Effects of gender and seating arrangement on perceptions of leadership

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EFFECTS OF GENDER AND SEATING ARRANGEMENT ON PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP

by

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Bachelor of Arts
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2003

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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Department of Communication Studies
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ABSTRACT

Effects of Gender and Seating Arrangement on Perceptions of Leadership

by

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The current study examines the effects that gender and seating arrangement on perceptions of leadership. In order to determine current attitudes regarding women as leaders, this study examines factors that may influence people's perceptions about leadership and gender. Three different hypotheses were tested. The findings are as follows: Seating arrangement is still seen as an important factor when determining leadership, specifically the head of the table positions. Secondly, in this study, men were seen as being the leader of a group significantly more often than women. Lastly, sex of the subject did seem to influence the subjects' choice of leader, with the majority of male subjects overwhelmingly choosing a male leader.
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EFFECTS OF GENDER AND PROXEMICS
ON PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP

Although women in U.S. society have made significant strides toward gaining equity with men, especially in the business world, gender bias regarding women’s ability to serve in leadership roles still exists (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Rhode, 2003; Stivers, 2002; Valian, 1999). This bias finds its origins in the perceptions we hold about the genders in general, with those attributes most often associated with leadership, mainly assertiveness, decisiveness, ambition, and control, linked to masculinity rather than femininity (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Porter & Geis, 1981; Rhode, 2003). Related to traditional views of the roles and characteristics of men and women, women lack the presumption of competence; as a contingent they face “greater difficulty in establishing their capability and credibility” (Rhode, 2003, p. 8).

Several studies explore the area of gender, seating arrangement, and leadership. Two such studies were conducted by Porter and Geis (1981), and Jackson and Engstrom (2004). Both studies included a stimulus that had five individuals seated around a rectangular table. Subjects from both studies were asked to identify who they thought was the leader of the group. However, results from each study differed. Porter and Geis (1981), who used photographs as stimuli, found that subjects favored a man over a woman as the leader, whereas Jackson and Engstrom (2004), who used symbols for
males and females, found no significant differences in how subjects chose men and women leaders.

**Status of Women in the U. S. Today**

The status of women today appears better than that of their cohorts from twenty years ago. In 2005, more than 60 percent of women are members of the labor force. This is up nearly 20 percent from 1970 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005). The U.S. Department of Labor (2005) also notes that the number of women executives and managers doubled from 10,772 in 1983 to 20,561 in 2002. Considering how many women are in the workforce, one would assume that current conditions for female workers are superb. Unfortunately, this has never been and still is not the case. Factors such as unequal pay, disproportionate female promotions to males, and “the glass ceiling” all contribute to poor working conditions for women.

Oakley (2000) defined the glass ceiling as “a transparent barrier which prevents women from moving up the corporate ladder past a certain point...the glass ceiling is not one ceiling or wall in one spot, but rather many varied and pervasive forms of gender bias that occur frequently in both overt and covert ways” (p. 321). The notion of the glass ceiling explains the lack of women in upper management positions. According to Diversity Hotwire (2004), a website that investigates and reports on diversity in the workplace, “women represent 15.7 percent of the corporate officers in America’s 500 largest companies” (p. 8). Although this number is low, it is actually an improvement from years before.

However, whereas women in the United States account for 40 percent of all managers, in the largest corporations, women only account for less than 0.5% of the
highest paid management jobs (Oakley, 2000). The following statistics further illustrate this point: "11.2% of corporate officers are women, 75% of Fortune 500 companies have more than 1 female corporate officer, and 6% of corporate officers holding line jobs are women, while 94% are men" (Diversity Hotwire, 2004, p. 11).

Women are not only disproportionately represented in upper management positions but once women make it to management positions they are subject to unequal pay and unfair evaluations than their male counterparts. Diversity Hotwire (2004) states that white women earn 59 cents to every dollar that a white male manager makes, and minority women can earn as little as 48 cents to every dollar a white male executive makes for doing the same job. If that is not enough to contend with, women managers receive lower evaluations than men. "Although some findings are contradictory, most studies have found that male managers are evaluated more favorably than their female colleagues" (Knott & Natalie, 1997, p. 525). One staggering example of the lack of women in positions of power is seen in U.S. politics. The Detroit Free Press (2002) notes that women make up 13 percent of the U.S. Senate, and 13.8 percent of the U.S. House of Representatives.

"Research indicates that both men and women overwhelmingly expect leaders to be men," notes Stivers (2002), "so much so that women in jobs that should logically be considered leadership positions...have not been generally recognized as such" (p. 74). The real world implications of "gender schemas"—which skew our perceptions and evaluations of men and women (Valian, 1999)—include the exclusion of women from the echelon of elite leaders and top executives (Eagly & Karau, 2002), lack of opportunities for women to develop leadership skills (Rhode, 2003), and perpetuation of
the society-wide perceptions that women do not fit the image of leadership (Stivers, 2002).

Thus, we base our perceptions of leadership or who is or can be a leader on our notions regarding gender, as traits associated with men translate into notions about leadership. In addition to gender-related “evidence,” we base our perceptions of leadership on certain heuristics, or assumptions that people make about events, other people, and life due to what they have learned through experience and trial-by-error over time (Kulik & Perry, 1994). We employ these cues in the absence of other information that helps us develop new ways of perceiving things, or helps us to solidify beliefs and views that we already hold.

In order to determine current attitudes regarding women as leaders, I examine factors that may influence people’s perceptions about leadership and gender. This study will take a feminist approach, which Wood (1994) defines as, “an active approach to equality and respect for life” (p.4). This thesis is a feminist study because it examines the issue of women’s progress; it thus takes a feminist approach. Feminism is the ideology that women and other minority groups should be treated equally and given the same opportunities as men and those who are members of the majority. My research aims to show that women are not seen as being leaders as often as men even if no information about qualifications is known about either. I hope that the results of my study can help shed some light on this issue.

This thesis also falls under the umbrella of nonverbal communication; proxemics, or a person’s use of space, is a major part of this research. Through my research, I aim to
discover what role proxemics plays in the subjects’ choice of leader, as well as whether proxemics overrides sex.

I conduct this research for several reasons: (1) to update the body of research that already exists; (2) to learn what makes subjects see one person as a leader over another; and (3) to find out whether our society has become more egalitarian in the last twenty years since Porter and Geis’ study was originally done. If my research does not support the findings of Porter and Geis, I hope my findings will provide evidence, however indirect, regarding any changes in societal perceptions of the genders, as well as the strides women have made in being treated equal to men. In addition, I hope my research will help feminist researchers learn what work still needs to be done in the area of perceptions of women’s leadership.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Burgoon, Heston, and McCroskey (1974), leaders have been shown to be more self-confident, less anxious, and more deliberate than non-leaders. Also, leaders seem to need to dominate, and are motivated by power, prestige, and status. In other words, leaders are born with or develop personality traits that influence others to view them as the leader they want to be.

Before we can understand how people perceive an individual as a leader, we must first define what a leader and leadership are:

A leader is a person who directs and influences a group to move toward a group’s goal. This person may be formally designated or may emerge informally from the group’s interaction. Leadership on the other hand, is an influence process...an influence process which is directed toward goal achievement (Wilson, 2005, p. 187).

