Gender makes the difference: The moderating role of leader gender on the relationship between leadership styles and subordinate performance

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\textbf{A B S T R A C T}

Using a predominantly male research and development (R&D) sample and a predominantly female customer service personnel sample, we investigated how authoritarian and benevolent leadership styles interact with leader gender to influence subordinate performance (i.e., task performance, citizenship behavior, and creativity). Our research extends role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) by adopting Kelley’s (1972a, 1972b) attribution principles to offer a more comprehensive framework for explaining how leader gender affects the impact of leadership styles on subordinate performance. Our results suggest that the negative relationship between authoritarian leadership and subordinate performance is stronger for female than for male leaders and that the positive relationship between benevolent leadership and subordinate performance is stronger for male than for female leaders. Accordingly, in addition to leaders engaging in gender-role congruent behaviors, a useful strategy is to adopt behaviors that are perceived as a positive deviation from their gender role.

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\textbf{Introduction}

Gender stereotypes affect people’s perceptions of appropriate male and female behavior (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001). Men are expected to display “agentic” characteristics, including assertion, control, competitiveness, and striving for achievement. In contrast, women are expected to demonstrate “communal” characteristics, such as individualized concern and sympathy (Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000). These gender stereotypes are salient in business, and the perception of incongruence between gender and leadership roles can have an unfavorable impact on leaders, especially on female leaders. According to role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), prejudice toward women in leadership positions is related to the degree of incongruence between female gender and leadership roles. Specifically, when female leaders demonstrate agentic leadership behaviors, they create incongruence between their female gender and leadership roles, which results in followers’ unfavorable perceptions (e.g., Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004; Lyness & Heilman, 2006).

Role congruity theory focuses on why female leaders become the targets of prejudice when they behave in an agentic manner (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The existing leadership and gender research, including role congruity theory, falls short, however, in explaining this phenomenon, and, thus, additional research is needed. Because role congruity theory does not focus on followers’ performance, it is not sufficient to explain how leader gender alters how leadership behaviors affect subordinate performance. To understand how leader gender alters the relationships between leadership behaviors and subordinate performance, it is necessary to compare the effects of the same leadership behaviors performed by both female leaders and male leaders (Eagly, 2007), which has not been addressed in previous research. Further, recent research (e.g., Anderson, Liewens, van Dam, & Born, 2006; Johnson, Murphy, Zewdie, & Rebeca, 2008) has suggested the need for a more comprehensive theoretical framework for gender and leadership research. In these studies, female leaders who adopted gender role-congruent leadership styles did not receive the most positive evaluations from their subordinates; instead, those who demonstrated favorable agentic behaviors, such as decisiveness, were particularly liked and valued. These findings suggest that role congruity theory cannot provide an adequate understanding of the relationship between gender and leadership roles.
Therefore, in the current research, we aim to address the remaining issues above. Kelley’s (1972a, 1972b) attribution principles have been widely used to understand the effects of stereotyping in social and organizational settings (e.g., Johnson et al., 2008; Jussim, 1986; Jussim, Coleman, & Lerch, 1987) and are proposed to supplement role congruity theory to provide a more comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the moderating role of leader gender on the relationship between leadership styles and subordinate performance. We examine the interaction between leadership styles based on authoritarian and benevolent leadership behaviors and gender roles on subordinate performance in Taiwan.

As the two most prevalent leadership styles in Chinese settings, authoritarian leadership (i.e., asserting strong discipline and authority) and benevolent leadership (i.e., caring about subordinates’ personal well-being; e.g., Farh & Cheng, 2000; Redding, 1990; Silin, 1976; Westwood & Chan, 1992) are especially suitable for investigating the relationship between leadership and gender roles. Authoritarian leadership is more consistent with male gender-stereotyped characteristics, whereas benevolent leadership is more congruent with those of female gender-stereotyped characteristics. We postulate that subordinates’ trust in leaders explains how leader gender and leadership styles jointly affect subordinate performance, including task performance, citizenship behavior, and creativity (Chen, Eberly, Chiang, Farh, & Cheng, in press).

Accordingly, we predict that female leaders’ authoritarian leadership, which is incongruent with the gender role expectations of females, has a stronger effect on subordinate performance than does male leaders’ authoritarian leadership. In contrast, male leaders’ benevolent leadership, which is incongruent with gender role expectations of males, has a stronger effect on subordinate performance than does female leaders’ benevolent leadership. Although both attribution principles and role congruity theory well explain the former prediction of an unfavorable deviation from gender role expectations, only attribution principles can explain the latter favorable deviation.

In sum, our research extends role congruity theory by adopting Kelley’s (1972a, 1972b) attribution principles to offer a more comprehensive framework for explaining how leader gender affects the impact of leadership styles on subordinate performance. Our paper extends previous literature that primarily examined differences in leadership styles based on authoritarian and benevolent leadership styles in Chinese settings (e.g., Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Engen, 2003) or differences in how male and female leaders are perceived and liked (e.g., Anderson et al., 2006; Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995; Johnson et al., 2008).

Theory and hypotheses

Attribution principles as a supplement to role congruity theory

Individuals have distinct preferences for men’s and women’s behavioral patterns, as related to stereotypes (Eagly et al., 2000; Thornton & Freedman, 1979). For example, agentic behavior is perceived as less desirable in women than in men (Eagly, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2003). Even when they are equally effective, female leaders who act agentically are usually perceived as less effective than their male colleagues (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Heilman et al., 2004; Lyness & Heilman, 2006). Role congruity theory aims to explain the prejudice toward female leaders (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly & Karau, 2002) and posits two types of biases against female leaders. The first bias is related to descriptive beliefs about females: Subordinates form less favorable evaluations of females’ potential for leadership because leadership ability is more stereotypical for males than for females. The second bias is related to prescriptive beliefs about females: Subordinates form less favorable evaluations toward females’ leadership behaviors when these behaviors are perceived as less desirable in females than in males.

Role congruity theory, however, does not explain the recent findings that leaders whose behaviors positively deviate from their gender roles (i.e., male leaders’ demonstrating sensitivity to emotions; female leaders’ showing decisiveness) receive better evaluations than those whose behaviors are congruent with their gender role expectations (Anderson et al., 2006; Johnson et al., 2008). To explain the effects of positive deviations from gender role expectations, we use Kelley’s attribution principles (Kelley, 1972a, 1972b) as a supplement to role congruity theory.

Central to attribution theory is that an action is more informative of an actor’s disposition when fewer reasons for the action exist and when these reasons are generally considered uncommon (Jones & Davis, 1965). Accordingly, Kelley (1972a) expected that behavior consistent with observers’ expectations is more likely to be attributed to situational constraints or to external stimuli, while behavior that departs from expectations says more about the actor. Kelley’s later work suggested that this proposition can be broken down into two mutually exclusive principles: the discounting principle and the augmentation principle (Kelley, 1972b; Kelley & Michela, 1980). The discounting principle predicts that an expected behavior under situational pressures is less likely to be attributed to an actor’s behavior–correspondent disposition than is the same behavior without situational constraints. The expected behavior is discounted as an indication of one’s identifying disposition because situational pressures may have caused it. The augmentation principle postulates that an unexpected behavior under situational pressures is more likely to be attributed to an actor’s behavior–correspondent disposition than is the same behavior without situational constraints. Occurring in the face of situational demands, the unexpected behavior is taken as revealing an actor’s disposition because it clearly indicates the actor’s response to situational pressures.

