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## The Functions of Role Models in the Leadership Orientation of Women

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The present study investigates the role models of high leadership-oriented individuals by asking whether such role models function as aspiration for women and as emulation for men. We also examine both within-gender differences and between-gender differences among leadership orientation groups in terms of their role models, such as the gender, identity, occupation, and personality of role models. Three hundred and seventy Japanese undergraduate students (Male=151, Female=219) were given a questionnaire on role models. The results show that regardless of gender, role models serve both as aspiration and emulation for leadership-oriented individuals. Between-gender differences were found in terms of the occupation and the frequency of contact with the role model. Within-gender differences were found in terms of the leadership experiences of the role model. Both within-gender and between-gender differences were found for the personalities of role models.

**Key words:** role model, leadership orientation, aspiration, emulation

Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of role models for women in choosing an occupation or specialization that is not in accordance with gender role expectation for women. Career-oriented women (Simpson & Simpson, 1961), women who were in predominantly male occupations (Almquist, 1974), and women in non-traditional majors (O'Donnell & Andersen, 1978) had more role models than non-career oriented women and traditional women. Role models were also found to be influential for women in becoming achievement-oriented (Alleger, 1975; Baruch, 1967; Hillman & Martell, 1986). If role models are important for the achievement orientation of women and their career orientation, there is no doubt that they are also an influential factor in leadership orientation, i.e., the aspiration towards taking leadership roles, leadership positions or leader-like positions. Leadership-oriented individuals

are individuals who have not yet achieved leadership positions, but nevertheless want to take leadership roles in both formal and informal groups.

According to Kemper (1968), role models demonstrate how something is done in a technical sense. Moreover, they possess skills and display techniques which the individual lacks. However, Almquist and Angrist (1971) pointed out that the function of role models goes further than providing a simple "how-to" technique as Kemper had defined. According to Almquist and Angrist (1971), role models can serve such purposes as setting norms and values, providing recognition and rewards for achievement, and orienting behaviors to a certain course. Although the results of Almquist and Angrist's study on career aspiration showed role models' influence on career-salient women, no clear indication of role model was presented beyond fundamental "how to" information.

Despite the lack of empirical evidence about the exact functions or influence of role models, it is highly likely that role models can serve as

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aspiration, particularly for women. Studies have indicated the scarcity of role models for women in leadership positions (e.g., Geis, Boston & Hoffman, 1985; Speizer, 1981). In contrast to women, men have little difficulty in finding role models. In many societies, male role models are found in higher management and supervisory positions. Moreover, men are tacitly portrayed as having higher status and authority in all media portrayals (cf., Geis, Boston & Hoffman, 1985). In fact, studies have indicated that many societies adorn men with higher status than women (cf., Glick & Fiske, 1999). This difference in status might lead to variations in influence of role model(s) on leadership-oriented women and men. That is to say, owing to the scarcity of role models for women, the very presence of a role model will be more likely to motivate them to choose a particular course. On the other hand, for men, the abundant supply of role models will be more likely to provide them with "how to" information than aspiration, because leadership positions or career positions are more or less established for men.

In a study by Tin Tin Htun and Yamamoto (1998), it was found that high leadership-oriented women had more role models than low leadership-oriented women. In addition, the study showed that the role models of high leadership-oriented women were people who were successful in the positions which they themselves intended to achieve in the future, whereas the role models of low leadership-oriented women were their friends. Furthermore, high leadership-oriented men were more likely to adopt a role model's behavior compared to low leadership-oriented men.

The patterns of these findings suggest that there might be between-gender differences in the need for a role model (i.e., the function of role models may be different between men and women). That is to say, role models of high leadership-oriented women are more likely to serve as an aspiration or a motivator, whereas role models of high leadership-oriented men are more likely to provide technical information (i.e., how to) to reach one's goal. In other words, the role models of women seem to act more as a motivator than the role models of men. Thus, in the present study, we intend to explore whether

there is a gender difference between leadership-oriented women and men regarding the functions of role models. That is, we examine whether the role models of high leadership-oriented women function more as *aspiration* to them, whereas the role models of high leadership-oriented men function more as *emulation*. *Aspiration* is defined as a motivation to be like a particular person whom one admires and idolize. *Emulation* is defined as copying or adopting the behavior or attitude of a role model.

