

The Impact of Perceived Gender Stereotypes on Job Adaptation in a Workplace Context

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Abstract: As a focal topic in the realm of social cognition, the impact of gender stereotypes on various aspects of an individual's academics, career, and life has been validated by an increasing amount of research. The present study reviews related literature from 2000 to 2023 on the impacts of perceived gender stereotypes in the workplace on individual work performance, stress adaptation, workplace social interaction and cooperation, and career identity. This paper analyzes the effects of perceived gender stereotypes on individual work adaptation and summarizes the limitations and potential future directions of existing research. The study concluded that gender stereotypes' perceived impacts are more profound and predominantly harmful on female workers compared to male workers. Such effect can lead to poor job performance and high stress in women, causing them to be more focused on interpersonal relationships. The impacts on male workers are concentrated in some female-dominated and highly male-dominated occupations.

Keywords: perceived gender stereotypes, job adaptation, work environment, stress adaptation, career identity

1. Introduction

In recent years, gender stereotypes have gradually become a hot topic in social research. Gender stereotypes are fixed, concise and stereotyped views and definitions of male and female behavior, roles and characteristics in social culture. This perspective and definition have evolved into societal expectations and even demands on the roles and behaviors of men and women, particularly when individuals perceive these stereotypes, resulting in corresponding psychological reactions and experiences, ultimately impacting various aspects of society.

With the deepening of research related to the field of work, an increasing number of studies have found that perceived gender stereotypes can bring various effects in workplace scenarios. Some research focuses on the limitations of gender stereotypes on the specific abilities and roles of both sexes, which affect individuals' adaptability to work and the work environment. For instance, it has been affirmed that men's understanding, and assimilation of inflexible, masculine traits can intensify the harm to their empathy for others' emotional experiences and emotional adaptability [1]. This may be unfavorable for them in developing workplace relationships and due to the social roles

women undertake, working mothers who bear stronger implicit gender stereotypes may face more guilt and work-family conflicts [2].

In addition, people stereotype of specific occupations may interact with gender stereotypes, forming specific gender occupational stereotypes, which may affect individuals occupational identity. According to the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) introduced by Fiske and colleagues, individuals' stereotypical perceptions of specific groups can be categorized under two aspects: warmth and competence. Warmth represents the degree of closeness, kindness, and likeability to others, while competence represents the degree of independence, competitiveness, and respectability [3]. In Fiske's research, women have higher warmth levels but lack competence compared to men. At the occupational level, some occupations require higher competence, while others require higher warmth. Therefore, within the framework of gender impressions, women are expected to work in occupations with higher warmth requirements, while men are more suitable for so-called high-competence occupations. Under the condition of stereotype inconsistency, the activation of either traditional or non-traditional gender roles will lead to a decline in women's interest in male-dominated occupations [4]. On the other hand, stereotype consistency is not always positive. For example, research on positive stereotypes points out that positive stereotypes may cause a choking effect, which may affect individuals' performance [5]. A study of masculinity found that male recruits and male surgical apprentices who found themselves incompatible with male chauvinism showed a lower level of career identity [6]. In other words, some occupations requiring strict gender temperament will not only deter opposite gender individuals, but also affect the work adaptation of practitioners who match gender requirements.

In summary, the impact of perceived gender stereotypes on workplace performance and adaptation of both genders has been well documented in existing research. However, there is a lack of systematic integration and comparison of research findings at different levels. This article attempts to review and summarize the existing research on the influence of gender stereotypes on work adaptation in terms of work performance, stress adaptation, workplace social & cooperation ability and vocational identity. Furthermore, it points out the shortcomings of existing research and provides directional suggestions for future research.

2. Method

The current research carried out a thorough review of existing literature by scouring digital databases such as Web of Science, CNKI, ProQuest, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. This paper used the following search terms: Perceived gender stereotypes, work adaptation, work environment, work-family balance, career identity, work performance. The criteria for inclusion were studies written in English or Chinese between 2000 and 2023, investigating the influence of gender stereotypes on occupational adaptation within the workplace environment.