I study leadership in several ways. I examine the impact that seating arrangement has on perceptions of leadership. Also, I examine the role a person’s gender plays in perceptions of leadership. Specifically, I want to find out whether men and women are seen as leaders equally. Lastly, I study leadership to determine which is a more important heuristic when determining a leader, the placement of an individual or his/her gender. In this literature review, I will discuss the following concepts as they relate to
my study: gender and perceptions of leadership, role congruity theory, heuristics, proxemics, small group ecology, seating arrangement, perceptions of leadership, and nonverbal leadership cues.

Gender and Perceptions of Leadership

Women have struggled to overcome unfair treatment based on their sex (Kerber & DeHart, 1995), and the bias of the male standard. According to Valian (1998), “Men are perceived as the norm against which females are measured, not only in male-dominated areas like business but also in neutral areas” (p. 110). Wood (2003) contended society defines men and masculine patterns as normative, which leads to perceptions of women and feminine styles as being different and inferior to the male standard. In short, men are the norm and women are measured against that norm; the male standard explains why it is so difficult for women to break through “glass ceilings,” or barriers holding women back from advancing.

Because men have traditionally been leaders, women in leadership positions have had to overcome long-held notions that only men were qualified to do the job of a leader: “This suggests that individuals who have nontraditional leadership traits, such as women or minorities, or engage in nontraditional leadership behaviors may be subjected to more systematic and more stringent evaluations than traditional leaders (white males)” (Kulik & Perry, 1994, p. 198). Stivers (2002) noted this as well, in that the image of “leader” has developed within the context of white, professional men, with others who do not fit that mold consequently perceived as not being fit for leadership positions.

In order for women to be accepted, they must become or present themselves more like men in order to be accepted into the business world or be accepted as leaders. As
Valian (1998) noted, women are expected to embrace more masculine traits, but those women who embrace too many masculine traits are judged harshly and are not accepted as leaders. Along this same vein, Stivers (2002) argued that “the disparity between images of leadership and norms of femininity force women to struggle to reconcile conflicting demands—‘look like a lady’ but ‘act like a man’—a struggle that men, whatever their personal views on leadership, are able to avoid” (p. 63).

Unfortunately, this becomes a double-edged sword for women: “Because women’s leadership is unexpected, it evokes negative affect in observers that is visible to other group members” (Butler & Geis, 1990, p. 49). Simply put, because people are not accustomed to seeing women in leadership roles, when they do see a woman in a leadership role, they feel negatively about them because they are not the norm.

Role Congruity Theory

Eagly and Karau (2002) explained this duality regarding perceptions of women leaders as role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. They postulated “that perceived congruity between the female gender role and leadership roles leads to two forms of prejudice: (a) perceiving women less favorably than men as potential occupants of leadership roles and (b) evaluating behavior that fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role less favorably when it is enacted by a woman” (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 573). The authors went on to discuss the sources of these two forms of prejudice. First the authors stated, “because social roles are socially shared expectations that apply to persons who occupy a certain social position or are members of a particular social category, gender roles are consensual beliefs about the attributes of women and men” (p. 574). These social and gender roles often lead to gender stereotypes, which explains why
people likely view women as leaders less than men. Valian (1999) explains this situation as a result of gender schemas:

Gender schemas are hypotheses about what it means to be male or female, hypotheses that we all share, male and female alike. Schemas assign different psychological traits to males and females. We think of males as capable of independent action, as oriented to the task at hand, and as doing things for a reason. We think of females as nurturant, expressive, and behaving communally. In brief: men act; women feel and express their feelings (p. 1044-45).

The “traditional woman” gender schema, which mandates women exhibit “communal” traits, such as nurturance, sympathy, and kindness, conflicts with those traits we expect of leaders, such as assertiveness, control, ambition, and decisiveness. The latter traits are considered “agentic” and are associated with men. This type of ideology has led our society to believe that women should only fill positions or roles that draw out or accentuate their “communal traits.” Most often such positions do not include leadership duties. Eagly and Karau (2002) explained that “the activation of beliefs about women and men by gender-related cues thus influences people to perceive women as communal but not very agentic and men as agentic but not very communal” (p. 575).

Eagly and Karau (2002) discussed the source of prejudice that leads female leaders to receive less favorable evaluations than male leaders:

Prejudice toward female leaders and potential leaders takes two forms: (a) less favorable evaluation of women’s (than men’s) potential for leadership because leadership ability is more stereotypical of men than
women and (b) less favorable evaluation of actual leadership behavior of women than men because such behavior is perceived as less desirable in women than men (p. 576).

This is explained by the fact that “because women who are effective leaders tend to violate standards for their gender when they manifest male-stereotypical, agentic attributes and fail to manifest female-stereotypical, communal attributes, they may be unfavorably evaluated for their gender role violation, at least by those who endorse traditional gender roles” (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 575).

Valian (1999) stated that the main reason there is a lack of women in high management positions is due to the fact that we normally overrate men and underrate women. This is because we are influenced by the biased perceptions we hold of men and women when we are selecting who we believe will be an effective leader. Eagly and Karau (2002) concluded that: “In general, prejudice toward female leaders follows from the congruity that many people perceive between the characteristics of women and the requirements of leader roles” (p. 574). The role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders aids the current study by offering possible explanations why women have not been viewed as leaders in the past and why they may or may not be viewed as leaders today. I hope to discover how and if people today hold traditional views about gender; specifically, if they think men are associated with leadership and women are not.

Because leadership positions are held in such high esteem in our society, it is difficult to become a leader. Thus, one crucial element of the process of becoming a leader is having others view one as such (Porter & Geis, 1981). When stereotypical thinking such as “women can’t be leaders” is learned, “our brain continues to use this
previous knowledge, automatically, to interpret all evidence pertaining to women in terms of meanings other than leadership” (Porter & Geis, 1981, p. 43). The resulting unconscious bias, contends Rhodes (2003), “is a problem not only for the individual women who encounter leadership barriers, but also their employers, who are failing to take full advantage of the talent pool available” (p. 9). Thus, perceptions about women, and their ability to be or become leaders, have real and significant consequences in society.

Heuristics

Heuristics is the process of using general rules acquired through past experiences and observations to make an assumption about a situation or person (Chaiken, 1980). It has also been defined as “the study of how to find things out, the discipline, as it were, of discovery” (Abbott, 2004, p. 81). Bottom and Nord (2004) viewed heuristics as a general process of “attribute substitution” in which a target judgment is effortlessly and automatically made by substituting a simpler, natural judgment (p. 695).

Regarding the use of heuristics to form opinions about leadership, past research has found that nonverbal cues can influence whether or not we think a particular person possesses leadership qualities. For example, Gitter, Black, and Goldman (1975) examined voice, gestures, and facial expressions of an actor delivering a message in either “superior” or “subordinate” acting styles. They reported that subjects saw the “superior” delivery style as having the qualities most reported to relate to leadership; namely, boldness, strength, and dynamism. They also reported that:

Differences in judgment may be the result of nonverbal communication and suggested that nonverbal cues should be regarded as essential in
impression-formation...it has been shown that persons lacking information about the personality of target persons will tend to make judgments in accordance with the stereotype associated with the nonverbal cue (p. 465).