Applying the discounting and augmentation principles of attribution to gender and leadership phenomena, we argue that stereotyped gender norms serve as background knowledge that affects how subordinates compare their leaders’ leadership roles with stereotyped gender roles. Following the discounting principle, when leaders demonstrate leadership styles consistent with gender role expectations, their behavior is more likely to be attributed to gender-norm requirements rather than to purposeful and intentional acts. In contrast, the augmentation principle suggests that, when leaders display leadership styles that violate gender role expectations, their behaviors are more likely to be attributed to the leaders themselves. Accordingly, we predict that, for male leaders, their gender role-congruent behaviors (e.g., assertiveness, decisiveness, controlling tendencies) are more likely to be attributed to gender norms for males. In contrast, their behaviors that deviate from male gender roles (e.g., empathy, sympathy) are more likely to be attributed to their disposition or intentions. Similarly, we predict that, for female leaders, their gender role-congruent behaviors tend to be attributed to gender norms for females, whereas their agentic, male-like leadership styles tend to be attributed to their disposition or intentions. As a result, in the presence of alternative causes, for both male and female leaders, leadership styles that are congruent with gender role expectations should have weaker effects on subordinates. In contrast, in the absence of alternative causes, for both male and female leaders, leadership styles that are incongruent with gender role expectations should have stronger effects on subordinates.

Gender role expectations in the Chinese context

In the service of a hierarchical and stable social order, Confucian ethics put forth distinctively different roles for men and women (Ramusack & Sievers, 1999), and, in Chinese culture, gender role expectations are strong (Curtin, 1975; Entwistle, Henderson, Short,
Chinese females are expected to be passive, compliant, and feminine, whereas Chinese males are expected to be active, aggressive, and masculine. These gender role expectations are consistent with agentic and communal preferences for men’s and women’s behavior, respectively (Eagly et al., 2000; Thornton & Freedman, 1979). Consistent with Eagly et al., research has shown that these stereotypical gender norms are found consistently across different cultural settings (e.g., Chang, 1999; Zhou, 2006).

Authoritarian and benevolent leadership

Authoritarian and benevolent leadership are considered the predominant leadership styles in Chinese culture (Aycan, 2006; Chen et al., in press; Farh & Cheng, 2000; Farh, Liang, Chou, & Cheng, 2008). Authoritarian leadership refers to a leader’s asserting strong authority and control over subordinates and demanding unquestioned obedience. Leaders who are highly authoritarian apply strict discipline when supervising subordinates’ work assignments; they insist on adherence to high standards and reprimand subordinates for poor performance. They also exhibit high levels of self-confidence and act in a dignified manner as well as highlight their authority by making decisions independently and tightly guarding key information (Farh & Cheng, 2000; Farh et al., 2008).

Benevolent leadership involves individualized and holistic concern for subordinates’ personal and familial well-being (Chen et al., in press; Farh & Cheng, 2000). Benevolent leaders show concern for subordinates’ career development by providing job security, developmental feedback, coaching, and mentoring, and giving subordinates chances to correct mistakes. Leaders’ care also can be expressed in their treatment of subordinates as family members by helping them to overcome personal crises and by extending concern to subordinates’ family members (Farh et al., 2008; Wang & Cheng, 2010).

Although, in the Chinese context, both male and female leaders demonstrate authoritarian and benevolent leadership (Lin & Cheng, 2007), authoritarian leadership and agentic characteristics are more consistent with the Chinese social expectations for men, whereas benevolent leadership and communal behaviors are more consistent social expectations for females. Thus, we propose that, for male leaders, authoritarian leadership is a gender role-congruent leadership style, while benevolent leadership deviates from male gender role expectations. In contrast, we expect that, for female leaders, authoritarian leadership deviates from female gender role expectations, while benevolent leadership is congruent with female gender roles.

Effects of authoritarian and benevolent leadership

Research has argued that authoritarian and benevolent leadership styles have different effects on subordinate performance because these two leadership styles have different effects on subordinates’ trust in leaders (Chen et al., in press; Wu, Huang, Li, & Liu, 2012). Authoritarian leadership that emphasizes controlling and demanding behaviors tends to trigger subordinates’ negative emotions, such as fear and anger, and thereby decreases subordinates’ trust in leaders (Chen et al., in press; Farh, Cheng, Chou, & Chu, 2006). In contrast, benevolent leaders, who show concern about subordinates, engender positive emotions, which develop subordinates’ trust in leaders (Chen et al., in press).

Given the positive effects of trust in leaders on subordinate outcomes, researchers consistently have found benevolent leadership to be positively related to subordinate outcomes, such as task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and creativity (e.g., Chen et al., in press; Cheng, Huang, & Chou, 2002; Cheng, Hsieh, & Chou, 2002; Wang & Cheng, 2010). Further, although substantial research evidence has supported the negative relationship between authoritarian leadership and subordinates’ job attitudes (e.g., Farh et al., 2008), more recent research suggests that the relationship between authoritarian leadership and subordinate performance is likely to depend on the context. For example, authoritarian leadership may be particularly effective in eliciting subordinates’ effort in urgent situations (Niu, Wang, & Cheng, 2009).

Leader gender as a moderator

How does leader gender moderate the relationship between authoritarian leadership and subordinate performance? According to the augmentation principle (Kelley, 1972b), when female leaders adopt authoritarian leadership, subordinates are more inclined to attribute the authoritarian leadership style to their leaders’ disposition and to perceive that their female leaders are intentionally demonstrating authoritarian leadership behaviors to overcome situational constraints (i.e., the female gender-role stereotype). The lack of an alternative explanation (i.e., authoritarian leadership as a display of gender role-congruent behavior) strengthens the attribution to leaders’ identifying dispositions. In this situation, female leaders’ authoritarian leadership should have particularly strong effects, such as a substantial decrease in subordinates’ trust in the leaders (Chen et al., in press), which is a proximal antecedent for task performance, citizenship behavior, and creativity (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002).

In contrast, for male leaders, authoritarian leadership behaviors are congruent with expectations of their agentic role. According to the discounting principle (Kelley, 1972b), male leaders’ authoritarian leadership is less likely to be attributed to their dispositions or intentions because their authoritarian leadership can be attributed to their gender roles. Compared to the situation with authoritarian female leaders, subordinates who work with authoritarian male leaders are less likely to reduce their trust in their leaders and thereby lower their performance. Therefore, we propose a moderating effect for leader gender: The negative effects of authoritarian leadership on subordinate performance are stronger for female leaders than for male leaders.

Consistent with Kelley’s (1972a, 1972b) attribution principles, role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) also predicts that the negative effects of authoritarian leadership on subordinate performance are stronger for female leaders than for male leaders. According to this theory, prescriptive bias toward female leaders occurs when female leaders adopt authoritarian leadership, as it is incongruent with female leaders’ gender roles. The incongruence between authoritarian leadership and the female gender role may decrease subordinates’ trust in female leaders and, hence, decrease subordinates’ performance.

Hypothesis 1. Leader gender moderates the negative relationship between authoritarian leadership and subordinate performance such that this relationship is stronger for female leaders than for male leaders.