In addition, the above-mentioned findings of Tin Tin Htun and Yamamoto (1998) indicate not only the importance of role models for high leadership-oriented individuals, but also within-gender differences regarding role models among high and low leadership-oriented women, as well as among high and low leadership-oriented men. In the same study (Tin Tin Htun & Yamamoto, 1998), greater within-gender differences than between-gender differences were observed with regard to motives associated with leadership orientation (i.e., achievement motive, power motive, status motive, and fear of success). Thus, we also intend to explore which aspects of role models could differentiate high leadership-oriented women from low leadership-oriented women. In order to have a better understanding of the leadership orientation of women, we also intend to explore between-gender differences regarding role models.

Hence, as the secondary aim of the present study, we intend to examine within-gender differences as well as between-gender differences among leadership orientation groups regarding role models (i.e., differences in terms of the gender of role model, their identity, occupation, and personality). Exploring various aspects of role models (e.g., gender, occupation, and personality) is expected to provide a better understanding of the significance of role models, as well as the reason(s) for choosing a particular person as role model.

## Method

### *Participants*

Three hundred and seventy (N=370) Japanese undergraduate students (Male=151, Female=219) participated on a voluntary basis.

**Measures**

We employed a questionnaire which contained the Leadership Orientation Scale with items on role models such as age, gender, who role models are, the occupation of role model, contact with the role model, the personality of the role model, the leadership experience of the role model, and the functions of the role model. The questionnaire was in Japanese. Respondents were instructed to choose one person they most wanted to be like and select the most suitable feature or characteristic that described the role model.

**Functions of a role model:**

In order to measure the functions of a role model, four items were employed: two items on the role model as aspiration and two items on the role model as emulation. The two items on aspiration were as follows: (1) He or she makes me believe that I can be like him or her, and (2) When I look at that person, I feel that I could make my dreams come true. The two items on emulation were as follows: (1) He or she exemplifies behavior, role, personality that should be learned, and (2) He or she shows what I would like to do in a specific way. The respondents were instructed to rate each item on a 5-point scale (1=Not at all true for me 5=Very much true for me). The items were formulated on the basis of definitions of the two concepts. Three graduate students were asked to judge whether the items represented the meanings aspirations and emulation. The items were rewritten and revised until their meaning was totally clear to the judges.

**Role models:**

The respondents had to choose one person as their role model from the following: (1) mother, (2) father, (3) friend, (4) relatives, (5) teacher, (6) senior, (7) public figures, (8) others. The choices listed here was modified from the previous research on role models (Tin Tin Htun & Yamamoto, 1998).

**Contact with the role model:**

The respondents were instructed to rate how often they met their role model on a 5-point scale (1=no personal contact to 5=have frequent personal contact).

**Occupation of the role model:**

The respondents were instructed to choose the occupation of their role model from the following: (1) occupational leader/high position leader, (2) professional, (3) student, (4) teacher, (5) entertainer/artist, public figure, (6) housewife, and (7) others. The choices were developed on the basis of the questionnaire used in the previous study of role models (Tin Tin Htun & Yamamoto, 1997).

**Leadership experience of the role model:**

The respondents were to answer whether their role model had taken the following leadership positions: (1) occupational leadership positions, (2) club president, (3) politician, (4) community leaders, (5) leader of friends and family, and (6) class leader. The respondents were instructed to choose one response from yes, no, don't know.

**Personality of the role model:**

Personality items were based on the results of interviews conducted with female undergraduate students (Tin Tin Htun, 1998) on the personality of female leaders. The items were modified to make them appropriate also for male role models. The items were concerned with agentic attributes (e.g., assertive, independent, clearly says what one thinks, like a leader), communal attributes (considerate, warm, gentle) and physical appearance (attractive, has presence, fashionable) of a role model. The respondents had to rate each personality trait on a 5-point scale (1=Not at all characteristic of the role model to 5=Very much characteristic of the role model).