In other words, nonverbal cues serve as heuristics as we form our opinions of others as well as our opinions of ourselves. If no information is known about a person, we tend to stereotype him or her according to the nonverbal cues we see or hear. Heuristics are used on a daily basis by all individuals. Thus, when we encounter a situation or individual we have no information about, we will use what we do know, typically nonverbal cues, to help us come to a conclusion. We also rely on our past experiences with similar situations or individuals to help us.

Although most of the time we use heuristics as a tool to help us, they can also be used to harm us. According to Bless, Fiedler, and Strack (2004), heuristics can cause biased judgments when we base our heuristics on biased information or if other information influences the process. For example, if one were to pass a Caucasian male on the street who had a shaved head, one may come to the conclusion that the male is a skin-head. This information could be biased, based on the knowledge that not all individuals with shaved heads are skin-heads or by a previous encounter one may have had with a person with a shaved head. In other words, biased heuristics can lead to stereotyping, the “application of a fixed set of characteristics about a group or subgroup to an individual member of that group or subgroup in such a way that the uniqueness of the individual is ignored” (Wilson, 2005, p. 381). Stereotyping and biased heuristics are examined in the current study in relation to biased judgments individuals make regarding
leadership and women. This study examines peoples' perception of gender and leadership, and uses heuristics and stereotyping to explain why individuals might view only men as leaders or as more effective leaders than women.

In summary, heuristics aid us in figuring out things we have little or no information about. For this study, heuristics are employed by subjects as they try to decide who the leader of a group is. In order to make a decision subjects will need to use their beliefs and past experiences to make a choice of leader. Individuals do not use heuristics alone to make assumptions; they also use nonverbal cues. This study will evaluate subjects' choice of leader by their use of heuristics, proxemics, and seating arrangement, a commonly used form of heuristics (Hickson, 1985; Knapp & Hall, 2002).

Proxemics

Proxemics serves as another nonverbal cue of leadership perceptions. It is “the use and perception of social and personal space” (Knapp & Hall, 2002, p. 8). Richmond and McCroskey (2004) defined it as “the study of the ways in which humans use and communicate with space and is a person’s use of space and territory is highly related to culture” (p. 119).

The use of space has been categorized into three basic themes: (1) individual, (2) small group and interpersonal relations, and (3) communities (Hickson, 1985). Here, I am concerned with small group and interpersonal relations use of space. In sum, proxemics offer insight into the relative power and status given to various groups in society. As Wood (1994) noted, the use of space serves as a primary means by which a culture designates who is important and who has privilege.
Proxemics has been studied in a variety of ways, ranging from how animals use space to how humans communicate with space. Such studies have examined the varying distance people use in certain situations, how animals and humans establish their territory, and how animals and humans use proxemics to establish dominance. As a broad concept explaining how people use space, proxemics, in terms of access and control of space, underscores an individual’s position in an organization (Harris, 2003). In other words, by selecting the appropriate space in an organization or small group, an individual can secure a position of power and control. If the securing of space is done in an effective manner, that individual will be seen as the leader of a given group, not only by him or herself, but also by the other members of that group. Although there are many different aspects of proxemics, I will mainly focus on small group ecology and seating arrangement here.

Small Group Ecology

Knapp and Hall (2002) defined small group ecology as “how people use and respond to spatial relationships in formal and informal group settings or the body of work on seating behavior and spatial arrangements in small groups” (p. 8). Small group ecology was defined by Sommer (1967) as the “systematic study of spatial arrangements in face-to-face groups” (p. 145). I use small group ecology in terms of seating arrangements and how those seating arrangements are used by others to determine positions of leadership.

Small group ecology serves as a foundation of most businesses and organizations. Communication in small groups keeps things running, and functions as subcultures helping members to create their own networks, channels, and degrees of effectiveness.
with their own rules, roles, and concepts required to understand organizations (Harris, 1993). The use of space in small groups helps to identify leaders as well as establish norms.

**Seating Arrangement**

The specific aspect of small group ecology that I look at in the current study is seating arrangement, or a person’s placement around an object or person. Patterson, Kelly, Kondracki, and Wulf (1979) noted that, “research on the social use of space suggests that spatial arrangements exert an important influence on the course of actions” (p. 180). Further, Knapp and Hall (2002) noted that:

Seating behavior is not generally accidental or random ... The particular position chosen in relation to other person or persons varies with the task at hand, the degree of relationship between the interactants, the personalities of the two parties, and the amount and kind of space available. We can summarize the findings about seating behavior and spatial positioning under the following categories: leadership, dominance, task, sex and acquaintance, and introversion-extraversion (p. 161).

Regarding my investigation of seating arrangement, I direct most of my attention to the categories of leadership and dominance. In the United States, leaders are expected to be found at the head or foot of the table (Knapp & Hall, 2002). Centrality of position signals dominance and status. For example, “leaders sit or stand in more central positions in a group, such as at the head of a table or wherever visual access to the most people is maximized” (Burgoon, Buller, & Woodall, 1996, p. 308).
I use a rectangular table to evaluate others’ perceptions of leadership and dominance within a small group. Researcher has found that the place where an individual chooses to sit can be an indicator of how much the person will participate in group discussion/activity as well as how much they will try to dominate the group (Michelini, Passalacqua, & Cusimano, 1976). Also, people select seats at end positions to show others their leadership or dominance (Knapp & Hall, 2002). People purposely choose certain seating arrangements based on relationships, tasks, and personalities (Stephens & Valentine, 1986). Knapp and Hall (2002) stated that individuals voted as group leaders most often seat themselves at the heads of rectangular tables. Burgoon et al. (1996) found “people display status, dominance, and power by owning, controlling, and accessing more, and qualitatively better, territory” (p. 306).

Researchers have documented the use of this heuristic, which holds that the person seated at the head of a (rectangular) table is or is most likely the leader of a group (Porter & Geis, 1981; Knapp & Hall, 2002). According to Hickson (1985), “…when specific impressions were desired in a group interaction around a table, the position taken helped indicate that impression” (p. 45). This could explain why those individuals wishing to give the impression of being leaders or holding power most often choose to sit at the head of a table. The position taken is also used by other members of the group to delineate which of the members of the group should be the leader. This point is illustrated by jury members as they select a jury foreman; most often the individual selected is seated at one of the heads of the table (Vargas, 1987).

I base my investigation on findings that document the significance that a person’s gender has compared to that person’s placement at a table. Specifically, I base my own
research here on the results of Porter and Geis' (1981), who found that men more likely are seen as leaders even if they are not shown at the “traditional” head-of-the-table leadership position.

**Seating Arrangement and Perceptions of Leadership**

Regarding the heuristic of seating arrangement, Knapp and Hall (2002) observe: “In the U.S. leaders are expected to be found at the head of the table” (p. 161). People assign significance to the head of the table, a space that serves as a heuristic in the absence of any other information about group members (Porter & Geis, 1981). Indeed, “the person at the head of the table is the authority figure in the group. This holds true regardless of whether the table in question is the one in the family dining room, or the one in the boardroom at corporate headquarters” (Porter & Geis, 1981, p. 40).

Individuals in visually central seats are perceived as leaders more often than individuals seated elsewhere. And no seat at a table is more visually central than the seat at the head. However, Hare and Bales (1963) contend that people who sit at the heads of the table have more dominant personalities, and that people more prone to be leaders choose to sit at the heads of tables. This implies that being perceived as a leader can be attributed not only to proxemics, but to personality characteristics as well. In this study, I will make use of table position as a nonverbal cue in determining the person who is already the leader of a group, rather than how leadership is developed.