For the moderating effect of leader gender on the relationship between benevolent leadership and subordinate performance, we consider that role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) is insufficient to explain the more favorable evaluations that male leaders receive when they engage in benevolent leadership. Following the logic of descriptive bias in role congruity theory, subordinates should form less favorable evaluations of males’ benevolent leadership because it is more stereotypical of females. However, this is not the case, given the positive effects of benevolent leadership consistently found in predominantly male settings (Farh et al., 2008). Thus, the use of the prescriptive bias to understand the interaction between
benevolent leadership and leader gender also is problematic. Although benevolent leadership is less congruent with male gender roles, subordinates do not perceive male leaders’ benevolent leadership to be less desirable in males than in females. Thus, we again employ attribution principles to hypothesize the moderating role of leader gender in the relationship between benevolent leadership and subordinate performance.

According to Kelley’s augmentation principle (Kelley, 1972b), when male leaders demonstrate benevolent leadership behaviors, subordinates are more likely to attribute their male leaders’ benevolent behaviors to the male leaders’ disposition. This attribution occurs because these benevolent behaviors violate subordinates’ expectations of male gender stereotypes, causing these benevolent behaviors to appear uncommon and particularly meaningful. As a result, subordinates tend to perceive their male leaders’ benevolent leadership more favorably than they do their female leaders’. They develop higher trust in their male leaders, work harder, and perform more citizenship behaviors.

In contrast, the discounting principle (Kelley, 1972b) indicates that female leaders’ benevolent leadership is less likely to be attributed to female leaders’ disposition because such benevolent behaviors meet subordinates’ expectations toward female leaders’ gender stereotypes. Their benevolent leadership is thus considered common and less meaningful to subordinates. As a result, the positive effects of benevolent leadership on trust in leaders and subordinate performance are likely to be mitigated. Thus, we propose that the positive effects of benevolent leadership on subordinates’ performance are stronger for male leaders than for female leaders.

Hypothesis 2. Leader gender moderates the positive relationship between benevolent leadership and subordinate performance such that this relationship is stronger for male leaders than for female leaders.

Study 1

In this study, we focused on R&D engineers in Taiwanese high-tech companies. To fully capture the performance of R&D engineers, we chose four outcome variables: creativity, task performance, altruism toward colleagues, and conscientiousness. Creativity and task performance served as indicators for R&D engineers’ in-role performance. Creativity is defined as products, ideas, or procedures that are original and potentially useful to an organization (Amabile, 1988; Oldham & Cummings, 1996). Task performance refers to performance on core tasks defined and assigned by the organization. The coefficient alpha for this scale was .80.

Farh, Dobbins, & Cheng’s (1991) 3-item scale was used to measure altruism toward colleagues. Altruism has been used to access citizenship behavior (e.g., Grant & Dutton, forthcoming; Grant & Gino, 2010). The ratings for altruism use the same supervisor-rated scale as that for creativity and performance. Our items included: “willing to assist new colleagues in adjusting to the work environment,” “willing to help colleagues solve work-related problems,” “willing to cover work assignments for colleagues when needed,” and “willing to coordinate and communicate with colleagues.” The coefficient alpha for this scale was .80.

The conscientiousness scale (α = .89) also was adopted from Farh, Earley, and Lin (1997). The five items also were rated on the same supervisor-rated scale and included: “complies with company rules and procedures when nobody watches and no evidence can be traced,” “takes his/her job seriously and rarely makes mistakes,” “does not mind taking on new or challenging assignments,” “tries hard to self-study to increase the quality of work outputs,” and “often arrives early and starts to work immediately.”

Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, and Farh’s (2004) scale was used to test authoritarian leadership (α = .88) and benevolent leadership (α = .87). Subordinates reported the frequency of perceiving their supervisors’ authoritarian or benevolent behaviors using a 6-point scale that ranges from 1 (not at all) to 6 (frequently). Sample items for authoritarian leadership are: “My supervisor always has the last say in the meeting,” and “My supervisor scolds us when we cannot accomplish our tasks.” Sample items for benevolent leadership are: “Beyond my work relations, my supervisor expresses concern about my daily life,” and “My supervisor will help me when I’m experiencing an emergency.”

Methods

Sample and procedure. The sample for Study 1 is a group of R&D engineers and their direct supervisors in 15 electronic manufacturers in Taiwan, where authoritarianism and benevolence are valued (Farh & Cheng, 2000). We contacted human resources managers in each company to solicit their help in distributing matching questionnaires to randomly identified supervisors and to three subordinates who reported directly to them. Subordinates provided information on their demographics and their perceptions of their supervisors, and their corresponding supervisors rated their subordinates’ work outcomes as well as provided information on their own demographics. Each respondent received a stamped, self-addressed envelope by which to return the completed questionnaire to the authors.

A total of 265 completed and usable matching pairs resulted from a total of 300 dyads, for an overall response rate of 88%. The mean age of the subordinates (n = 265) was 36.71 years (SD = 5.31), with a mean company tenure of 4.30 years (SD = 4.01). Over half of those sampled were male (56%) and well-educated (83% held bachelor’s or higher degrees). Of the supervisors (n = 100), 65% were male and highly educated (89% held bachelor’s or higher degrees). The mean age for supervisors was 41.52 years (SD = 4.96), and their mean tenure was 10.13 years (SD = 6.21).

Measures. A Chinese version of scales for subordinate outcomes was created following Brislin’s (1986) translation and back-translation procedure. Because Chinese respondents tend to choose the midpoint on a Likert scale (Yang & Chiu, 1987), we removed the mid-point by converting the 5- or 7-point scale into a 6-point scale.

Oldham and Cummings’s (1996) scale was used to measure subordinates’ creativity (α = .94). The supervisor-rated scale, which was answered by 1 (very uncharacteristic) to 6, (very characteristic), included “develops ideas, methods, or products that are both totally unique and especially useful to the organization,” “uses existing information or materials to develop new ideas, methods, or products that are useful to the organization,” and “produces creative work outcomes that are both original and useful to the organization.”

Farh, Dobbins, & Cheng’s (1991) 3-item scale was used to measure task performance (α = .91). The scale, which was answered by 1 (very uncharacteristic) to 6 (very characteristic), included the following supervisor-rated items: “works efficiently,” “completes assigned tasks on time,” and “produces accurate, error-free work outcomes.”

We used Farh, Earley, and Lin’s (1997) four-item altruism scale to measure altruism toward colleagues. Altruism has been used to access citizenship behavior (e.g., Grant & Dutton, forthcoming; Grant & Gino, 2010). The ratings for altruism use the same supervisor-rated scale as that for creativity and performance. Our items included: “willing to assist new colleagues in adjusting to the work environment,” “willing to help colleagues solve work-related problems,” “willing to cover work assignments for colleagues when needed,” and “willing to coordinate and communicate with colleagues.” The coefficient alpha for this scale was .80.

The conscientiousness scale (α = .89) also was adopted from Farh, Earley, and Lin (1997). The five items also were rated on the same supervisor-rated scale and included: “complies with company rules and procedures when nobody watches and no evidence can be traced,” “takes his/her job seriously and rarely makes mistakes,” “does not mind taking on new or challenging assignments,” “tries hard to self-study to increase the quality of work outputs,” and “often arrives early and starts to work immediately.”