**The Leadership Orientation Scale:**

The Leadership Orientation Scale (LOS) constructed by Tin Tin Htun (1995) was employed. This scale was based on the Directiveness Factor Scale (Lorr & More, 1980), the Miner Sentence Completion Scale (Miner, 1974), and related findings from the literature. The scale consists of nine items which measure an individual's preference for leadership behavior and leader-like positions, as well as the desire to become a leader. The items were rated on a 5-point scale (1=not at all true for me to 5=very much true for me). The highest score for the leadership orientation scale was 45 and the lowest was 9. Factor analysis showed only one factor as having a significant inclination toward leadership positions. The alpha

coefficient of the LOS is .89 and the test-retest reliability of the LOS is .63 ( $p < .01$ ). Conceptual validity was measured by finding correlations between leadership orientation, having experience of holding offices at school and university, taking a leadership role in interpersonal relationships (Tin Tin Htun & Yamamoto, 1997). It was found that LOS was significantly correlated with having experience of holding offices and taking interpersonal leadership.

## Results

In order to examine within-gender differences and between-gender differences in terms of leadership orientation, high, medium, and low leadership orientation groups were formed on the basis of the distribution of the leadership orientation scores. Based on 25 % of the leadership orientation scores that fell to each end of the distribution, high and low leadership orientation groups for men and women were formed. Low groups consisted of individuals who scored 18 or lower than 18. Medium groups consisted of individuals who scored higher than 18 and lower than or equal to 29. High groups consisted of individuals who scored above 29. The mean leadership orientation score for men was 25.28 ( $SD=7.94$ ); for women it was 22.83 ( $SD=7.58$ ).

A2 (gender)  $\times$  3 (level of leadership orientation) ANOVA was conducted to examine between-gender differences and within-gender differences regarding the leadership orientation score. Only a main effect of leadership orientation level was found,  $F(5, 364)=765.72$ ,  $p < .001$ . This indicates within-gender differences. This also means that the group formation based on the 25 % either end of the leadership orientation score distribution is credible. Table 1 presents the mean scores of leadership orientation for high, medium, and low leadership orientation groups in terms of gender.

### *Are there between-gender differences regarding the functions of role model between high leadership-oriented men and women?*

A2  $\times$  3 ANOVA of the role model's gender-responder's sex groups and leadership orientation groups was performed. Averaged total mean

scores of aspiration and emulation items were used in this ANOVA. Only a main effect of leadership orientation was observed both in role model as aspiration and role model as emulation,  $F(2, 364)=9.96$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $F(2, 364)=6.84$ ,  $p < .01$  respectively. Therefore, the results fail to support the hypothesis regarding between-gender differences as to the significance of a role model. Table 2 presents mean scores and standard deviations of emulation and aspiration for leadership orientation groups.

## *Other Characteristics of Role Models*

### *Gender of the role model*

In order to examine the relationship between the gender of role models and leadership orientation, chi-square analyses were performed separately for men and women. A 2 (gender of role model)  $\times$  3

Table 1 Mean Scores of Leadership Orientation for High, Medium, and Low Leadership Orientation Groups

Leadership Orientation Level	Male (n=151)	Female (n=219)
High	34.17 (3.73) (n=47)	33.62 (3.92) (n=39)
Medium	24.4 (3.1) (n=69)	24.32 (3.12) (n=114)
Low	14.49 (3.21) (n=35)	13.88 (3.42) (n=66)

Note. Standard deviations are presented in parentheses.

Table 2 Mean Scores for Functions of Role Models in terms of Gender and Leadership Orientation

	Male (n=149)	Female (n=219)
<b>Aspiration</b>		
HLO	7.26 (1.82)	7.05 (2.05)
MLO	6.45 (2.28)	6.4 (1.91)
LLO	5.48 (2.44)	6.03 (2.23)
<b>Emulation</b>		
HLO	8.3 (1.59)	8.1 (1.5)
MLO	7.54 (2.1)	7.66 (1.43)
LLO	6.89 (2.29)	7.59 (1.76)

Note. Standard deviations are presented in parentheses. HLO=High Leadership Orientation Group, MLO=Medium Leadership Orientation Group, LLO=Low Leadership Orientation Group

(levels of leadership orientation)  $\chi^2$  analysis was computed. No significant differences were observed among the leadership orientation groups regarding gender of role model. Chi-square analysis showed that the majority of men and women have same gender role models ( $\chi^2=108.86$ ,  $p<.01$ ) (Table 3).