Regarding seating arrangement, our culture specifies a certain space as being that of the leader of a group: “the small group ecology of North America in most formal and nonformal settings reserves the head position at a table for the leader or the most prestigious person” (Davenport, Brooker, & Munro, 1971, p. 751). According to
Akimoto, Sanbonmatsu, and Ho (2000), people are likely to change their position within a small group in order to alter other group members' impression of them. This means that if an individual does not feel that their perceived position within a group is not one of leadership, they may alter their positioning to change to one of leadership.

Pelligrini (1971) found that spatial position serves an important way others view one as a leader, and that one can attribute this to be an unconscious act on the perceivers' part. Because the seat at the head of a table is more visually central, we assume that the person who sits in that seat will be seen by all at the table, as will all of his or her actions. This gives the person sitting at the head of the table some perception of power. In this study, I focus on this unconscious aspect of perceptions of leadership by presenting subjects with a pictorial representation of implied leadership—with the head of the table serving as the implicit location of a group’s leader.

Proxemics and Gender: Nonverbal Leadership Cues

Porter and Geis' 1981 study on proxemics and sex as nonverbal leadership cues serves as the basis for the current inquiry. In their study, “explicit egalitarian ideologies notwithstanding, sex-role stereotypes were pitted against head-of-the-table effect as determinants of leadership attributions” (Porter & Geis, 1981, p. 45). They posited that subjects would not perceive a woman shown at the head a table in a group of both men and women as the leader of that group, but they would see a man in that position as the leader.

Porter and Geis (1981) created eight color photographic slides, each showing five of the stimulus persons seated around a rectangular table. In some of the slides, all men were seated around the table, others showed all women, and other slides showed mixed
groups of men and women seated around the table. In the mixed sex groups, some slides had a woman at the head while others had a male at the head. Subjects, college students, were asked to identify who they thought was the leader of the slides they were shown.

Porter and Geis (1981) found that every time a man was shown seated at the head of the table, whether it was a same-sex or mixed-sex group, subjects identified him as the leader of the group. On the other hand, when a woman was seated at the head of the table in a mixed-sex group, the subjects identified her as the leader less than half the time. They also found that subjects did not consider women seated at the head of the table as having or even exuding leadership qualities, unlike the men at the head of the table, who were seen as possessing and contributing leadership qualities to their groups. Porter and Geis (1981) concluded that discrimination against women as leaders existed among the college age population in their sample, and that it was unconscious and unintentional:

Furthermore, if sex discrimination operates unconsciously, as the results suggested, this would produce a self-fulfilling prophecy with serious consequences for the stereotyping of women in general, and women's own self-confidence in particular. The key assumption is that implicit stereotypes bias perceptions before they register in conscious awareness (Porter & Geis, 1981, p. 54).

I consider Porter and Geis' 1981 experiment significant communication research generally, and in leadership and gender studies in particular, because some twenty years later researchers continue to cite Porter and Geis' study in their discussions of evidence for gender bias against women leaders (Rhode, 2003; Valian, 1998, 1999). Although they also measured subjects' attitudes and personality attributes related to gender, it is
their finding regarding nonverbal cues—that is, the importance of sex versus proxemicons—of leadership that continues to receive attention.

For example, Valian cites Porter and Geis’ findings in both her 1998 book Why So Slow? and in her 1999 Brooklyn Law Review article, “Cognitive Bases for Gender Bias”. Wood (2003) cites Valian’s book in her text, Gendered Lives, in a call-out box describing the experiment itself. Rhode (2003), in The Difference ‘Difference’ Makes: Women and Leadership, cites Valian’s 1999 article when discussing how people are less likely to view women as leaders compared to men: “...when individuals see a man seated at the head of a table for a meeting, they typically assume that he is the leader; they do not make the same assumption about a woman” (Rhode, 2003, p. 9).

In 2004, Jackson and Engstrom conducted an experiment based on Porter and Geis (1981). Their study differed from Porter and Geis (1981) in that instead of using photographs of actual people, they used graphic representations of men and women placed around a rectangular table. They used internationally recognized symbols for male and female, based on the American with Disabilities Act requirements for wall signs. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of four stimulus conditions: (1) all female group with a female at the head of the table, (2) all male group with a male at the head of the table, (3) mixed male and female group with a female at the head and (4) mixed male and female group with a male at the head. Subjects were then asked to identify the leader of the group by circling their choice.

The results of Jackson and Engstrom’s (2004) study conflicted with the findings of Porter and Geis’ (1981): they found that when given a diagram with male and female people positioned around a rectangular table, 91.5% of subjects chose a person seated at
the head of the table as the leader of a group, regardless of that person’s sex. They also found significance when testing the subjects’ choice of leader with the different experimental conditions. Specifically, they found 29% of female subjects in the mixed-sex/male-head-of-table condition chose someone other than the male seated at the head of the table as the leader of the group. Seven out of eight of those female subjects chose a woman seated elsewhere around the table instead of the man at the head (Jackson & Engstrom, 2004). This information contradicts findings by Porter and Geis (1981), where a female seated at the head of a mixed-sex group was chosen as the leader less than half of the time. Jackson and Engstrom’s (2004) results lead one to presume that seating arrangement is more important than gender when selecting a leader. This leads me to believe that there is a possibility that American society may have become more egalitarian since Porter and Geis’ study in 1981.
CHAPTER 3

HYPOTHESES

In this study, I aim to determine whether the college age population, within North American culture, a segment of society that will most likely become leaders themselves—has changed its view of women as leaders since Porter and Geis conducted their experiment in 1981. This study will differ from the previous one done by Jackson and Engstrom (2004) in that this study will give subjects a choice between two persons placed at both end positions of a table. I will test to see if seating arrangement influences subjects’ choice of leader and whether the sex of the subject or sex of the subjects’ choice is related to beliefs centered around role congruity theory. Specifically, if a male and female were placed at both end positions of a rectangular table, I examine which would be chosen more often. The current study will assess if seating arrangements impact perceptions of leadership, as well as finding out what influences a subject’s choice of leader.

Based on previous findings by Porter and Geis (1981), I pose the following hypothesis:

H1: There will be no difference between all female, all male, and mixed-sex groups regarding subjects’ choice of leader based on seating arrangement: subjects will choose a person shown seated at the head, regardless of condition.
Secondly, I pose the following hypothesis based on the findings of Jackson and Engstrom's (2004) study:

H2: When given a choice between a man and woman shown seated at each head of a table, there will be no significant difference in how many times a man is selected as leader and how many times a woman is selected as leader.

Lastly, I pose the following hypothesis based on the study done by Jackson and Engstrom (2004), who found that the sex of the subject did not impact the subjects' choice of leader. To see if sex of the subjects influences their choice of leader, I pose the following hypothesis of no difference:

H3: The sex of the subject will have no bearing on their choice of leader.