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Control variables. Previous studies have identified a gender bias in evaluating males’ and females’ behaviors (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Heilman et al., 2004; Lyness & Heilman, 2006). That is, the same behavior enacted by males and females can be viewed differently by raters of different sexes. Additionally, a previous study (Lin & Cheng, 2007) found that varying gender combinations of leaders and subordinates may affect how subordinates perceive their leaders’ authoritarian and benevolent leadership. Therefore,
we entered the leader's gender, the subordinate's gender (both dummy-coded as 0 for female and 1 for male), and the interaction term of the former two dummy variables (1 for the male-male combination and 0 for other gender combinations) into regression models before testing hypothesized effects.

Further, because two-thirds of the sampled supervisors were male, our sample reflected a predominantly male leadership context, and it is possible that female leaders act differently because they are not in the majority group. To clarify whether the source of observed effects was gender, we controlled for percentages of female leaders within each firm (0–80%, average = 29%). Additionally, the collecting of subordinate outcomes from supervisors may introduce potential confounders that contaminate the main effect of authoritarian/benevolent leadership. For example, subordinates who have long-term relationships with their supervisors may see greater benevolence. Therefore, we also controlled for the length of a supervisor–subordinate relationship (in years).

Analytic strategy. Our data revealed a nested structure (i.e., on average, 2.65 subordinates under one supervisor). To control for the nesting effect, we adopted hierarchical linear modeling (HLM). Specifically, authoritarian and benevolent leadership styles were operationalized as the mean score of followers under the same leader (means were group centered; cf. Enders & Tofghi, 2007). In the multilevel model, authoritarian leadership, benevolent leadership, and leader gender were entered as group-level variables, while subordinate outcomes were entered as individual-level variables.

We followed Bliese’s (2000) recommendation to justify the aggregation of individual perceptions of leadership to the unit level of analysis. We first assessed within-group agreement using the total ICC statistic. For authoritarian leadership, the range of each group’s ICC was .78–.91, and the mean ICC was .84. For benevolent leadership, the range of each group’s ICC was .84–.98, and the mean ICC was .92. These statistics suggested sufficient within-group agreement for both authoritarian and benevolent leadership. Second, we computed ICC1 and ICC2 as well as performed one-way ANOVA tests to assess the proportion of between-group variance. For both authoritarian and benevolent leadership, the between-group variance was satisfactory (authoritarian leadership: ICC1 = .24, ICC2 = .78, F = 3.01, p < .01; benevolent leadership: ICC1 = .28, ICC2 = .85, F = 5.23, p < .01). These results provided statistical justification for our aggregation of authoritarian and benevolent leadership to the unit level.

Results

Confirmatory factor analyses. Because the outcome variables in our study were conceptually related and derived from the same source (i.e., supervisor survey), we performed a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) to verify the distinctiveness of our constructs before formally testing hypotheses. Analyses were conducted at the item level. A CFA of the four-factor baseline model yielded fit indices within an acceptable range $\chi^2 = 175.10, df = 84$, RMSEA = .062, CFI = .96, IFI = .96. These results were compared with those of two alternative models: Model 1, in which creativity and task performance were combined into one factor, and the other two factors from the same organizational citizenship behavior scale (Farh et al., 1997) were combined into another factor; and Model 2, in which all four factors were combined into one overall factor. As shown in the upper half of Table 1, significant chi-square differences and model fit indices indicated that both alternative models obtained a poorer fit than did the proposed baseline model.

Descriptive statistics. Means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables appear in Table 2. Correlational results indicate that authoritarian leadership was negatively related to creativity ($r = -.15, p < .05$) and task performance ($r = -.15, p < .05$) but unrelated to altruism toward colleagues ($r = -.01, n.s.$) and conscientiousness ($r = -.11, n.s.$). Benevolent leadership was positively related to all studied outcomes (creativity, $r = .23$; task performance, $r = .22$; altruism toward colleagues, $r = .23$; and conscientiousness, $r = .21, ps < .01$).

Authoritarian leadership × leader gender interaction. Table 3 presents the HLM results for each dependent variable. All independent variables were centered before being entered into regression models. Hypothesis 1 predicts that leader gender moderates the relationship between authoritarian leadership and subordinate outcomes (i.e., creativity, task performance, altruism toward colleagues, and conscientiousness in Study 1) such that female leaders’ authoritarian leadership would have a stronger negative effect on subordinates’ outcomes than that of male leaders’. Model 1 shows that the coefficient for the interactive effect between authoritarian leadership and leader gender on creativity was significantly positive after the control variables, the two leadership behaviors, and the moderator (leader gender) were entered in the regression equation. Similarly, as shown in Model 3, a significant, positive interactive effect of authoritarian leadership and leader gender on altruism toward colleagues was found. However, we did not find significant interactive effects of authoritarian leadership and leader gender on task performance and conscientiousness (see Models 2 and 4).

To further understand the interactive effects, we plotted them in Fig. 1, following Aiken and West’s (1991) suggestion. For creativity (Fig. 1a), the slope for the female leader group was significantly negative ($-44, p < .01$), whereas the slope for the male leader group decreased to a non-significant level ($-.09, n.s.$). For altruism toward colleagues (Fig. 1b), the sign of the slope for the female leader group was negative ($-17, n.s.$), whereas that for the male leader group became positive ($+.15, n.s.$). Although the patterns for altruism toward colleagues were not completely consistent with Hypothesis 1, we found that the negative effects of female leaders’ authoritarian leadership on subordinates’ creativity were stronger than that of male leaders’. This provided support for Hypothesis 1.

Benevolent leadership × leader gender interaction. Hypothesis 2 posits that leader gender moderates the relationship between benevolent leadership and subordinate performance such that male leaders’ benevolent leadership has a stronger, positive effect on subordinate performance than that of female leaders’. The HLM results in Table 3 show that the interactive effects of leader gender and benevolent leadership on all four dependent variables were in the predicted direction. The interactions were further plotted to examine whether the patterns of these interactive effects support Hypothesis 2.

Fig. 1c demonstrates the interaction effect of benevolent leadership and leader gender on creativity. The slope for the male leader group was positive and significant ($+.39, p < .01$), whereas the slope for the female leader group was not significant ($-.03, n.s.$). Fig. 1d demonstrates a similar interactive effect on task performance. The slope for the male leader group was strongly positive ($+.39, p < .01$), while the slope for the female leader group was not significant ($-.01, n.s.$). Fig. 1e shows the benevolent leadership × leader gender interactive effect on altruism toward colleagues. The slope for the male leader group was positive ($+.34, p < .05$), and the slope for the female leader group was not significant ($-.05, n.s.$). Finally, Fig. 1f depicts the moderating effect of leader gender on the relationship between benevolent leadership and conscientiousness. Again, only the slope for the male leader group was positive and significant ($+.41, p < .01$), while the slope for the female leader group was non-significant ($-.08, n.s.$). Together, these results provide strong support for Hypothesis 2 that male leaders’ benevolent leadership had stronger effects on subordinate performance than did female leaders’.
Table 1
Comparison of measurement models for outcome variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$\Delta\chi^2$</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>IFI</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study 1 (the R&amp;D engineer sample)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creativity, task performance, altruism, and conscientiousness</td>
<td>Null model: All indicators are independent</td>
<td>2394.90</td>
<td>105</td>
<td></td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.96</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Baseline model: Four factors</td>
<td>175.10</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.96</td>
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<td>Model 1: Two factors; creativity and task performance were combined into one factor, and the other two were combined into another factor</td>
<td>964.19</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>789.09$^{**}$</td>
<td>.194</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 2: One factor; all factors were combined into one factor</td>
<td>1558.64</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>1383.54$^{**}$</td>
<td>.250</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 2 (the customer service personnel sample)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task performance and conscientiousness</td>
<td>Null model: All indicators are independent</td>
<td>1605.00</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baseline model: Two factors</td>
<td>80.66</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1: One factor; both factors were combined into one factor</td>
<td>461.18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>380.52$^{**}$</td>
<td>.137</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. CFI: comparative fit index; IFI: incremental fit index; RMSEA: root mean square error of approximation.
$^{*}$ p < .05.
$^{**}$ p < .01.