#### **Role models**

Neither within nor between gender differences were found among the leadership orientation groups for both men and women. Regardless of leadership orientation, men mainly reported friends (21.5 %), fathers (15.4 %), and public figures (12.8 %) as their role models. As for women, friends (30 %), teachers (13.4 %), seniors (16.1 %), and public figures (15.2 %) were reported as their role models.

#### **Occupation of the role model**

For both men and women, no significant within-gender differences were observed among leadership orientation groups regarding the occupation of the role models. However, gender differences were observed between men and women regarding the occupations of the role models ( $\chi^2$  (6,372)=27.48,  $p<.01$ ). The occupations of the role models of women were found to be students (46.8 %), whereas only 28.8 % of the role models of men were students, with 21.6 %

occupational leaders or high position leaders (Table 4).

#### **Contact with the role model**

A2×3 ANOVA of gender and leadership-orientation levels for contact with the role model showed a main effect of gender ( $F$  (1,363)=7.84,  $p<.01$ ). Women were found to have greater contact with their role models than men. Table 4 shows mean scores for contact with the role model.

#### **Leadership experience of role model**

A3 (levels of leadership orientation)×3 (having leadership experience, no experience, don't know)  $\chi^2$  analysis was performed separately for men and women. Significant within-gender differences were found among women as well as men. The role models of high leadership-oriented women were found to have more leadership experience as occupational leaders (e.g., managers, teachers),  $\chi^2$  (4, N=218)=10.76,  $p<.05$ , club leaders,  $\chi^2$  (4, N=218)=9.98,  $p<.05$ , and community leaders,  $\chi^2$  (4, N=218)=10.92,  $p<.05$ , than the role models of low leadership-oriented women (see Table 5). For men, high leadership-oriented men were found to have role models who were in occupational leadership positions more than low leadership-oriented men,  $\chi^2$  (4, N=149)=11.78,  $df=4$ ,  $p<.05$ .

#### **Personality of the Role Model**

Factor analysis was performed for items concerning the personality of the role model. Three factors (eigen value above 1) were extracted by varimax rotation; expressiveness-warmth, instrumentality, and attractiveness. The expressiveness-warmth factor includes being sensitive to others, helping people who are in trouble, making good relationships with people, being pleasant, not blaming other people for their failure or weaknesses, being considerate, being reliable, taking great care in appearance, and being gentle. The instrumentality factor includes being dynamic, taking leadership roles, expressing one's opinion clearly, being decisive, being independent, being assertive, being persuasive, having presence, being humorous, and being intelligent. The attractiveness factor includes being smart (in physical or appearance wise), stylish, sexy, and attractive. Items that had less than a .40 factor loading were excluded.

Table 3 Role Model's Gender

Role Model's Gender	Male % (n=150)	Female % (n=219)
Male	88.7	66.2
Female	11.3	33.8

Table 4 Occupations of Role Models for Men and Women

Occupations of Role Models	Male (n=153)	Female (n=219)
Occupational Leader/ High Position Leader	21.6	8.3
Professional	8.5	3.2
Student	28.8	46.8
Teacher	11.1	14.4
Entertainer/Artist/ Public Figure	24.2	20.4
Housewife	0	4.2
Others	5.9	2.9

Table 5 Leadership Experience of Role Models for Women

	HLO % (n=39)	MLO % (n=114)	LLO % (n=65)
<b>Occupational leader</b>			
Yes	35.9	16.7	13.8
No	23.1	35.1	44.6
Don't know	41.0	48.2	41.6
<b>Club manager</b>			
Yes	46.2	22.8	23.1
No	15.4	30.7	33.8
Don't know	38.4	15.5	43.1
<b>Community leader</b>			
Yes	28.2	11.4	7.7
No	23.1	28.1	36.9
Don't know	48.7	60.5	55.4

Respondents were divided into four groups in terms of the gender of their role models and their own gender in order to explore the relationships between the respondent's gender-the gender of the role model and leadership orientation. Group (1) consisted of men who had male role models (n=133); group (2) consisted of men who had female role models (n=17); group (3) consisted of women who had male role models (n=74); and group (4) consisted of women who had female role models (n=145).