Two reviewers independently screened the title, abstract, and keywords of the retrieved studies for relevance, with disagreements resolved through discussion. The complete articles of studies that could potentially be relevant were obtained and assessed for their appropriateness. The final set of articles this paper chosen was based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria established in the search strategy.

The paper used a narrative synthesis approach to analyze the literature. Based on our analysis, the paper mainly identified four themes: the impact of gender stereotypes on work performance, stress adaptation, social contact & cooperation and vocational identity. Each theme was further analyzed for sub-themes. Data were extracted from each study using a standardized form, which included author, year, sample size, design, measures used, and key findings. The paper identified seventeen articles that meet the inclusion criteria and the majority of them were quantitative researches.

3. The Effect of Perceived Gender Stereotypes on Work Adaptation

There are multiple ways by which perceptions of gender stereotypes affect employees' job adaptation in a workplace context. Perceived gender stereotypes influence overall job adaptation by affecting work performance, adaptation to work-related stress, workplace social interactions and collaboration, and vocational identity. When individuals experience gender stereotypes in a workplace context, they have different psychological responses and experiences in the aforementioned aspects, resulting in varying levels of job adaptation.

3.1. Effect of Perceived Gender Stereotypes on Work Performance

The paper suggests that work performance can intuitively reflect an individual's job adaptability. Thus, it initially examines the effect of perceived gender stereotypes on the performance of the job. Based on role congruity theory, when individuals perceive gender stereotypes, they generate psychological reactions associated with personal traits that subsequently affect their job performance. Research shows that the stereotype of "girls being better at studying, boys being better at working" is already established in middle childhood, and female employees face stronger stereotype threats than male employees [7]. Compared to men, female employees face stronger stereotype threats. Von Hippel and his partners conducted an online survey of 410 women from various managerial levels, age groups, and tenures across Australian organizations to collect relevant demographic information and examine the threat of stereotypes on women in the workplace. Consequently, they found that female employees in male-dominated industries were more likely to feel the threat of gender stereotypes, which intensifies the identity separation between their women identities and their staff identities, lower their expectations of achieving career aspirations, and subsequently reduce the perseverance of female employees, making women less likely to accomplish their career goals [8].

Gender stereotype threats also affect women's entrepreneurial performance, especially in leadership situations. BarNir conducted two research surveys on a total of 164 college students in the United States, investigating the correlation between perceived gender stereotypes and aspirations and preferences in entrepreneurship. The research confirmed that the interference of gender stereotypes disrupted the self-efficacy of female entrepreneurs and reduced the positive impact of previous entrepreneurial experiences, adversely affecting women's entrepreneurial intentions, prompting them to choose more community-oriented rather than growth-oriented enterprises [9]. This may be due to the fact that people tend to evaluate female leaders more negatively under the influence of gender stereotypes, and entrepreneurs are first and foremost leaders; at the same time, female leaders are more cautious about opportunities under stereotype threats, which further affects their work performance [10].

3.2. Effect of Perceived Gender Stereotypes on Stress Adaptation

This paper considers that adaptation to job stress is an essential element in evaluating an individual's job adaptation. When individuals perceive the expectations and demands brought by gender stereotypes in the workplace, they face different pressures, which thereby affects their adaptation to job stress. Research shows that gender stereotype threats often increase the perceived stress of female employees through work-family conflicts [11]. Due to the existence of stereotyped social roles for women, there are social expectations for women to prioritize family more. Career women who internalize the belief of being a perfect mother often face greater pressure in balancing family and work, and their career aspirations will also be hindered. At the same time, perceived gender stereotypes can also induce other psychological risks. Feenstra and his team executed an internet survey which engaged 185 high-ranking professional women. They employed structural

equation modeling through maximum likelihood estimation to verify their hypotheses. The data showed an acceptable fit between negative workplace experiences triggered by perceived gender stereotypes and internalized power threat, further confirming that perceived gender stereotypes can strengthen internalized power threat and even trigger the danger of work burnout [12]. That is to say, internalized gender stereotypes and power threats will exacerbate the emotional exhaustion that female workers experience at work, and this fatigue will serve as a stress experience to reinforce the occupational glass ceiling that women experience.