Table 2
Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the variables in Study 1.

| Variables                                      | M     | SD    | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    | 6    | 7    | 8    | 9    |
|------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1. Creativity                                  | 3.87  | .81   | (.94)|     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| 2. Task performance                            | 4.53  | .74   | .51$^{**}$| (.91)|     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| 3. Altruism toward colleagues                  | 4.39  | .78   | .52$^{**}$| .53$^{**}$| (.80)|     |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| 4. Conscientiousness                           | 4.53  | .73   | .46$^{**}$| .55$^{**}$| .48$^{**}$| (.89)|     |      |      |      |      |      |
| 5. Authoritarian leadership                    | 2.87  | .79   | .15$^{**}$| .15$^{**}$|     | -.01 | -.11 |      |      |      |      |      |
| 6. Benevolent leadership                       | 3.90  | .72   | .23$^{**}$| .22$^{**}$| .23$^{**}$| .21$^{**}$| -.23$^{**}$| (.87)|     |      |      |      |
| 7. Leader’s gender (0 = female, 1 = male)     | 0.65  | .48   | .18$^{**}$| .12 | .12 | .19$^{**}$| -.15$^{**}$| .01  |      |      |      |      |
| 8. Subordinate’s gender (0 = female, 1 = male) | 0.56  | .50   | .12   | .02 | .08 | .07 | -.11 | .11  | .41$^{**}$|      |      |      |
| 9. % of female leaders within each firm        | 0.29  | .29   | .02   | -.13 | -.05 | -.07 | .01  | -.13 | -.38$^{**}$| -.33$^{**}$|      |      |
| 10. Length of relationship (years)             | 2.13  | 2.18  | .02   | .18$^{**}$| .16 | .10 | -.07 | .00  | .02 | -.02 | .00  |      |

Note. N = 261–265. Internal consistency reliabilities are in parentheses. Authoritarian leadership, benevolent leadership, leader’s gender, and the percentage of female leaders were assigned to each subordinate.
$^{*}$ p < .05.
$^{**}$ p < .01.

Table 3
Results for regression analyses in Study 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Model 1: Creativity</th>
<th>Model 2: Task performance</th>
<th>Model 3: Altruism toward colleagues</th>
<th>Model 4: Conscientiousness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>3.66$^{**}$</td>
<td>4.43$^{**}$</td>
<td>4.31$^{**}$</td>
<td>4.40$^{**}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinate’s gender (SG)</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader’s gender (LG)</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG × LG</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of female leaders</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>-.45$^{**}$</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of relationship (years)</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.05$^{**}$</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian leadership (AL)</td>
<td>-.44$^{**}$</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benevolent leadership (BL)</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL × LG</td>
<td>0.53$^{**}$</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BL × LG</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.40$^{**}$</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.33$^{**}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo $AR^2$ for the interactions</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo $R^2$ for the model</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\sigma^2$</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\tau_0$</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AL, BL, LG, and % of female leaders were unit variables while others individual variables.
$^{*}$ p < .05.
$^{**}$ p < .01.

Discussion

In Study 1, we found that the positive effect of benevolent leadership on subordinate performance becomes weaker for female leaders. In support of Kelley’s (1972b) discounting principle, these results suggest that female leaders’ benevolent behavior is more likely to be attributed to females’ stereotyped gender roles. In contrast, benevolent leadership had a stronger, positive effect on subordinate performance for male leaders. As the augmentation principle (Kelley, 1972b) predicts, the strengthened effect of benevolent leadership reveals that male leaders’ benevolent leadership is more likely to be considered intentional. Our results
suggest that both the descriptive and prescriptive biases proposed by role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) cannot offer valid predictions in regard to the moderating role of leader gender on the relationship between benevolent leadership and subordinate performance. Attribution principles (Kelley, 1972b), however, offer an adequate theoretical framework.

Our findings for Hypothesis 2 are particularly important because they indicate that both female and male leaders are subject to the comparison between leadership roles and their stereotyped gender roles. A study by Scott and Brown (2006) found that perceivers have difficulty with encoding leadership behaviors into their underlying prototypical leadership traits when the leadership behaviors imply an agentic trait but are performed by female leaders. Scott and Brown’s findings suggest that female leaders are subject to the comparison between leadership and gender roles, but they did not examine whether similar effects exist for male leaders. When we focused on male leaders, we found that their benevolent leadership had stronger positive effects on subordinate performance.
performance. Therefore, our findings, together with Scott and Brown’s (2006), could lead to the conclusion that it is natural for subordinates to focus on leadership behaviors in view of gender roles.

In contrast, for authoritarian leadership, although we found that authoritarian leadership and leader gender interact to affect subordinates’ creativity, we did not find a significant interactive effect of authoritarian leadership and leader gender on subordinates’ task performance. One possible explanation is that task performance serves as a basic, well-defined job requirement (Tsui et al., 1997) and thus is less likely to be influenced by an unfavorable reaction to the role-deviating quality of female leaders’ authoritarian leadership. In contrast, creativity is usually more difficult to clearly define, and thus it is more difficult to specify a “minimum” level of creativity that an employee has to produce.

We also found that neither males’ nor females’ authoritarian leadership had significant effects on altruism toward colleagues and conscientiousness. This result may suggest that the relationship between authoritarian leadership and organizational citizenship behavior may be much more complicated than we had expected. For example, Bolino (1999) argued that, in addition to being an authentic form of altruism, organizational citizenship behaviors also can come from subordinates’ wanting to maintain a positive self-image. Thus, we suspect that, although prior research constantly reported the negative effect of authoritarian leadership (e.g., Farh et al., 2008), subordinates under an authoritarian leader may engage in organizational citizenship behavior due to their desire to be good citizens in front of a powerful authoritarian leader. Future research should further divide organizational citizenship behaviors into sub-constructs based on motives as well as investigate how authoritarian leadership relates to these sub-constructs.

Moreover, our correlation results appear to indicate that female leaders are engaging in more authoritarian leadership than are male leaders and that there are no differences in benevolent leadership between female leaders and male leaders. One reasonable explanation is that, because perhaps when subordinates rated their leaders, the effects of attribution principles (i.e., discounting and augmentation) already had taken place. Thus, the correlations may indicate that the ratings for female leaders’ authoritarian leadership and those for male leaders’ benevolent leadership are inflated.