In order to predict the reason for choosing a particular person as a role model in relation to gender and leadership orientation, a 4(gender of role model-gender of respondent) $\times$ 3 (levels of leadership orientation) ANOVA was performed for the three factors. A significant main effect of leadership orientation was found for instrumentality,  $F(2, 354)=4.64$ ,  $p<.01$ , and attractiveness,  $F(2, 356)=4.4$ ,  $p<.05$ . A main effect of role model's gender and respondent's gender was observed for all 3 factors; expressiveness-warmth,  $F(3, 354)=8.47$ ,  $p<.001$ ; instrumentality,  $F(3, 354)=3.18$ ,  $p<.05$ ; and attractiveness,  $F(3, 356)=5.79$ ,  $p<.001$ . Table 6 shows the means for personality aspects of role models.

Multiple comparisons were conducted by using The Tukey Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) test between four groups of gender of role models and gender of respondents. Regarding expressiveness-warmth, significant differences were found between group 4 (women with female role models)

and group 1 (men with male role models) as well as group 3 (women with male role models) and group 1 ( $MSE=.44$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Regarding instrumentality, significant differences were found between group 1 (men with male role models) and group 4 (women with female role models), and group 3 (women with male role models) and group 4 (women with female role models) ( $MSE=0.45$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

Regarding attractiveness, significant differences were found between group 3 (women with male role models) and group 1 (men with male role models), group 4 (women with female role models) and group 1 (men with male role models) ( $MSE=0.62$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Regarding leadership orientation groups, the high leadership-orientation groups rated attractiveness higher than the low leadership-orientation groups ( $MSE=0.63$ ,  $p<.05$ ). High leadership-oriented groups rated instrumentality in their role models more highly than medium and low groups ( $MSE=0.44$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

## Discussion

### *Role Model as Aspiration and Emulation*

In the present study, we have attempted to explore whether role models of high leadership-oriented women function as aspiration and the role models of high leadership-oriented men function more as emulation. The results indicate that regardless of gender, role model serves both as aspiration and emulation for leadership-oriented

Table 6 Mean Scores of Personality Aspects for Role Models in terms of the Role Model's Gender, Respondent's Gender, and Leadership Orientation

Gender	HLO	MLO	LLO
<b>Expressiveness-Warmth</b>			
Males with Male Role Models	3.85 (0.59)	3.8 (0.66)	3.41 (0.75)
Males with Female Role Models	3.85 (0.62)	3.8 (0.59)	4.37 (0.23)
Females with Male Role Models	4.19 (0.59)	4.12 (0.46)	3.94 (0.7)
Females with Female Role Models	4.15 (0.38)	3.97 (0.6)	3.96 (0.63)
<b>Instrumentality</b>			
Males with Male Role Models	4.38 (0.46)	4.19 (0.51)	3.78 (0.78)
Males with Female Role Models	4.00 (0.85)	3.94 (0.76)	3.86 (0.4)
Females with Male Role Models	4.40 (0.34)	4.29 (0.42)	4.06 (0.75)
Females with Female Role Models	4.19 (0.66)	3.91 (0.62)	3.83 (0.82)
<b>Attractiveness</b>			
Males with Male Role Models	3.64 (0.94)	3.48 (0.88)	3.11 (0.97)
Males with Female Role Models	4.11 (0.59)	4.00 (0.92)	3.55 (0.41)
Females with Male Role Models	4.12 (0.87)	3.93 (0.73)	3.32 (1.0)
Females with Female Role Models	3.88 (0.89)	3.78 (0.85)	3.85 (0.83)

Note. Standard deviations are presented in parentheses.

individuals. Although the importance of having a role model has been indicated in several studies, how the role model functions has not been clearly understood. Role models were assumed to act as emulation or provide how-to information (Kemper, 1968). On the other hand, role models were assumed to serve as motivators (Almquist & Angrist, 1971). However, neither of the functions had been clearly demonstrated in previous research.

