders, and Whether This Difference Is Moderated by Cultural Context (Collectivist vs. Individualist Societies)

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Abstract. The study investigates gender biases in workplace settings, especially on people's perception and evaluation of narcissistic male leader and female leader, with cultural context as the moderator. A combined sample of US and Chinese participants (n = 265) will be recruited to complete an online questionnaire, assessing their evaluations of narcissistic male and female leader and their cultural preference (horizontal/vertical collectivist or individualist). The study predicts that narcissistic leader, especially female narcissistic leader, will be evaluated more harshly across two cultures, and they will be evaluated more negatively in people who have collectivism beliefs than in people who have individualism beliefs.

Keywords: Cultural context, collectivist, individualist, narcissism, personality traits

1. Introduction

Narcissism has long become a topic of interest in personality, organizational, and social psychology, particularly because of its implications for leadership and workplace dynamics. In a study done by Rosenthal and Pittinsky in 2006 [1], narcissism is characterized as a combination of arrogance, elevated self-focus, fragile self-esteem, and interpersonal hostility. While such personal traits can contribute to confidence and ambition, they might also be viewed as exploitative and having poor empathy in certain circumstances. According to Miller et al. [2], narcissistic traits can also be dominant and aggressive. They proposed two types of narcissism: vulnerable narcissism and grandiose narcissism. All the narcissistic phenomena mentioned in this study refer to grandiose narcissism. This type of narcissistic personality exhibits typical characteristics such as high self-esteem, but does not include traits such as mistrust and social isolation. In the workplace, grandiose narcissism is often observed in leaders. This phenomenon raises a crucial question: if both male and female leaders exhibit narcissistic traits, are there differences in how people evaluate them? What is the reason for this?

Previous research in this area has shown that gender-related factors often play a key role in the perception of narcissistic leaders. Research has found that people tend to be stricter with female leaders who exhibit narcissistic traits. Male leaders generally do not receive the same amount of negative evaluations. The reason behind this phenomenon might be that such behavior violates the

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gender norms for women that emphasize warmth and gentleness [3]. Meanwhile, cultural background influences the interpretation and evaluation methods of these traits, and this difference is particularly worthy of exploration between collectivist and individualistic cultures. In an individualistic society, self-promotion and self-confidence are often regarded as positive traits and even as necessary conditions for success. Collectivist societies, on the other hand, place greater emphasis on harmony, humility and interdependence [4]. A paper published by Miller et al. [5] People in other regions generally believe that Americans are more narcissistic than those in their own country or cultural group. Therefore, it can be inferred that narcissistic traits are more difficult to be accepted in collectivist cultures. However, the research by Fatfouta et al. [6] challenged this assumption, finding that narcissistic traits could also be strongly manifested in specific collectivist environments.

Despite these insights, there remains a notable gap in literature. Most studies on narcissistic traits and leadership evaluations have been conducted in Western or U.S. samples, and few have examined both gender and culture within the same framework. As a result, little is known about how gender bias in leader evaluation operates across different cultural contexts. The current study aims to address this gap by investigating how people's evaluations of narcissistic female and male leaders differ, and whether this difference is moderated by cultural context (collectivist vs. individualist societies). Two predictions are proposed: (1) narcissistic female leaders will be judged more negatively than narcissistic male leaders, and (2) this gender difference in evaluations will be stronger in people who have collectivistic societal expectations than those who have individualistic societal expectations.

2. Method

All measures, manipulations, and exclusions in this study will be reported. This study will be carried out in accordance with the approvals and recommendations of the Institutional Review Board for human participants. All participants will fill out the informed consent form beforehand.

This study will employ a between-subjects experimental design. 265 participants will be recruited for this study. Participants will be recruited simultaneously from China and the United States, as these two countries are widely recognized as typical examples of collectivist and individualist cultural orientations.

Cultural context will be examined at both the national level (China vs. US) and the individual level using INDCOL orientation scores. This dual approach will allow us to assess cultural effects both by the physical location which each participant lives and by individual mindsets that might differ across the entire sample.

A priori power analysis will be conducted before data collection to show the minimum sample size needed to achieve sufficient statistical power. The analysis result indicates that with N = 265, the study could detect an effect size of Cohen's d of .20, using a three-way ANOVA at an alpha level of 0.05 (two-tailed), and statistical power of 90%. Ideally, half of the participants will be from China, and the other half will be from US. Each group should have a balanced gender distribution, and the whole sample should have a balanced cultural context distribution. Participants will have to be at least 22 years old, and they also need to have a minimum of one year of workplace experience. Because the study focuses on gender biases between male and female leaders, participants who identify as non-binary will be excluded from the final sample.