One important limitation of Study 1 is that our sample was predominantly male, although we did control the percentage of female leaders in each company. Given that an R&D engineer’s role is generally defined by masculine characteristics, a female leader’s behavior in this role may be very different from that seen in other neutral or less-masculine roles. Thus, we conducted Study 2 to reexamine our hypotheses in a predominantly female setting. We attempt to test whether the stronger effect of female leaders’ authoritarian leadership as well as those of male leader’s benevolent leadership, found in Study 1, were limited to the masculine nature of the sample.

Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 was to examine our hypotheses using a predominantly female sample. Given that leader gender is the proposed moderator, consistent findings between the two studies would support the generalizability of the hypothesized effects. Thus, we collected data from customer service units, which are predominantly female, in a large Taiwanese commercial bank. Customer service personnel are responsible for determining the appropriate financial products for customers’ needs and for selling these products either in person or over the phone. At the time of data collection, 74% of the customer service personnel and 67% of the unit supervisors were female.

Although we used four outcomes (i.e., creativity, task performance, altruism toward colleagues, and conscientiousness) to measure R&D engineers’ performance in Study 1, only task performance and conscientiousness were selected to assess customer service personnel’s work outcomes in Study 2. Creativity was dropped because the sampled bank did not require its customer service personnel to develop new products, ideas, or suggestions. Rather, these personnel members were asked to meet sales standards by following concrete work procedures and schedules. We also dropped altruism toward colleagues because each of the sampled customer service personnel provided service for distinct customers; they worked independently and seldom had task-related interaction with coworkers under the same supervisor.

Methods

Sample and procedure. The sample was comprised of customer service personnel and their immediate unit supervisors from a Taiwanese commercial bank. A human resources manager in the headquarters helped us contact the customer service unit in each of the 72 branches. One of the authors and two research assistants visited each branch and distributed matching questionnaires to the customer service unit supervisor and to four randomly selected subordinates in the unit. Completed surveys were returned to the author onsite.

We dropped data from eight of the sampled unit supervisors due to the short length of the supervisor–subordinate relationship (less than six months). Among questionnaires from the remaining 64 units, we eventually received 223 completed and usable matching pairs (response rate = 87%). The mean age of the sampled subordinates (n = 223) was 34.39 years (SD = 5.89), with a mean company tenure of 9.21 years (SD = 5.62). The majority of the sample was female (77%) and well-educated (33% completed two-year college programs; 65% held bachelor’s or higher degrees). Most of the sampled supervisors (n = 64) also were female (66%) and highly educated (32% completed two-year college programs; 68% held bachelor’s or higher degrees). The mean age for supervisors was 45.32 years (SD = 3.69), and their mean tenure was 20.06 years (SD = 4.61).

Measures. We assessed authoritarian leadership, benevolent leadership, task performance, and conscientiousness by the same scales used in Study 1. All scales had satisfactory internal consistency (authoritarian leadership: α = .88; benevolent leadership: α = .95; for task performance: α = .93; and conscientiousness: α = .85).

Control variables. Again, we entered the leader’s gender, the subordinate’s gender (both dummy-coded as 0 for female and 1 for male), and the interaction term of the former two dummy variables into regression models before testing the hypothesized effects to control for the supervisor–subordinate gender combination. In addition, we controlled for the length of a supervisor–subordinate relationship (in years). Finally, because respondents in this sample had relatively long company tenure and, as such, may have had more work experience and, thereby, better performance, we added company tenure as a control.

Analytic strategy. Similar to our R&D engineer sample in Study 1, in our customer service personnel sample, 3.48 subordinates, on average, reported to the same supervisor. Thus, we again used HLM to control for supervisor effects (i.e., authoritarian and benevolent leadership as well as leader gender were entered into regression models as group-level variables, while task performance and conscientiousness were treated as individual-level variables). Within-group agreements for both leadership constructs were computed. For authoritarian leadership, the range of each group's
Results

Confirmatory factor analyses. We first performed CFA to verify the distinctiveness of our outcomes (i.e., task performance and conscientiousness). Analyses were conducted at the item level. The two-factor baseline model yielded satisfactory fit indices ($\chi^2 = 80.66$, $df = 19$, RMSEA = .052, CFI = .96, IFI = .96). The above results were compared with an alternative model in which two factors were combined into one overall factor. As shown in the lower half of Table 1, the alternative model obtained a poorer fit than did the proposed model, which suggests that construct distinctiveness was obtained.

Descriptive statistics. Means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables in Study 2 appear in Table 4. Correlational results indicate that authoritarian leadership was negatively related to both outcomes (task performance: $r = -.24, p < .01$; conscientiousness: $r = -.37, p < .01$), while benevolent leadership was positively related to both outcomes (task performance: $r = .36, p < .01$; conscientiousness: $r = .41, p < .01$).

Authoritarian leadership × leader gender interaction. Table 5 presents the HLM results. As Hypothesis 1 predicts, leader gender moderates the relationship between authoritarian leadership and subordinate performance (i.e., task performance and conscientiousness) in Study 2 such that female leaders' authoritarian leadership had a stronger, negative effect on subordinates' task performance and conscientiousness than that of male leaders'. Model 1 shows that the coefficient for the authoritarian leadership × leader gender interaction on task performance was significantly positive. Again, interactive effects were plotted for male and female leaders (Aiken & West, 1991). For task performance (Fig. 2a), the slope for the female leader group was negative but not significant (−.16, n.s.), whereas the slope for the male leader group was positive (.28, $p < .05$). This pattern was consistent with Hypothesis 1, that female leaders' authoritarian leadership had a stronger negative effect on subordinates' task performance. In addition, as expected, the direction of the interactive effect of authoritarian leadership and leader gender on conscientiousness was positive (Table 5, Model 2). However, this effect did not reach significance due to its relatively large standard error. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 received only partial support.

Benevolent leadership × leader gender interaction. Hypothesis 2 posits that leader gender moderates the relationship between benevolent leadership and subordinate performance in such a way that male leaders' benevolent leadership has a stronger positive effect on subordinate performance than that of female leaders'. Model 1 in Table 5 shows a significant interactive effect of benevolent leadership and leader gender on task performance. As shown in Fig. 2b, the positive slope for the male leader group was higher (.62, $p < .01$) than that for the female leader group (.19, $p < .05$). Thus, our results provide support for Hypothesis 2, that male leaders' benevolent leadership had a stronger positive effect on subordinates' task performance than did female leaders'. However, as seen in Table 5 (Model 2), the interactive effect of benevolent leadership and leader gender on subordinates' conscientiousness was not significant due to the relatively large standard error.

Discussion

The results for Study 2 provided some support for Hypothesis 2, that the positive effect of benevolent leadership on subordinate performance is stronger for male than for female leaders. In contrast, female leaders' benevolent leadership had a weaker effect on subordinates' task performance than did male leaders'. However, unlike Study 1, which indicated that female leaders' benevolent leadership did not significantly relate to any of the subordinate outcomes, Study 2 showed that female leaders' benevolent leadership was positively associated with task performance. Consistent with Eagly et al.'s (1995) suggestion that female leaders are more effective in predominantly female settings, our findings indicate that female leaders in predominantly female settings are able to adopt behavior that is congruent with gender roles, such as benevolent leadership, to enhance subordinate performance. However, their benevolent leadership is not as effective as that of their male counterparts. It is thus likely that our hypothesis for the interaction between benevolent leadership and leader gender holds across both predominantly male and female settings, but the strength of it may vary across different settings. In predominantly male settings, the moderating effect of leader gender may become stronger so that female leaders' benevolent leadership has weaker (or even non-significant) effects. In predominantly female settings, the same moderating effect is weaker, and female leaders are much more able to utilize benevolent leadership. Future research is recommended to further explore the role of context.