However, contrary evidence has also been found in some studies. One study on negotiators found that women face stronger threats of incompetence and weakness negotiation stereotypes, but the pressure they perceive is less than that among men, even though men perceive this pressure as a positive factor in negotiation. The negative prediction of negotiation performance by stereotypes is only achieved through the moderation of centrality in social networks [13]. This result may be related to the unique role of stress in the negotiation field. Stress is more often seen as a promoter of performance, while low stress implies retreat.

3.3. Effect of Perceived Gender Stereotypes on Social Contact & Cooperation Behaviour

This article argues that workplace socialization and collaboration reflect the individual's level of adaptation to the collective in the workplace. Therefore, when gender stereotypes exhibited by the collective are perceived by the individual, it will cause different psychological reactions, thereby affecting the individual's level of job adaptation. Generally speaking, in the work environment, women are stereotypically regarded as more social, and men are seen as more proactive. In the framework of the stereotype content model, women are regarded as passionate but lacking in ability, thus forming a benevolent gender stereotype. Barreto and his colleagues requested that 241 Dutch female university students complete questionnaires detailing their self-perceptions after being exposed to the prevalence of benevolent or hostile sexism views. Additionally, they were asked to predict their level of cooperation under varying circumstances. The results of the study proved that under the stereotypes of mercy, female college students showed higher levels than hostile stereotypes of relationship-oriented self-concept and lower task-oriented self-concept, and under the condition of expected cooperation is easier to transfer leadership to male partners, show higher cooperation rather than leadership intention [14]. That is to say, women's internalization of benevolent stereotypes may enhance their focus on interpersonal relationships and adversely affect their leadership intentions.

The impact of perceived gender stereotypes on workplace cooperative behaviors is also manifested in hierarchical relationships. A study on high-ranking female police officers found the moderating role of gender identification in female cooperation [15]. The researchers collected the experiences of gender bias from 63 Dutch female police officers through the internet and measured it on a 7-point scale. They found that those with low gender identification were more likely to emphasize their masculine traits, alienate same-sex collaborators and exhibit "queen bee behavior", while those with high gender identification showed a higher motivation to support female subordinates.

3.4. Effect of Perceived Gender Stereotypes on Vocational Identity

This paper argue that vocational identification reflects an individual's perception of job adaptation, and workplace gender stereotypes will affect individual vocational identity by changing individual job expectations and requirements. Professional identification involves "whether I am suitable for this profession". Low vocational identification often results in lower job satisfaction and higher turnover intentions. Research confirms that negative gender-related workplace experiences will lead

to lower job satisfaction and higher exit intentions among high-powered women, among which the imposter feelings induced by perceived gender stereotypes and power instability are the mediating variables in this process [12].

The conflict between gender roles and occupational gender stereotypes is also an important factor. The impact of stereotype threat on vocational identification often presupposes role inconsistency. For example, in the academic field dominated by men, female scholars' occupational self-concepts are less suited to the stereotype of a successful scholar than men's, leading to lower work participation and vocational identification among women [16]. In the nursing industry, male nurses are perceived to have weaker emotional sensibilities and management capabilities, tend to maintain more emotional distance from patients, leading to a larger sense of insecurity towards the nursing occupation [17]. However, other studies have found that role consistency can also trigger problems with occupational identity. In an empirical study conducted by Peters et al., using a 5-point Likert scale survey on Marine Corps recruits and male surgical interns, it was found that male recruits and male surgical apprentices who perceived themselves as incongruent with machismo demonstrated lower identification with their respective occupations, and such a kind of disproportionation is associated with a psychological withdrawal after one year (in surgical apprentices) [6]. This means that highly gender-stereotyped occupations pose a stereotyped threat to practitioners of both genders.