The study will be administered through an online questionnaire. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four scenarios: a narcissistic female leader, a non-narcissistic female leader, a narcissistic male leader, or a non-narcissistic male leader. To ensure consistency, all scenarios took

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place in professional settings. After viewing the scenarios, participants were asked to rate the expertise, trustworthiness, and overall impression of the leader using a Likert scale (3-point; 0 = not at all trustworthy/low expertise, 2 = very trustworthy/high expertise/profession). The sum of these scores was used as the primary dependent variable, reflecting participants' overall evaluation of their assigned leader type.

In the final part of the questionnaire, participants will complete a 27-item INDCOL scale [7]. This scale measures cultural orientation along four dimensions: horizontal individualism, horizontal collectivism, vertical individualism, and vertical collectivism [4]. Horizontal orientation reflects respondents' preference for an egalitarian social structure, while vertical orientation reflects a preference for a hierarchical social structure. For example, individuals with high horizontal individualism value independence but believe that all people are equal. In contrast, individuals with high vertical individualism value independence but favor competition and recognize the benefits of a high social status.

To prevent participants from guessing the true purpose of the study and developing biases, we will inform them at the beginning of the study that it is a survey of various workplace situations. Meanwhile, more neutral working scenarios will be set up in the questionnaire to mask the research purpose. Participants are required to sign an informed consent form before the start of the study. After the research is completed, the researchers will hold a debriefing to inform the participants of the true purpose of the study.

Data Analytic Approach. The collected data will be analyzed in two stages to systematically check the impact of gender bias and culture on leadership evaluations. The first stage will test the overall effects of leader's gender and narcissism across the entire sample. A three-way between-subjects ANOVA will be conducted to determine whether narcissistic leaders receive lower evaluations than non-narcissistic leaders, and whether narcissistic female leaders are perceived more negatively than their male counterparts.

The second stage will focus on individual-level cultural orientation. For half of the participants that were assigned to the narcissistic workplace leader scenario, their INDCOL scores will be used to classify them into horizontal/vertical collectivism and individualism. First, the two individualism categories and the two collectivism categories would be combined to assess general gender biases across the two main cultural contexts. Next, the four orientations will be compared together to determine which orientation holds the highest bias against narcissistic female leader in the workplace. A 2 × 2 × 4 ANOVA will then be conducted to determine the results.

3. Results

Data will be analyzed using a series of between-subjects analyses of variance (ANOVAs) to test the study's hypotheses. It is expected that the overall analysis will reveal a significant effect of leader's narcissism, specifically that narcissistic leaders will receive lower evaluation scores than non-narcissistic leaders. A significant interaction is expected between the gender of leaders and their narcissistic traits. Participants' evaluations of narcissistic female leaders with the same traits are anticipated to be more negative than those of narcissistic male leaders.

When the INDCOL scores are analyzed separately based on the cultural background (collectivism and individualism) of each subject, the scores given to leaders are expected to vary across different cultural backgrounds. Participants with a collectivist orientation may give narcissistic female leaders a more negative evaluation, because their cultural preference has more traditional gender expectations and places greater emphasis on humility, social harmony and restraint. Correspondingly, participants with an individualistic orientation may have a more lenient or positive

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evaluation of female narcissistic leaders than those with a collectivist orientation. If the results collected truly correspond with our predictions, it will predict a bar graph with the following pattern (Figure 1):

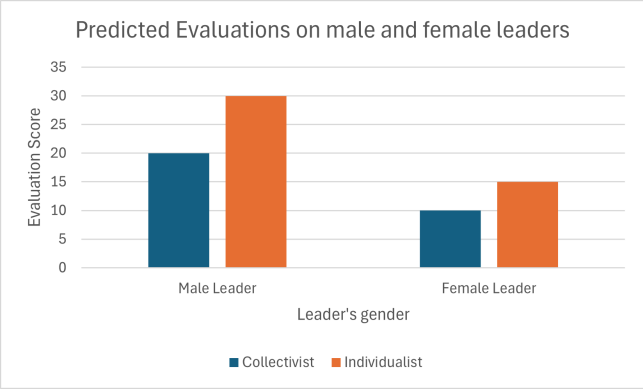

Figure 1. Male leaders receive significantly higher evaluation scores than female leaders. Evaluation scores are higher in individualist societies than in collectivist societies