I hope that by reevaluating the view that college-age individuals, a segment of the population that served as subjects in Porter and Geis' original 1981 research, hold in regard to women as leaders, my results might show a progression in our society's treatment and view of women as leaders. In addition, I hope my research adds to the current body of research in the areas of feminism and nonverbal communication.
CHAPTER 4

METHOD

Sample

The initial sample consisted of 260 students enrolled in the basic oral communication class at a large southwestern university during the spring 2005 semester. There were 45% (n = 118) males and 54% (n = 141) females. One subject did not indicate his/her sex. Fifty-six percent (n = 145) of the subjects indicated their race as Caucasian, 15% (n = 40) as Asian/Pacific Islander, 13% (n = 34) as Hispanic, 8% (n = 21) as African-Americans, and 8% (n = 20) as “other”. The mean age of the subjects was 20.5. Only 19 of the subjects were communication majors; the remaining were from a variety of majors. The breakdown of subjects by class standing was as follows: 40% (n = 103) were freshmen, 33% (n = 85) were sophomores, 20% (n = 51) were juniors and 8% (n = 21) were seniors. Of the original 260 questionnaires, 19 were unusable due to the stimulus area being either left blank or all the choices being circled. This brought the sample size down to 241 usable questionnaires. The new sample consisted of 44% (n = 105) males and 56% (n = 135) females. The mean number of subjects per condition was 60. The breakdown of subjects’ sex by condition is as follows: in the all female condition 50% (n = 27) were females and 50% (n = 27) were males, in the all male condition 52% (n = 34) were females and 48% (n = 32) were males, in the mixed male
left condition 66% (n = 37) were females and 34% (n = 19) were males, and in the mixed
female left condition 58% (n = 37) were females and 42% (n = 27) were males.

Design

I used a 3 x 2 x 2 factorial design. The independent variables consisted of: (1) the
composition of persons at both heads of the table (two males, two females, or mixed: one
male and one female), (2) the composition of the remaining persons around the table
(same-sex or mixed-sex), and (3) sex of the subject. The dependent variable was the
subjects' choice of leader of those persons seated around the table.

Stimulus

As did Jackson and Engstrom (2004), I used graphic representations of male and
female figures instead of actual people to avoid possible biases by the subjects due to
physical characteristics such as race, hair, and clothing. The symbols used were retrieved
from a clip-art program located in Microsoft Word XP and most closely resemble those
symbols found on the outside of public restrooms.

Subjects were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. In each condition the
seating arrangement was altered. Subjects were shown a diagram of: (1) all females
around a rectangular table with a female at both heads (Appendix A), (2) all males around
a rectangular table with a male at both heads (Appendix B), (3) both males and females
around a rectangular table with a male at the head on the left and a female at the head on
the right (Appendix C), and (4) both males and females around a rectangular table with a
female at the head on the left and a male at the head on the right (Appendix D).
Pretest

To test the accuracy of the graphic representations, I conducted a pretest with an upper division communication class. It consisted of 17 females and 9 males. Subjects were asked to view the two graphic representations and then indicate whether each was male or female. All 26 of the questionnaires were usable and there was 96% (25 out of 26) agreement on the female graphic representation being female and the male graphic representation being male. Due to the agreement as to the sex of the graphic representations, they were used as the stimulus for this study.

Procedure

In the main experiment, subjects were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. Each was then given a packet containing a letter of informed consent, signature page, stimulus, and questionnaire. Subjects were asked to read the letter of informed consent, sign the signature page, and then proceed to the stimulus. After viewing the stimulus, subjects were instructed to circle which of the persons represented in the diagram they perceived as the leader of the group. They then proceeded to the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of an item asking the subjects for the reason for their choice of leader to determine why subjects chose that particular person, and demographic items, such as age, sex, race, major, class standing, family income, and marital status (Appendix E).

Analysis

Data were submitted to chi-square analyses to test the hypotheses. For Hypothesis 1, I used the variables position of choice and condition. For Hypothesis 2, I used the variables sex of the choice and condition, but only for subjects in the mixed-sex
group conditions. For Hypothesis 3, I used sex of choice and sex of subject for subjects in
the mixed-sex group conditions.
CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

In order to see whether subjects chose a person shown at the lefthand or righthand head of the table unequally, I tested differences between the conditions. Results indicated that there was no significant difference ($X^2 = 10.542$, $df = 6$, $p = .104$). Thirty-four percent ($n = 83$) of subjects chose the person seated in the left head-of-the-table position and 36% ($n = 87$) chose the person seated in the right head-of-the-table position, leaving 30% ($n = 71$) choosing a person seated in a position other than either of the head-of-the-table positions.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that there would be no difference between experimental conditions regarding the position of subjects’ choice of leader. This was supported. Subjects chose people seated at the head-of-the-table position more than any other position (see Table 1). Of the 241 subjects, 71% ($n = 170$) chose a person seated at one of the head positions as the leader of the group. Close to 30% ($n = 71$) of subjects chose a person seated at a position other than the head-of-the-table position as the leader of the group. There was no significant difference ($X^2 = .579$, $df = 3$, $p = .901$) between the four conditions: in all four, subjects consistently chose someone seated at the head as the leader.
Hypothesis 2 predicted that when forced to make a choice between a man and a woman shown seated at each head of the table, there will be no significant difference in how many times a man is selected as leader and how many times a woman is selected as leader. This was not supported. Out of 120 subjects who saw a mixed-sex group seated around a table with a man and woman at the head positions, 58% (n = 70) chose a male as the leader of the group, while 42% (n = 50) chose a female as the leader of the group ($X^2 = 8.097$, df = 1, $p = .004$). Subjects chose a male as the leader of the group significantly more times than a woman (see Table 2).

The left and right head positions seemed to have an effect as well for subjects who viewed mixed-sex groups: When a female was shown on the left side-head position, she was chosen as leader 29.7% (n = 19). When a female was shown on the right-side head position, she was chosen 55.4% of the time. It seems subjects preferred a male leader in a group where a male was seated at the right-side head position, rather than a female seated at the left-side head position.

In the mixed-sex female left-side head position condition, there was great disparity in the number of times a male was chosen as leader and the number of times a female was chosen as leader. Upon further examination, it appears that the sex of the subject seemed to influence the subjects’ choice of leader. Female subjects within this condition chose males and females as being the leader of the group almost an equal number of times. Forty-nine percent (n = 18) of the time, female subjects chose the male seated in the right head position as the leader, and 51% (n = 19) of the time female subjects chose the female seated in the left-head position as the leader. Male subjects within this condition were not as egalitarian in their choice of leader. One hundred
percent (n = 27) of the time, males within this condition chose a male seated in the right-head position as the leader of the group instead of the female in the left-head position.

Similarly, in the mixed-sex male left-head position, male subjects chose a male seated in the left-head position 84% (n = 16) of the time as the leader and the female seated at the right-head position as the leader 15.8% (n = 3) of the time. Female subjects within this condition were not as egalitarian as their cohorts in the mixed-sex female left-head position condition. Seventy-six percent (n = 28) of the time, female subjects chose a female seated in the right-head position as the leader rather than the male seated on the left. Twenty-four percent (n = 9) of the time female subjects within this condition chose a male seated in the left-head position as the leader over the female on the right.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the sex of the subject will have no bearing on his or her choice of leader. This was not supported. When I compared male and female subjects' choice of leader in the mixed-sex conditions, their sex did seem to affect who they chose as the leader of the mixed-sex group. This was especially true for male subjects. Male subjects in the mixed-sex conditions chose a male as the leader of the group 93.5% (n = 43) and a female as the leader of the group 6.5% (n = 3) of the time.