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, our results suggest that female leaders' authoritarian leadership had a stronger negative effect on subordinates' task performance than did that of male leaders. Surprisingly, we obtained a positive relationship between authoritarian leadership and task performance for male leaders in the customer service setting. Our explanation is that, because male leaders' authoritarian leadership is congruent with gender role expectations for males, at least to some extent, subordinates attribute their male leaders' authoritarianism to the display of stereotyped gender roles.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Task performance</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>(.93)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Conscientiousness</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>(.85)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Authoritarian leadership</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>−.24 *</td>
<td>−.37 *</td>
<td>(.88)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Benevolent leadership</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>.36 *</td>
<td>.41 *</td>
<td>−.43 *</td>
<td>(.95)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Leader's gender (0 = female, 1 = male)</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Subordinate's gender (0 = female, 1 = male)</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>−.02</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>−.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Subordinate's tenure in the company (years)</td>
<td>9.21</td>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>.22 *</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>−.18</td>
<td>−.07</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>−.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Length of relationship (years)</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>−.05</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>−.06</td>
<td>−.01</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $N = 190–219$. Internal consistency reliabilities are in parentheses. Authoritarian leadership, benevolent leadership, and leader's gender were assigned to each subordinate.  
*p < .05.  
**p < .01.
When this attribution is strong, male leaders’ authoritarian leadership becomes legitimate. Because the job description for customer service personnel is relatively concrete and well-defined, we suspect that controlling but expectable supervision styles, such as male leaders’ authoritarian leadership, may have the potential to increase performance levels of employees in such settings.

**General discussion**

While gender and leadership phenomena have received much research attention, a careful examination that includes a comparison between leadership and gender roles for both male and female leaders is still rare. Using attribution principles (Kelley, 1972a, 1972b) to supplement the role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), our research demonstrated the moderating role of leader gender on the relationship between leadership styles and subordinate performance in two different settings (i.e., R&D engineers and customer service units). As expected, we found that the positive effects of benevolent leadership on subordinate performance were stronger for male than for female leaders. For two of the studied variables (i.e., creativity in Study 1 and task performance in Study 2), we also found that the negative effects of authoritarian leadership on subordinate performance were stronger for female than for male leaders.

Although our results demonstrate some generalizability across our Study 1 and Study 2 settings, nuanced differences existed between our findings, particularly for authoritarian leadership, in Study 1 and Study 2. In particular, the relationship between authoritarian leadership and subordinate performance differed between the two studies. Whereas the moderating effects of leader gender on the relationship between benevolent leadership and subordinate performance existed across both predominantly male and female settings, the moderating effects on the relationship between authoritarian leadership and subordinate performance are more complex. Our results echo previous findings that the positive relationships between benevolent leadership and subordinates’ work outcomes are relatively stable (Wang & Cheng, 2010), whereas the negative effects of authoritarian leadership on subordinate performance may be less stable and depend on the context (Farh et al., 2008; Niu et al., 2009). Future research is thus suggested to further examine the effects of authoritarian leadership.
on outcomes in different contexts as well as the possible mechanisms that explain the different effects of authoritarian leadership.

In addition, we also recommend that future research clarify under which conditions authoritarian leadership can have a positive effect on subordinates’ work outcomes. Across our two studies, authoritarian leadership had negative effects on only two (i.e., creativity in Study 1 and conscientiousness in Study 2) out of the six outcomes. When the moderating effects of leader gender were considered, only female leaders’ authoritarian leadership had a significant, negative effect on their subordinates’ creativity. Our findings thus suggest that, although prior research mainly concluded that authoritarian leadership is negatively related to subordinate performance (e.g., Farh et al., 2008), authoritarian leadership might have a positive impact on subordinate performance, as well, which has not yet been well explored.

Theoretical contributions

Our research suggests that the discounting and augmentation attribution principles (Kelley, 1972a, 1972b) provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between leadership and gender roles and supplement role congruity theory. According to our findings, male and female leaders’ authoritarian and benevolent leadership had different effects on subordinate performance. Thus, future researchers should be cautious about following prior research (e.g., Eagly, 2007; Eagly et al., 1995) that simply argues that male and female leaders are equally effective. Because no one can eradicate gender stereotyping (Deaux & LaFrance, 1998; Heilman, 2001), leader gender, as a natural background for subordinates’ perceptions of leadership behavior, can substantially alter the associations between leadership constructs and subordinates’ outcomes. In support of Kelley’s (1972a, 1972b) principles of attribution, our results suggest that, for both male and female leaders, leadership styles that are incongruent with gender role stereotypes have stronger effects, either positive or negative, on subordinate performance than do those in line with gender role expectations.

Based on our findings across two settings, the argument that female leaders should be particularly effective when they adopt gender-congruent leadership roles (Eagly, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2003) may not always be true. The significant interactive effects of benevolent leadership and leader gender on subordinate performance in both Studies 1 and 2 revealed that female leaders’ benevolent leadership, which is congruent with female gender-role prescriptions, has weaker effects on subordinate performance than does male leaders’, especially in predominantly male settings. We, therefore, call for a revision of the current views on gender and leadership by carefully considering this effect from an attribution perspective.

At a first glance, our results appear to send a pessimistic message for female leaders, whose authoritarian leadership behavior had stronger negative effects on two of the studied variables across the two studies and whose benevolent leadership had weaker positive effects on most of the studied subordinate outcomes. However, in this research, we considered only authoritarian and benevolent leadership, the two most prevalent leadership styles in Taiwanese organizations (Farh & Cheng, 2000). As future research examines a larger set of leadership behaviors, the true female advantage can be more clearly identified. For example, female leaders can be more effective than are their male counterparts when adopting “favorable” agentic behaviors, such as decisiveness and braveness (Anderson et al., 2006; Johnson et al., 2008). The same attribution principles used in our research predict that these favorable violations of gender stereotypes should generate stronger positive effects on subordinate performance than the same behaviors that male leaders adopt and that favorable departure of leader roles from gender roles may be a good thing for both male and female leaders. Thus, our attribution perspective of gender and leadership suggests that female leaders should find effective strategies by adopting leadership roles that favorably deviate from their gender roles. We encourage future researchers to probe this important direction.

In addition, our findings challenge the common view that “[female leaders] conforming to their gender role can produce a failure to meet the requirements of their leader role” (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001, p. 786). Consistent with our attribution argument, the significant interactive effects of authoritarian leadership and leader gender on creativity in Study 1, as well as similar effects on task performance in Study 2, to some extent, indicate that it may not be unfavorable for female leaders to devote themselves to conforming to stereotyped gender roles. More specifically, when female leaders were low in authoritarian leadership, subordinates’ outcomes were not significantly lower than for those under male leaders with similar levels of authoritarian leadership. Thus, female leaders’ conforming to non-agentic gender roles is not necessarily a disadvantage.