4. Discussion

4.1. Limitation & Implication

This paper explores the impact of perceived gender stereotypes on individual job adaptation in the workplace, involving aspects such as job performance, stress adaptation, workplace socialization and cooperation, and career identity, and it sorts out existing research. The present study suggest that some limitations exit in the empirical research on perceived gender stereotypes.

Firstly, existing studies lack a systematic exploration of the internal connections between different variables related to job adaptation, such as whether the threat of gender stereotype impact on individual stress adaptation will further threaten job performance, and how gender stereotype threat affects career identity through job performance, etc. The complex logical relationships that may exist are not yet clear.

Furthermore, other important environmental variables that may moderate the relationship between perceived gender stereotypes and job adaptation, such as the gender-friendly nature of the work environment, organizational culture, and the gender composition of organizations, are less discussed in current research and await further exploration in subsequent studies.

Additionally, due to the weak position of women in terms of gender, empirical studies on perceived gender stereotypes pay more attention to women, focusing on the job adaptation of female employees and female workers in workplace scenarios. Research on men, however, mainly focuses on certain specific professions, such as negative performance in female-dominated professions such as nursing and education, while other studies are scattered and often use women as comparison subjects. But in reality, the impact of perceived stereotypes on male employees cannot be ignored, future research could further explore how men's perceived gender stereotypes impact areas of male concern, such as interpersonal connections, workplace socialization, and cooperation, within workplace scenarios.

4.2. Suggestion

Existing studies has confirmed the impact of perceived gender stereotypes on individuals' job adaptation. To alleviate the detrimental impacts of gender stereotypes and enhance individual

adaptability and sense of accomplishment in the workplace, collaborative proactive measures should be undertaken by both male and female employees, as well as employers and organizations.

Employees need to be aware of the potential gender stereotypes in the workplace, and take the initiative to reject traditional stereotypes when dealing with others, even if it takes up more cognitive resources. If people find themselves trapped in a gender stereotype, they should carefully examine which parts of the perception are true and which parts are biased by the stereotypes, and take action based on this analysis. For example, sharing this way of thinking with colleagues and supervisors proactively, making adjustments to your own mindset and behavior in the situation, etc.

For employers, it is their responsibility to create a non-stereotypical atmosphere in the workplace, for example, by encouraging experienced female employees to take on more responsibilities and providing more opportunities for advancement, so as to defuse the glass ceiling, the threat of stereotypes and self-denial in the workplace that they face.

Last but not least, some specific occupations need to reconsider the rationality for single-sex access mechanism. At an age when the gender division of labor is becoming stronger and women's strengths are being tapped, traditionally female-dominated or male-dominated occupations are also looking forward to the diversity of skills and genders.

5. Conclusion

The main conclusion that can be drawn from the combed literature is that gender stereotypes are entrenched social norms that have all kinds of impacts on everyone. In the workplace, the impact of these gender stereotypes is particularly prominent, affecting a range of aspects, including but not limited to employee performance, stress management skills, social interaction, cooperation, and professional identity, thereby adversely impacting employee job adaptation. Specifically, the impact of perceived gender stereotypes in female employees mainly stem from social expectations for them to exhibit warmth rather than male competence, which can easily lead to poor work performance, heightened stress, and greater focus on interpersonal relationships. The impact on male workers is relatively small and concentrated in certain feminized professions and highly masculinized professions, leading to problems with occupational identity and workplace interpersonal social interaction risks.

Therefore, acknowledging and reducing the impact of these gendered stereotypes is not only crucial for enhancing employee work adaptability, but also for advancing organizational development. The impact of these stereotypical views is primarily negative in the workplace. Therefore, understanding and actively guarding against these harmful preconceived notions is vital for the overall nourishment of the workplace, ultimately improving employee work adaptability and promoting the development of the entire organization.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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