Abstract

Contradictory findings about whether agentic women are penalized or rewarded persist in gender and leadership research. To account for these divergent effects, we distinguish between agentic traits that people believe women leaders ought not possess (i.e., agency proscriptions) and those that people believe women ought to possess (i.e., agency prescriptions). We draw on expectancy violation theory to suggest that, due to a difference in how strongly agency proscriptions and prescriptions are imposed on men and women, an agentic advantage (vs. disadvantage) is elicited when women are perceived to violate agency prescriptions (vs. proscriptions). Reconciling the conditions under which which agentic advantage and disadvantage may emerge, we developed a new measure of agency based on a comprehensive literature review of the past four decades of gender and leadership research. In Studies 1 and 2, we generated our multifactor measure of agency and found that the resulting measure of agency perceptions consisted of 6 factors that varied in terms of being proscribed and prescribed agency-based stereotypes for women: Competent agency, Ambitious agency, Dominant agency, Diligent agency, Independent agency, and Self-assured agency (i.e., CADDIS). In Studies 3 to 5, we found that this six-factor conceptualization of agency not only reconciles existing tensions within the gender and leadership literature, but also leads to a different understanding of past conclusions – an agentic advantage occurs when women are being perceived to possess competent agency, diligent agency, and independent agency, and an agentic disadvantage occurs when women are perceived to possess dominant agency.

Short Biography of Prof. Christy Koval

Christy Zhou Koval’s research focuses on diversity and inclusion in the workplace, stereotyping and bias, and intergroup relations. Her work has been published in Leadership Quarterly, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Research in Organizational Behavior, Psychological Science, Social Psychological and Personality Science, and Journal of Experimental Social Psychology. She has won the Dorothy Harlow Best Paper Award and was a runner-up for the Saroj Parasuraman Outstanding Publication Award at the Academy of Management GDO division. Prior to MSU, she was a faculty member of the Management department at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology Business School.