On the other hand, female subjects chose a male as the leader of the group 36.5% (n = 27) of the time and chose a female as the leader 63.5% (n = 47) of the time (see Table 3). Chi-square analysis indicated a significant difference between male and female subjects' choice of leader ($X^2 = 37.908$, df = 1, $p < .001$).

In order to find out the reasons for subjects' choice of leader, they were each asked to write the reason for their choice of leader on the questionnaire. Responses were categorized according to three common themes: (1) seating arrangement, (2) gender, and
Out of the 241 usable surveys, I assigned 68% (n = 163) of the reasons given to the category of "seating arrangement" as the reason for choice of leader. The most common response in this group was that the person was seated at the head of the table and that is where leaders sit. There were a few comments from this group that dealt with seating arrangement but included added information. For example, five of the subjects made reference to the head of the table being the position they chose because that is where their father sits at the dinner table. A 20-year-old male subject stated, "Normally when in a conference room, the person of highest rank sits at the end of the table. Also in my house that is where my father sits." Another subject, a 19-year-old female wrote, "The person is at the end of the table and when I think of a leader, I pick my dad and that is where he sits at our dinner table." A 21-year-old male wrote, "That is my spot at the dinner table." For these subjects, it appears leadership is associated with family composition, especially in terms of seating at dinnertime.

Thirty percent (n = 71) of the subjects who wrote a response said they made their choice based on gender. The most common response among this group was that they chose a man as the leader because in most cases men are the leaders. One male subject, age 19, stated, "Without any additional information I assumed that in a male dominant society the leader would be a male at the head of the table." An 18-year-old female subject wrote, "The two people at the top of the box are apparently the leaders of the groups because they are on top, statistically men make more money and therefore the man was my choice." Another 19-year-old female subject stated, "She was standing alone and I chose the girl because I am a girl and want females to come out stronger in the world." A male subject, 20 years old, who chose a male leader, wrote, "Only chose
due to the fact I had to choose one. Otherwise I would have circled none of them because anyone at that table could have been the leader. My decision was based on current norm and tradition.” Another comment regarding gender came from a 23-year-old female subject: “She is at the head of the table and I chose the girl over the boy because most people do not think of women as leaders.” A male subject, 28 years old, wrote, “Because he is at the head of the table where everyone can see him, no specific reason to chose male other than I am a male.”

Only 2% (n = 7) of the subjects left the item blank or wrote they had no particular reason for choosing a particular leader. Some examples of these comments include, “No reason really, they all looked the same to me so I just circled the closest one to me,” from an 18-year-old female. Another female subject, age 22, simply put “N/A.” A 22-year-old male subject remarked, “Not sure?” Lastly, a 20-year-old male subject indicated “I have no reason. Maybe because he is the only one on the left side.”
CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to discover what role proxemics plays in a subjects' choice of leader and whether proxemics overrides sex as a reason people choose a particular person as the leader of a group, based on seating arrangement. I wanted to do this research for several reasons, one being to update the body of research that already exists in this area. Secondly, I wanted to learn what makes a subject see one person as a leader over another. Finally, I wanted to do this research to find out whether society has become more egalitarian since the research done by Porter and Geis (1981).

Past research on gender and leadership suggests that it is not the norm to see women in leadership positions. Valian (1998) pointed out that “men are the perceived norm against which females are measured” (p. 110). This view is supported by Wood (2003), who stated that society defines men and masculine patterns as the norm, which, in turn, leads society to view women and feminine styles as being abnormal and inferior to the male standard. This directly influences society’s view of women as leaders: Men are viewed as the norm when it comes to leadership positions; women do not measure up and are seen as inferior leaders.

Stivers (2002) noted that the image of a leader has developed within the context of white, professional men, with others who do not fit that mold being perceived as being unfit for leadership positions. This could explain why we often do not see women in high
leadership positions or why often women in high leadership positions are evaluated more harshly than their male counterparts. Regarding seating arrangement and leadership, past research indicates that in the United States the head positions of a rectangular table are seen as leadership positions. People assign significance to the head of the table, a space that serves as a heuristic in the absence of any other information about a group (Akimoto, Sanbonmatsu, & Ho, 2000; Davenport, Brooker, & Munro, 1971; Hare & Bales, 1963; Knapp & Hall, 2002; Pelligrini, 1971; Porter & Geis, 1981;).

Based on past research on gender, seating arrangement, and leadership, I posed several hypotheses. First, I predicted that regardless of the makeup of a group of people shown around a table, subjects will choose as the leader of the group a person seated at the end position (head) of a rectangular table. Next, I posed H2: when given a choice between a man and woman shown seated at each head of the table, there will be no significant difference in how many times a man is selected as leader and how many times a woman is selected as leader. Finally, I posed H3: the sex of the subjects will have no bearing on their choice of leader.

In order to test my hypotheses, I created four conditions where six figures were placed around a rectangular table. In each condition the seating arrangement of the male and female figures was altered. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. They were shown a diagram of either: (1) all females around a rectangular table with a female at both heads, (2) all males around a rectangular table with a male at both heads, (3) both males and females around a rectangular table with a male at the head on the left and a female at the head on the right, and (4) both males and females around a rectangular table with a female at the head on the left and a male at the head on the right.
Subjects were asked to circle the leader of the group and then answer some questions on the following questionnaire. I then used chi-square analyses to test my hypotheses.

When it comes to what had more of an influence on subjects’ choice of leader, seating arrangement or sex, the answer varies depending on the hypothesis being discussed. For Hypothesis 1, seating arrangement had more of an influence than sex on subjects’ choice of leader. However, for Hypothesis 2 and 3, sex clearly had more of an influence than seating arrangement. This is confirmed by the fact that subjects’ indicated the reason for their choice of leader being due to the sex of the person.

Results supported Hypothesis 1: Subjects chose people seated at the head of the table position as the leader 70.5% of the time and choice of head position was consistent for all four experimental conditions. These results support the commonly-held view the fact that in U.S. society the position at the head of a table is reserved for leaders, and past research that indicates seating arrangement as an important heuristic when determining leaders (Akimoto et al., 2000; Davenport et al., 1971; Hare & Bales, 1963; Knapp & Hall, 2002; and Pelligrini, 1971). Also, these results indicate that for Hypothesis 1, seating arrangement had more of an influence than sex, on the subjects choice of leader. The majority of subjects chose a leader seated in one of the head of the table positions.

When given a choice between a man and woman shown seated at each head of the table, I predicted that there would be no significant difference in how many times subjects selected a man as leader and how many times they selected a woman. This hypothesis was not supported by my findings: Subjects in the mixed-sex conditions did not choose men and women equally as leaders. A male was chosen as the leader of these
conditions 58.3% of the time, whereas a female was chosen as the leader 41.7% of the time.

These differences were most pronounced in the mixed-sex condition where a female was seated in the left-head position and a male was seated in the right-head position. Subjects within this condition chose the female on the left at the head as the leader 29.7% of the time, whereas the male on the right was chosen 70.3% of the time. Of these subjects, 37 were female and 27 were male. None of the 27 male subjects chose the female seated on the left as the leader of the group; instead, they all chose the male seated on the right. The majority of these male subjects indicated the reason for their choice was based on gender. Specifically, they wrote that they chose the man because in our society men are seen as leaders more than women. The female subjects in this condition chose a male in the right-head position as the leader 48.6% of the time and the female in the left-head position as the leader 51.4% of the time. Some of the female subjects within this condition indicated the reason they chose a female leader is because typically woman are not seen as leaders in our society and they should be.