For further analyses using participants' INDCOL scores to group them into one of the four cultural orientation groups, it is anticipated that participants high in collectivist orientations, especially those with vertical collectivist values emphasizing hierarchy and harmony, will show the strongest gender bias against narcissistic female leaders. Participants high in horizontal collectivism may also demonstrate this pattern, though to a lesser extent. In contrast, those high in individualist orientations, particularly horizontal individualists who value equality and independence, are expected to show the weakest bias, rating narcissistic leaders of both genders more similarly. If the collected results follow our predicted patterns, the resulting bar graph would look like this (Figure 2):

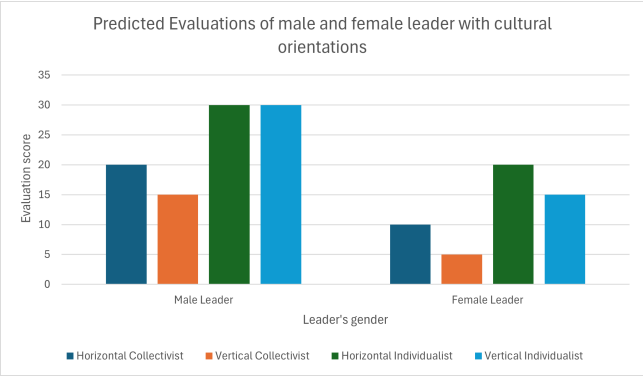

Figure 2. In general, male leaders receive higher evaluation scores than female leaders. For both genders, scores in horizontal and vertical individualist cultures are significantly higher than in the other cultural conditions

Overall, these predicted results will support the proposed hypotheses that narcissistic female leaders will be evaluated more negatively than narcissistic male leaders, and that this bias will be most significant among participants from collectivist cultures or those who personally endorse collectivist value orientations.

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4. Conclusion

This study aims to demonstrate that people's evaluations of leaders are not only influenced by gender stereotypes but also by the cultural environment. Our research predicts that gender bias in leadership assessment is culturally dependent in context. They will stand out even more in a society that values modesty, harmony and compliance. Furthermore, existing research also indicates that narcissistic female leaders are more likely to suffer from negative evaluations than narcissistic male leaders. This phenomenon is particularly prominent in a collectivist environment. These findings demonstrate how gender norms and cultural values jointly influence people's perception of workplace capabilities and professional qualities.

In the past, many studies on gender issues in the workplace were mainly conducted in the context of Western individualistic culture. This has led to a lack of understanding of the issue of gender bias in a society that emphasizes group harmony and social cohesion. This study aims to fill this research gap by directly comparing participants from China and the United States. We aim to reveal how cultural orientation plays a crucial role in people's judgments of narcissistic male and female leaders. Based on this, the research can also prompt organizations and policymakers to more carefully consider the cultural background of employees when designing anti-bias programs.

As this study focuses on two countries representing individualistic and collectivist cultures, its findings can still be used to understand other societies with similar cultural patterns. Although the United States and China cannot represent all cultures around the world, as typical cases, they clearly demonstrate the key differences in values such as independence, individual freedom and interpersonal relationships between countries with different cultural orientations. Therefore, the comparative analysis of this study can provide a useful entry point for future cross-cultural research on gender bias in the workplace.

Meanwhile, this study has several limitations. Firstly, scenario design and measurement tools are only applicable to the workplace environment, and their conclusions may not be applicable to schools, the political field, or informal social groups. Furthermore, online surveys may lead to self-selection bias, since active participants who volunteered to fill out the surveys may not be generalizable to the whole working population. Subsequent research should verify these models in different occupations, industries and age groups to enhance the universality of the conclusions

Looking ahead, this study can provide support for future cross-cultural research on gender bias and narcissistic traits. Subsequent research can incorporate samples from more regions to more fully reflect different cultural values and gender norms. Researchers can also explore whether other personality traits besides narcissism, such as openness and agreeableness, exhibit similar patterns. The collected advancement of these research directions will help to gain a clearer understanding of how gender and culture interact to influence people's perception of personality traits and leadership.

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