Finally, our findings are particularly meaningful to research on leadership in Chinese-influenced settings because the development of the authoritarian and benevolent leadership constructs is based primarily on observations of male leaders (e.g., Redding, 1990; Silin, 1976; Westwood & Chan, 1992). When identifying the moderating role of leader gender, future research should carefully distinguish between male and female leaders’ authoritarian and benevolent leadership. In this research, we demonstrated that adopting benevolent leadership is a useful strategy for male leaders, who still hold the majority of leadership positions in contemporary Chinese business settings. However, this is not the case for female leaders. Given that females are increasingly entering leadership roles in modern Chinese settings (Grant Thornton., 2007; Lin & Cheng, 2007), we need to investigate whether female leaders can achieve high performance via other leadership models instead of via the prevalent authoritarian or benevolent leadership model.

Limitations

The mediating role of subordinates’ trust in leaders in the relationship between authoritarian/benevolent leadership and subordinate outcomes is one of the primary tenets of the argument being proposed. However, we did not empirically test subordinates’ trust in either study. Incorporating subordinates’ trust into a research framework would help future researchers to better understand how gender-bias perceptions of authoritarian/benevolent leadership are related to subordinate outcomes.

Another limitation is that, given that attribution principles are a key theoretical mechanism of this research, we did not measure subordinates’ expectations or attributions. One recent study has suggested that subordinates’ attribution of their leaders’ behavior mediates the relationship between leaders’ emotional expression and subordinates’ responses (Schaubroeck & Shao, 2012). Future research should empirically test whether attribution mechanisms also moderate the relationship between leadership styles and subordinate responses. In particular, we recommend experimental designs that manipulate subordinates’ attribution of their leadership perceptions. Such designs can examine the role of subordinate attribution and offer meaningful replications of our findings.

In addition, caution should be exercised in regard to the different findings across our two studies. Although the general patterns of our results were consistent with proposed hypotheses, future research should simultaneously consider leader gender, contextual factors, and different outcomes to better understand the effects of authoritarian and benevolent leadership.

There were also several minor limitations. First, because the authoritarian and benevolent leadership constructs were...
developed primarily from interviews with and observations of male leaders (Farh & Cheng, 2000), the interactive effects found in our research might be a reflection of the fact that key female features might not have been included in the original definitions of the two leadership constructs. Hence, the observed effects in our research might be weaker for other gender bias-free leadership constructs. Second, although the cross-sectional design of this study did not compromise our examination of moderating effects, reverse causality is nevertheless a possibility (e.g., high levels of work outcomes lead to less authoritarian leadership or more benevolent leadership). Thus, researchers should apply a longitudinal design to control for reciprocal causality.

Third, the generalizability of our results for different cultures must be examined. For example, although Eastern cultures tend to have particularly strong expectations in regard to how males and females should behave, most Western societies, who do not have as strong an expectation, also prefer non-agentic women over agentic ones in leadership settings (Eagly, 2007). Future research should further clarify whether results similar to ours also are found in non-Chinese settings. Finally, recent research has revealed that, in Chinese-influenced settings, similarly, female leaders of- ten conform to an authoritarian leadership role (Lin & Cheng, 1991). In Chinese-influenced settings, similarly, female leaders often conform to an authoritarian leadership role (Lin & Cheng, 2002). Our results, however, suggest that doing so leads to an incongruity of leader and gender roles that activates unfavorable effects, such as a considerable decrease in subordinates’ creativity. This study also showed that female leaders’ benevolent leadership has a weaker positive effect on subordinate performance because their efforts to offer benevolence tend to be attributed to their gender roles rather than to their disposition or intention. Therefore, female leaders face a dilemma unimagined to male leaders: They should not violate stereotypical gender prescriptions (by demonstrating high levels of authoritarian leadership), but they also should not overly rely on gender-congruent leadership styles (such as benevolent leadership). Female leaders who treat subordinates as family members, help subordinates with personal crises or career development, or try to understand why subordinates do not perform well may not obtain expected levels of favorable subordinates’ outcomes because their “motherly” benevolence seems too ordinary and effortless. We suggest that female leaders, in addition to adopting benevolent leadership, may consider adopting some favorable agentic behaviors such as decisiveness and braveness (Anderson et al., 2006; Johnson et al., 2008), which may enhance their leadership effectiveness.

In contrast, our results indicate that male leaders’ authoritarian leadership has a less-detrimental effect and that their benevolent leadership is strongly related to creativity, task performance, altruism toward colleagues, and conscientiousness. When male leaders are considered to be benevolent leaders, the incongruity of leader and gender roles strengthens the association between benevolent leadership and subordinate performance. Based on our results, the strategy that male leaders should use to promote subordinate work outcomes deviates from stereotypical gender-role expectations. In the work domain, male leaders should provide subordinates with necessary coaching and mentoring, allow subordinates opportunities to correct mistakes, and show concern for subordinates’ career development. Beyond the work domain, they should create psychologically safe environments by assisting subordinates during personal crises, treating subordinates as family members, and showing holistic concern beyond professional relationships. Such efforts are more effective in encouraging subordinate performance than are the same efforts by female leaders.

**Conclusion**

Although recent research on gender and leadership has exam- ined the differences in females’ and males’ leadership styles (e.g., Eagly et al., 2003) as well as the prejudice that female leaders expe- rience (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Heilman et al., 2004; Lyness & Heilman, 2006), there is still an assumption that female leaders are as effective as their male counterparts when they adopt the same leadership styles. Our findings suggest that leader gender moderates the effects of authoritarian and benevolent leadership, the two relevant leadership styles in Chi- nese-influenced regions, on subordinate performance. Accordingly, adopting these two leadership styles may not be the best leader- ship strategy for female leaders. Thus, future leadership research should pay more attention to the relationship between leadership and gender roles to understand the female advantage in leadership asserted in existing literature and articles (Eagly & Carli, 2003). After all, females and males are different, and female leaders need to have an exclusive model of leadership rather than to use existing ones that were developed primarily for male leaders.

**Practical implications**

Women are still the minority of executives and managers in modern organizations. To compensate for their minority-related disadvantages, female leaders tend to act like male leaders (Ragins, 1991). In Chinese-influenced settings, similarly, female leaders of- ten conform to an authoritarian leadership role (Lin & Cheng, 2007). Our results, however, suggest that doing so leads to an incongruity of leader and gender roles that activates unfavorable effects, such as a considerable decrease in subordinates’ creativity. This study also showed that female leaders’ benevolent leadership has a weaker positive effect on subordinate performance because their efforts to offer benevolence tend to be attributed to their gender roles rather than to their disposition or intention. Therefore, female leaders face a dilemma unimagined to male leaders: They should not violate stereotypical gender prescriptions (by demonstrating high levels of authoritarian leadership), but they also should not overly rely on gender-congruent leadership styles (such as benevolent leadership). Female leaders who treat subordinates as family members, help subordinates with personal crises or career development, or try to understand why subordinates do not perform well may not obtain expected levels of favorable subordinates’ outcomes because their “motherly” benevolence seems too ordinary and effortless. We suggest that female leaders, in addition to adopting benevolent leadership, may consider adopting some favorable agentic behaviors such as decisiveness and braveness (Anderson et al., 2006; Johnson et al., 2008), which may enhance their leadership effectiveness.

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