Female subjects in the mixed-sex male left-head position conditions chose a female seated in the right-head position as the leader 75.7% of the time, while they chose the male in the left-head position 24.3% of the time. Some of these subjects, like some of the female subjects from the mixed-sex female left-head condition, indicated they chose the female over the male because women are not seen as leaders and should be. The male subjects within the mixed-sex male left-head condition chose a male seated in the left-head position as the leader 84.2% of the time and chose the female in the right-head position 15.8% of the time. The reason for their choice of the male as the leader was
similar to that of the male subjects from the other mixed-sex condition. They wrote that they chose the male because men are leaders. In summary, the male subjects in the mixed-sex group conditions favored a male leader; I believe this accounts for the findings regarding Hypothesis 2. These findings also indicate that for Hypothesis 2 sex had more influence on subjects than did seating arrangement. This was especially true for male subjects, who chose a man as the leader of the group overwhelmingly more often than they chose a woman.

Results for Hypothesis 2 contradict findings by Jackson and Engstrom (2004); they found that subjects chose men and women equally as leaders, but they did not offer subjects a choice between a man and woman. However, my findings do support those of Porter and Geis (1981), who found that men where chosen as leaders more often than women. In this study, it seems that when presented with a choice between a man or woman shown seated at the head of the table positions, subjects chose a man as leader. My findings indicate that the male standard in our society still holds, especially when it comes to positions of leadership. The results of the current study show that men are seen as leaders more than women among my college sample.

I find the results for the two mixed-sex conditions to be very interesting. I believe that this is an indication that the college age population still holds views of women as leaders similar to that of the college age population from Porter and Geis’ (1981) study. I believe a possible explanation for these findings could be that our society today is still sending the message that women will not be and are not as good as leaders as men. I feel this message is especially geared toward the men of our society, based on the fact that male subjects in the current study chose a female as the leader of a mixed-sex group only
three out of 43 times. Also, I believe women still perceive themselves as not being capable leaders when compared to men due to the fact that female subjects in this study, when given the choice between a male and female, chose the female as leader less than 50% of the time. I feel in order to better understand these findings, more research is needed in this particular area of gender and leadership to see if seating arrangement has more influence than gender.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the sex of the subject will have no bearing on their choice of leader. This hypothesis was not supported. When male and female subjects' choices of leader within the mixed-sex conditions were compared, I found that male subjects chose a male leader 93.5% of the time and female subjects chose a male leader 36.5% of the time. A female leader was chosen 6.5% of the time by male subjects and 63.5% of the time by female subjects. These findings support those of Porter and Geis (1981), where a man seated at the head of the table of a mixed-sex group was chosen as the leader significantly more often than a woman. In their study, women seated at the head of mixed-sex groups were only chosen as the leader less than half the time. Again these findings could be explained by the notion that U.S. society does not view women as the norm especially when it comes to positions of leadership. Thus, when given a choice between a male and female leader, subjects chose the male leader more often than not. Also, it is clear that for Hypothesis 3, sex had more influence on subjects' choice of leader than seating arrangement. This is verified by the finding that most of the male subjects chose a male leader.

When subjects were asked to provide a reason for their choice of leader, their answers seemed to fit into one of three groups: (1) seating arrangement, (2) gender, or (3)
no reason. The feedback from the subjects was quite interesting. Overwhelmingly, the majority of subjects indicated the reason for their choice of leader was based on seating arrangement; specifically, they chose a particular person as a leader because he or she was seated at the head of the table. This information further supports past research by Porter and Geis (1981), Jackson and Engstrom (2004), and others who found the head position of a table to be an indicator of leadership in the United States (Akimoto et al., 2000; Davenport et al., 1971; Hare & Bales, 1963; Knapp & Hall, 2002; and Pelligrini, 1971). It also adds support to Hypothesis 1, which predicted subjects would choose a person seated at the head of the table more than any other position.

Interestingly, 30% of subjects replied that they chose a leader based on the sex of the person they chose. Comments from this group did enlighten findings regarding Hypotheses 1 and 2. Most of the subjects in this group wrote that they chose a male leader because in our society men are typically seen as leaders more than women. This information supports the findings by Porter and Geis (1981). In their study, subjects chose a male seated at the head of a table the leader 100% of the time, whereas a female at the head of the table was selected less than half the time. These findings also contradict the results of Jackson and Engstrom’s (2004) study, where the sex of the subject as well as the sex of the choice had no bearing on selection.

In the current study, the stimulus offered subjects a choice of persons to choose from placed at both heads of a table. In both Jackson and Engstrom’s (2004) and Porter and Geis’ (1981) studies, there was no such choice. By having such a choice, subjects were made to choose between a man and woman leader in the mixed-sex group conditions. Subjects also were asked to explain or justify their choice of leader. Neither
of the other two studies mentioned above gave subjects the option of explaining their choice. The comments made by subjects offered insight into the current perception of women as leaders in the U.S.

Role Congruity Theory

The results of this study support the first part of Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruity theory, which states that men will be seen more favorably as possible leaders than women. Hypothesis 2 predicted that when given a choice between a man and a woman shown seated at each head of the table, there will be no significant difference in how many times subjects selected a man as leader and how many times they chose a woman as leader. This was not supported; subjects chose a man as the leader significantly more often than a woman. These results could be explained by Eagly and Karau's contention that prejudice against female leaders exists. As stated before, because men, and masculine traits, are seen as the norm in our society, it may have been difficult for some subjects to view a woman as a leader. It is probably hard for individuals to view men and women equally as leaders when our society still views one sex more favorably than the other.

Heuristics

The present study indicates that seating arrangement was one of the most important heuristics that subjects used in determining who they perceived as the leader. When asked to indicate their reason for why they chose as the leader, the majority of subjects wrote that they made their choice based on the person's placement around the table. Further, subjects stated that they made their choice because that individual was seated at the head of the table. These findings add to the already existing body of
research that states the head of the table position is seen as a position of leadership and power in American society (Knapp & Hall, 2002). Surprisingly, no subjects indicated that they did not have enough information to make such a choice. This leads me to believe that when determining leadership, at least for subjects of this study, heuristics played a vital role. Without having any additional information, subjects were able to make a choice of leader based primarily on the heuristics of seating arrangement and gender.

Limitations

The findings presented here are limited for several reasons. First, the use of undergraduate college students as subjects limits the generalizability of the findings because this population makes up a fraction of society as a whole. Also, individuals outside this population may hold entirely different views regarding gender, seating arrangement, and leadership. Another limitation is the use of subjects attending a southwestern university. College students as well as other individuals from other parts of the country may hold views contrary to the subjects used here.

Due to the use of graphic representations instead of actual people, the findings are limited. Like Jackson and Engstrom (2004), I used symbols in place of actual people to help focus my subjects’ attention to the variables of seating arrangement and gender. I believed that the use of the symbols would avoid biases on the part of subjects caused by clothing, appearance, attractiveness, and race of stimulus persons. However, by not using actual people, the findings are less realistic than actual scenarios where leadership is being determined, thus limiting the study’s external validity.