The results of the present study clearly indicate that both functions are important, especially for leadership-oriented individuals. This suggests that role models serve more as both aspiration and emulation to high leadership-oriented individuals than to low leadership-oriented individuals. We believe that this finding would be particularly beneficial for women, owing to the fact that female leaders are still rare compared to male leaders. Thus, if we could provide more female role models in leadership positions, we could encourage more women to take leadership positions. In the context of Japan, the results also have a beneficial implication for young Japanese women. The lack of diverse role models for women in Japan (Fujimura-Fanslow, 1996) leaves limited choice for these young women in terms of choosing careers as well as taking leadership positions. Thus, having a role model who inspires

and who provides how-to information is one of the critical factors likely to increase the emergence of female leaders in Japan.

We would also like to provide a word of caution regarding measuring the aspiration function and the emulation function. Although we have tried to measure these two functions, it is difficult to separate the two functions empirically. This difficulty may have some effect on the actual measurement of the functions of role models. Increasing the number of items or conducting supplementary in-depth interviews on the role models of leadership-oriented individuals are recommended for further studies regarding the functions of role models.

**Other Important Characteristics of Role Models**

The majority of men and women were found to have same gender role models. This indicates that not only do both men and women prefer to have same gender role model, but also it is essential to look up to someone who shares the same characteristic(s) as oneself. These results on the gender of role models are consistent with other studies indicating the importance of same gender role models (Basow & Howe, 1980; Goldstein, 1979).

The role models of men were found to be



occupational leaders or high position leaders, whereas the role models of women were students. The absence of role models in occupational or high leadership positions might be one possible factor inhibiting women from taking leadership positions. Previous studies have reported that women did not choose male dominated occupations if there was no female pioneer or role model in that occupation (e.g., Matsui, Ikeda & Ohnishi, 1989). Therefore, if women do not have role models in occupational leadership positions, it is less likely that they will attempt to achieve leadership positions.

Women were found to have more personal contact with role models than men. This suggests that women appear to choose their role models on the basis of interaction. It might also show that women's choice is limited to people who are in close contact with them (e.g., students or peers).

#### **Leadership Experience of Role Models**

Both leadership-oriented men and women, particularly leadership-oriented women, had role models who had been in various leadership positions. Having role models who had been in leadership positions appears to enhance the leadership orientation of women. This also indicates that female role models in leadership positions are greatly needed in order to facilitate the emergence of female leaders.

#### **Personality of the Role Model**

The role models of leadership-oriented individuals seem to possess greater instrumentality and physical attractiveness than the role models of their counterparts. These aspects of personality probably lead to aspiration and emulation in leadership-oriented individuals for their role models. Another noteworthy finding is the interaction between the gender of the role model, the gender of the individual, and personality aspects of the role model. Instrumentality was found to be expected more in male role models than female ones. Women with female role models emphasized more expressiveness-warmth in role models than men with male role models; the same was true for women with male role models, compared to men with male role models. This suggests that

women more tend to stress or expect the expressiveness-warmth aspect of role models than men. A similar result was also noted for attractiveness. This indicates that the attractiveness of a role model is likely to be an important factor in choosing a particular role model for women. The patterns of results regarding the personality aspects of role models indicate that choosing a particular person as a role model appears to interact with the individual's level of leadership orientation, the individual's gender as well as the role model's gender, and which particular aspect of the role model appeals to the individual in question.

On the whole, the results imply that although a role model can provide both emulation and aspiration, the aspect of the role model that is emulated or inspires the individual appears to be associated with the gender of the role model and the gender of the individual. The results of this study also indicate that having a role model, specifically a role model in leadership positions, seems to be an advantage for the enhancement of leadership orientation.

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