Lastly, the findings are limited due to the age and education level of subjects. The mean age of all participants in this study was 20.5. This age is relatively young and
not necessarily reflective of the age of most individuals working in business settings, where leadership is assigned. Older individuals may hold different views of gender, seating arrangement, and leadership.

Suggestions for Future Research

Along with using an older and broader segment of the population, I also suggest future researchers use an actual group of individuals or a photograph of actual individuals as the stimulus instead of graphic representations of men and women. I believe the use of actual people will make the study more realistic. It may also help subjects' evaluate what they would do if they were in the actual scenario. In addition, I suggest that this study be done not only in other areas of the United States, but also in other countries around the world. Doing so would help determine how U.S society is different and similar to other countries, when it comes to perceptions of women and leadership.

Another suggestion I have would be to expand the sample to include individuals from various professions. This would give insight into the mentality of certain fields when it comes to gender, seating arrangement, and leadership. According to Diversity Hotwire (2004), only 11% of corporate officers are women; it would be insightful to include people in the business world to determine if a bias is still perceived against women in business. Results might show which fields are the most and least egalitarian when it comes to women leaders.

In addition, I suggest future researchers try using a round instead of rectangular table to see who subjects will choose as the leader of a group when the heuristic of seating at the heads of the table are eliminated. Also, it may be insightful to measure the life experiences and family background of the subjects to see how these might influence
subjects' choice of leader. Another suggestion is to alter the stimulus by describing
different scenarios, such as a business meeting, faculty meeting, or student project, to see
if the subjects' choice is a reflection of what they see in real life or a reflection of who
they think should or could be a leader.

Finally, future researchers could include some element in the questionnaire that
would measure where notions of gender, seating arrangement, and leadership originate.
Also, such questions could determine how such messages are reinforced and by whom.
Including questions that measure where notions of gender, seating arrangement, and
leadership come from may help researchers discover what can be done to counter notions
that do not view women as leaders. Along with this, future researchers should include a
feminism scale to test subjects' attitudes to see if perspectives and values relate to their
choice of leader.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The current study aimed to update the body of knowledge on gender, seating arrangement, and perceptions of leadership. Results led to several main findings. First, it is apparent that seating arrangement, especially the head of the table position, is still an important heuristic when determining leadership. Next, as far as this study goes, when subjects are forced to choose between a man or woman leader, the majority of the time the man will be chosen over the woman. This seemed most pronounced when subjects saw a female seated in the left head of the table position and a male seated in the right head of the table position. It seems as though the sex of the subject does influence his/her choice of leader. This is most pronounced when dealing with male subjects who overwhelmingly choose male leaders. Additionally, when asked, subjects indicated they chose a man as the leader because that is what society dictates.

These findings help us understand society’s views of gender and leadership. It is evident that when dealing with seating arrangement and leadership, the position a person occupies around a rectangular table is an indicator to others of leadership. My findings show that seating arrangement for the most part is a more important cue into leadership than gender. However, gender is still a big factor in subjects’ choice of leader. For some subjects, gender led them to choose one person, whereas for others gender led them to not choose a person.
After evaluating the data, I conclude that I do not think society's views have changed since Porter and Geis (1981) first did their study. Unfortunately, men, masculine traits, and male leadership still seem to be the norm in U.S. society. Women are still perceived as being inferior to men when it comes to leadership roles.

Regarding Jackson and Engstrom’s (2004) study, my findings contradict theirs. Jackson and Engstrom (2004) found that seating arrangement was more important than sex when determining leadership. They also found that subjects chose male and female leaders equally when not forced to choose between a man and a woman seated at the heads. When given a choice between a man and a woman leader, this was not the case in the current study. This study found that men are seen as leaders more than women. Additionally, male subjects chose a male as the leader over a female more than 90% of the time.

So what does all of this mean in the grand scheme of things for women living in U.S. society today? I would like to say that women are moving quickly to being seen as equals to men, but this is not what my research shows. It seems that in the more than twenty years after Porter and Geis (1981) conducted their experiment, society still holds the same unegalitarian view of women. Now, just like then, women are not seen as equal to men. This is mostly likely due to the fact that society still holds the same ideologies as it did back then. I feel we are still a long way from gender equality. In order to achieve such equality, society must recognize that there is more than the male norm in our society. Men and women in our society need to assert that women are valuable assets to our society and are more than capable of being effective leaders.
REFERENCES


Table 1

Experimental Condition by Subjects' Choice of Leader

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects' Choice of Leader</th>
<th>Group Make-Up/Head of Table</th>
<th>Other Position</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed/Male</td>
<td>Mixed/Female</td>
<td>Female/Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Table</td>
<td>73.2% (41)</td>
<td>67.2% (43)</td>
<td>70.4% (38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Position</td>
<td>26.8% (15)</td>
<td>32.8% (21)</td>
<td>29.6% (16)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[
\chi^2 = .579, \text{ df} = 3, p = .901
\]
Table 2

Mixed-Sex Conditions

Group Composition/Head Positions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects' Choice of Leader</th>
<th>Mixed/Male Left</th>
<th>Mixed/Female Left</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female Right</td>
<td>Male Right</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44.6% (25)</td>
<td>70.3% (45)</td>
<td>58.3% (70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55.4% (31)</td>
<td>29.7% (19)</td>
<td>41.7% (50)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total                      | 100% (56)       | 100% (59)         | 100% (120)|

($x^2 = 8.097, df = 1, p < .05 = .004$)

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Table 3

Sex of Subject by Subjects’ Choice of Leader

Mixed-Sex Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects' Choice of Leader</th>
<th>Sex of Subject</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>93.5% (43)</td>
<td>63.5% (47)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6.5% (3)</td>
<td>36.5% (27)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100% (46)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

($\chi^2 = 37.908, df = 1, p < .001$)
APPENDIX A

STIMULUS FOR ALL- FEMALE GROUP CONDITION
APPENDIX B

STIMULUS FOR ALL-MALE GROUP CONDITION
APPENDIX C

STIMULUS FOR MIXED-SEX GROUP WITH FEMALE LEFT/MALE RIGHT
AT HEAD POSITIONS
APPENDIX D

STIMULUS FOR MIXED-SEX GROUP WITH MALE LEFT/FEMALE RIGHT
AT HEAD POSITIONS
APPENDIX E

QUESTIONNAIRE

1) Please indicate the reason for your choice: ___________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

2) What is your age? ________

3) What is your race? ________ Caucasian

________ African-American

________ Asian/Pacific Islander

________ Hispanic

________ Other, Please Indicate ________________________________

4) What is your sex? ________ Female

________ Male

5) What is your class standing? ________ Freshman

________ Sophomore

________ Junior

________ Senior

________ Graduate Student

6) What is your Major? ___________________________________________

7) What is the average income of your family?

________ Under $20,000 ________ $50,000 - 59,999 ________ $90,000 - 99,999

________ $20,000 - 29,999 ________ $60,000 - 69,999 ________ $100,000 or more

________ $30,000 - 39,999 ________ $70,000 - 79,999

________ $40,000 - 49,999 ________ $80,000 - 89,999

8) What is your current marital status? ________ Single

________ Married

________ Divorced/Separated

________ Cohabiting

Thank You for Your Participation!

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VITA

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